

COVID-19 Update

Talbot County Emergency Services
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Phase Three of Governor's Recovery Plan Begins Friday

Gov. Larry Hogan announced at his press conference on September 1, 2020, that the state would be entering the third phase of Maryland's Recovery Plan for COVID-19 beginning 5 p.m. on Friday, September 4.

Phase three allows theaters to open at 50% occupancy or up to 100 people. Retail businesses and religious facilities can move from 50% to 75% occupancy. Restaurants, personal services establishments, indoor recreation venues, fitness centers, and gaming facilities remain at 50% occupancy.

Venues in Maryland at which live performances occur or where motion pictures are shown outdoors and at which entry is limited to ticketed customers, may open with 50% of Outdoor Maximum Occupancy of the venue or 250 persons, whichever is less. Senior Centers remain closed.

Masks On Maryland

The mandate on face covering did not change. The previous executive order requires anyone over the age of five years to wear a face covering when indoors where the public is permitted, outdoors when six foot distance can't be maintained, on public transportation, in healthcare offices and facilities, and when engaged in work in any area where interaction with others is likely or food is prepared or packaged. The same exceptions are listed for mask wearing.

"As reopening continues, the risk of infection with COVID-19 will increase and an increase in cases will almost certainly occur," says Health Officer Dr. Fredia Wadley "Masks and social distancing will be even more critical to keep infection rates low."

Adult Sports Reopen Sans Fans

A new Secretary Directive and Order was issued by Secretary Neall of Maryland Department of Health to supersede the Directive and Order Regarding Community, Recreational, Leisure, Cultural and Sporting Gatherings and Events, dated June 12 and June 10, 2020.

All adult sports gatherings may open without spectators. High school and college athletics may resume sports gatherings and events without spectators and with contact sports modified following CDC guidance. All people within an indoor sports facility are to maintain six feet social distancing whenever possible, and wear a face covering when social distancing is not feasible.

COVID-19 Update

CDC guidance provides a range of sports conditions that equate to four risk levels with contact sports competition games being the highest risk. However, the CDC guidelines are vague about what level should be allowed according to the level of transmission of the virus in the area. Health Officers have posed many questions to the Maryland Department of Health for guidance relative to the new Executive Order and the Directive of the Secretary.

Non-School Related Youth Sports Allowed

On August 3, 2020, The Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA), in consultation with the Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), and the Public School Superintendent Association of Maryland (PSSAM), decided to postpone the 2020 high school fall and winter competition season during the first semester.

Youth sports gatherings and events outside of public schools have been allowed to open since the Governor's Executive Order in June 2020 and these events can have parents and family as spectators with appropriate social distancing. The Secretary's Directive, reads, "For contact sports (wrestling, basketball and football) play should be modified to safely increase the distance between players following CDC guidance."

Some parents want these youth leagues to require masks and other restrictions so there will be less risk for COVID-19 infection for their youth, but not all parents hold this view. The vagueness around contact sports guidelines will not likely be resolved with further guidance from the state.

"Needless to say, no one has found a way to maintain distance between youth in a wrestling match or during tackle football," Dr. Wadley notes. "My recommendation now is that parents carefully consider the risk for their child and make their own decisions about whether they are willing for their child to play contact sports when masks and social distancing will be almost impossible to maintain."

Open With Caution

"Most of our businesses in Talbot County have stepped up and are working hard to keep their customers safe," says Director of Emergency Services Clay Stamp. "But it's more important than ever that we try to achieve a balance between reopening and curtailing the spread of the virus."

Once again, personal responsibility seems to be the key to getting more businesses and activities safely opened.

"While our individual decisions and behavior to protect ourselves seem trivial in the big picture of a pandemic, they can be very effective, and they are all we have," says Dr. Wadley. "Just because big gatherings are allowed doesn't mean we should go. When businesses are not safe, don't spend your money there. Further, since wearing masks and social distancing decreases the spread of COVID-19, let's at least do that so our businesses can reopen and our children may get back to their classrooms again."

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COVID-19 Update

Where to Find More Information

- **CDC COVID-2019 Website:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- **Talbot County COVID-19 Information** www.talbotcovid19.org
- **Shore Regional Health COVID Information** <https://www.umms.org/shore/patients-visitors/coronavirus>
- **Maryland Department of Health Website:** <https://health.maryland.gov/pages/home.aspx>
- **Talbot County Health Department Website:** <https://health.maryland.gov/talbotcounty/Pages/home.aspx>
- **Maryland COVID-19 Website:** <https://governor.maryland.gov/coronavirus>