

March 12 Announcement: Overcoming COVID-19

- One year ago we embarked on what would become perhaps the most difficult year in history: thousands lost to COVID-19; a virus that closed schools and businesses; a global pandemic that made us give up so much to keep each other safe.
- But every long, dark, cold winter comes to an end. And so, too, will this pandemic. Today, the sun is shining brighter than ever, and Minnesotans – as we do every spring – are getting out and enjoying it.
 - Today in Minnesota, 90% of our school districts are offering some form of in-person learning.
 - 94% of long-term care facilities are open for family visits.
 - More Minnesotans are back to work as businesses reopen to customers.
- We remain cautious and vigilant to protect the progress we've made, but we can see it and feel it now more than ever – **we are beating COVID-19.**
- Our vaccine rollout is one of the best in the nation.
 - Nearly 1.2 million Minnesotans have the shot.
 - We beat our goal and got more than 70% of seniors vaccinated by early March.
 - More Minnesotans are now eligible for the vaccine. We are getting more than 40,000 shots into arms each day. In a matter of weeks, not months, it's likely everyone will be eligible for a shot.
- Life is slowly returning to normal as vaccines start to have an impact.
 - Social activity and family visits are coming back in long-term care facilities.
 - Cases among teachers and educators have been stable even as so many teachers are back in the classroom.
 - Vaccinated grandparents can safely hug their grandchildren again.
- Every decision in this pandemic has been driven by science and data. And today, the data shows us that new cases are down; hospitalizations are declining; and fewer people are dying of COVID-19. **There are more good days now than bad days.**
- Based on where we are now, today we can take more common-sense steps toward “back to normal.” With the impact of vaccines taking hold, it is becoming safer to gather with family and friends, and to support small businesses. Our adjustments today reflect that reality and give us hope that we are on the cusp putting the pandemic behind us.
- The adjustments announced today are effective 12 p.m. on March 15 unless otherwise noted. Even as we make these adjustments, it is important we continue to wear masks, maintain social distancing, wash our hands, and get a test if appropriate.
- To make it easier to safely gather with family, we are doing the following:
 - **Social gatherings:** Up to **50 people outdoors** or **15 people for indoor** gatherings, both without household limits.
 - **Wedding ceremonies and religious services:** No percentage or capacity limits. Social distancing and masks required.

- To support small businesses:
 - **Bars and restaurants:** Increasing allowable occupancy to **75%**, up from 50%, with a limit of 250 people. The limit apply separately indoors and outdoors. Bar seating increases to parties of 4.
 - **Salons/barbers:** No percentage or capacity limits, but social distancing and masks required.
 - **Gyms/fitness centers/pools:** Increasing allowable occupancy to **50%**, up from 25%.

- As summer nears, Minnesotans want to be more active: to go to a baseball game or a soccer match or a reception or other celebration. With the progress we've made, we can adjust guidelines for venues. All venues can open at **50% capacity up to 250 people** as of March 15. Venues with capacity over 500 can add additional guests, **effective April 1:**
 - **Seated outdoor venues** can add an additional **25%** of their capacity over 500, with a limit of **10,000 people**.
 - **Non-seated outdoor venues** can add an additional **15%** of their capacity over 500, with a limit of **10,000 people**.
 - **Seated indoor venues** can add an additional **15%** of their capacity over 500, with a limit of **3,000 people**.
 - **Non-seated indoor venues** can add an additional **10%** of their capacity over 500, with a limit of **1,500 people**.

- One final area where the time has come to move toward normal – the workplace. Many people have not been able to work from home. For others, it has been mandatory. It has worked well for some. But others have struggled with distance learning, isolation from co-workers, and new technology.

- We are not ready yet to fully return all employees. Workplaces should continue to allow work from home – as the State of Minnesota will continue to do, for now. But as more Minnesotans are vaccinated, and as we near the end of the pandemic, it is time begin to change our approach.
 - **Effective April 15**, work from home will be strongly recommended for those who can, but not required. All employers should continue to accommodate employees who wish to work from home, and must provide reasonable accommodations as required by law.

- We're beating COVID and it is time move toward "back to normal." But COVID-19 is still with us, and we need to be mindful and safe. So here's what isn't changing:
 - Minnesotans should **keep wearing masks**. We know that masks work.
 - **Continue to socially distance**. All of our guidance today **requires venues to maintain 6 feet of distance between guests or groups** to reduce the spread of the virus.
 - **Our COVID response remains robust**. If you need a test, you can get one free at a community testing site. The COVIDAware App will continue to alert you if you have been exposed.

- The thaw is here, but in Minnesota we know better than to let our guard down at the first sign of spring. Keep doing what you need to do to stay safe; get a vaccine if you are able; and we'll get through this together.