

San Bernardino County to ask state for OK to open more businesses after coronavirus closures



San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors Chairman Curt Hagman speaks at a Wednesday, March 25, 2020, news conference on the coronavirus conditions in the county. (File photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

By [SANDRA EMERSON](#) | semerson@scng.com |

PUBLISHED: May 7, 2020 at 7:01 p.m. | UPDATED: May 7, 2020 at 7:01 p.m.

San Bernardino County officials say they're ready for [certain businesses to reopen this weekend](#), but expressed frustration that Gov. Gavin Newsom isn't giving them flexibility to open more.

The Board of Supervisors' approved the county's recovery plan during a special meeting Thursday afternoon, May 7, after the [state released guidelines](#) for reopening some retail businesses and manufacturing warehouses.

Supervisors will also ask Newsom to look at their plan, which was crafted by county and business officials, and give them permission by May 15 to allow other lower-risk businesses to open, including short-term rentals and churches. County officials are working to finalize that list.

“I’d like to get the opportunity for him to review our plan, especially the things he didn’t address today and say for San Bernardino that makes sense and this is why it makes sense,” Board Chairman Curt Hagman said. “We’re doing things he’s not doing yet.”

Starting Friday, May 8, retailers and manufacturers deemed to have a low risk of transmitting the virus are allowed to reopen as the state moves into the early second phase of a four-phase plan for reopening.

Stores can open for curbside service if they take certain public health precautions. The businesses include florists, bookstores, clothing stores and sporting goods shops. Higher-risk businesses, such as hair salons, gyms, offices and restaurant dining rooms will be allowed to open later.

Newsom’s plan also allows for local governments to move faster through the phases if they meet certain criteria. To move to the later part of the second phase, counties must show they can meet certain testing and tracing requirements and that their healthcare systems could handle a potential surge.

For San Bernardino County to meet the criteria, there would need to be no more than 16 cases per day, Gary McBride, the county’s chief executive officer, said. While the county has passed its peak, it is still seeing about 72 cases per day on average over the past week, he said.

The county would need to test 3,300 people per day, which is higher than what it’s doing and previous testing targets and up it’s contact tracing, he said.

There would also need to be zero deaths reported every day for two weeks. The county is averaging about two per day, McBride said.

“There’s very, very few counties that are going to get that, even if you’re doing what you can to flatten the curve and have things in place,” McBride said. “To go for zero for two weeks, is basically impossible even with the numbers we’re seeing currently.”

However, the county has the hospital capacity needed to address a surge of COVID-19 patients.

“The number of positive cases and the testing we’re doing are really only indicative of the volume we have available to us,” McBride said. “What we do know in the hospital beds where we have a 100% sample those numbers have been relatively flat for some time now.”

Some counties have already moved ahead with broader reopenings, in violation of the state's order.

Hagman said he hopes Newsom will look at the county's plan and "all the work that we've been doing based on his guidance for last four or five weeks to get to this point and see how he responds and bring it back to the board if he does not respond in a positive way."

The county [created a coalition](#) with several government, private-sector and community officials from throughout the county to create the recovery plan. Hagman said they came up with pragmatic ways for businesses to open safely and prevent the spread of the disease.

The county will offer \$30 million to small businesses with up to 100 employees through the COVID Compliant Business Partnership Program to help with costs associated with the pandemic.

Businesses will need to apply for the funding and commit to complying with state and county health requirements for slowing the spread of the disease, according to a county report. The county is recommending \$2,500 per business during the first round of funding. A second round depends on participation and remaining funds, the report reads.

The county also plans to buy \$7.5 million worth of protective equipment and supplies for businesses, such as safety guards at workstations, protective clothing, face coverings, gloves, hand sanitizers and disinfectants.

The program gives businesses a monetary incentive to do the right thing, but it also assures the public that the business was inspected by a third party to ensure it complies with health measures, Hagman said.

"We're trying to lead with a positive reinforcement to do the right thing," he said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.