



# A Message from East Central District Health Department and Area Hospitals



Just over a year ago, Nebraska was faced with a crisis—a historic, once in a century flood that impacted thousands of families and individuals across our state. At that time, Nebraskans and East Central District residents came together under the motto, “Nebraska Strong,” with an unmatched level of resolve and determination to overcome the damage flooding left behind. Once again, that “Nebraska Strong” level of community and togetherness is needed, this time to help us confront our current crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the last three days, the East Central District Health Department (ECDHD) has identified 36 new cases of COVID-19 in our area, bringing the total number of confirmed cases in the four county ECDHD jurisdiction to 67. In comparison, only 14 cases were reported from March 27- April 21. Currently in our district, there are about 40 COVID-19 tests with pending results. As ECDHD continues to work closely with our state and local partners, including the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and Governor Ricketts’ office, we will use the evidence from these test results to guide discussions about the health and safety of our friends and neighbors.

On Friday, April 24, Gov. Pete Ricketts announced new plans for modified Directed Health Measures that will last through May 31, including plans to relax many of the restrictions beginning on May 4. The governor’s announced plans include relaxed changes across several sectors, including surgery centers, dental offices and hospitals; places of worship; salons; restaurants and child care facilities.

This move is sure to bring relief to area businesses hit by the economic crisis that has accompanied COVID-19. However, these relaxed measures are scheduled to begin just as our state enters the predicted height of the pandemic.

With that in mind, we are urging area businesses to maintain tighter restrictions than those that are being proposed to go into effect as of May 4. Halting social distancing efforts now would not only allow further spread of COVID-19, but we believe would also cause even greater long-term economic damage than continuing with social distancing in the short term. It is important that we continue to use data to guide our decisions and data shows the best way to continue to flatten the curve of COVID-19 on a global, national and local level is to stay home.

Just as they did following the 2019 floods, our community members have banded together in times of hardship. They have helped flatten the curve by practicing social distancing and learning how to support and protect each other in new ways. Worship services moved to

online streaming platforms and drive-up services. Local restaurants moved to delivery or curbside service long before directive health measures were in place. Salon owners wore masks and screened sick patrons before they were instructed to close. Our local hospitals stopped elective procedures well ahead of national and state guidance so they could spare vital personal protective equipment to combat COVID-19.

All these efforts were instrumental in helping to flatten the curve in Boone, Colfax, Nance and Platte counties before May 4 and they will continue to be needed after May 4.

The success of our health district's response to COVID-19 has been one of unity within our communities and that unity is required going forward. With the combined efforts of local public health agencies, the Unified Area Command, our area hospitals, the broader health care community, and many, many others, we have been successful at keeping people with confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 from requiring hospitalization.

While our collective communities within the East Central District have fared well so far, we are now heading into the worst of the pandemic. For that reason, and for the health and safety of our communities, we are coming together to urge the residents of Boone, Colfax, Nance and Platte counties to continue to help us flatten the curve by practicing Gov. Ricketts' most vital rule for keeping Nebraska healthy—Stay Home.

By staying home, except for vital errands, you can reduce your chances of getting sick and help ensure that our hospitals have enough resources ready to manage the upcoming surge of COVID-19 patients. By staying home, you can ensure that your friends and neighbors who are elderly, have chronic illnesses like diabetes or who have compromised immune systems, are less likely to be exposed to a virus that can be life-threatening. By staying home, you can help preserve the limited supply of personal protective equipment that is available for our first responders, law enforcement and health care workers.

By staying home, you can help show that whether the challenge is historic flooding or a pandemic, our communities are prepared to face it together - because we are "Nebraska Strong."

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