

April 15, 2020: Multnomah County position on reopening and COVID-19

- Multnomah County is encouraged by, and supportive of, the pact by Governors Brown, Inslee and Newsom. We agree with the three states' science, approach and strategy. They have identified the right components and are showing sound public health thinking.
- We also expect to influence Oregon's timing. Multnomah County has the largest population, largest concentration of vulnerable people, largest hospital system, largest system of public health clinics and largest county. We have the most to lose from opening up too much, too soon.
- We see three benchmarks emerging as we determine when and how to reopen: 1) large-scale testing with reliable access to testing supplies. 2) Ability of public health to follow up on positive cases and trace close contacts. 3) Health care systems adequately outfitted by reliable supply chains. The key word here is reliable.
- County governments have no control over the global supply of reagent and PPE. We do control the size of our public health response team. And research shows that robust case investigation that incorporates robust contact tracing is effective in controlling outbreaks.
- Multnomah County has increased its case investigation staffing from seven nurses and epidemiologists pre-COVID to 10 investigators, with a dozen more on-call nurses and graduate students in their final term of school to support increased case investigations.
- We are crunching the numbers on how many additional investigators Communicable Disease Services will need and identifying the pool of qualified and available applicants.
- Because we don't yet have a blood test to show immunity to the virus, we must assume immunity is low in our communities and proceed slowly, in phases, and with intention when we restart our economy. We don't want to open too quickly, and risk a second wave where a yoyo effect could cause even greater damage to our economy and our health.
- When we do begin the slow process of reopening, Public Health will continue to recommend measures to protect us from a second wave. That will likely include the continuation of current recommendations on:
 - Restrictions on large gatherings
 - Physical distancing
 - Use of masks
 - Hand and cough hygiene
 - Strict guidance to stay home when ill