



# MEDIA RELEASE

## San Juan County

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### **The Governor's "Safe Start" Plan and What it Means for San Juan County**

On May 29<sup>th</sup>, Governor Inslee released [further details](#) on his "Safe Start" plan, a phased approach to re-opening Washington's economy. Safe Start lays out a measured approach to moving forward through the COVID-19 pandemic by modifying physical distancing measures and allowing businesses and other activities to slowly resume. This article will answer some common questions about what the future may hold for the islands.

#### **What Phase is San Juan County in Now?**

The islands entered Phase 2 on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. This allowed limited opening of restaurants, retail stores, some fitness operations, professional services, churches, and other activities and services. Travel is allowed for activities permitted in Phases 1 and 2. More recently, transient lodging has been allowed to reopen at 50% capacity.

#### **What Would the Changes be in a Move to Phase 3?**

Phase 3 allows non-essential travel. Restaurants and other businesses and services will be allowed to increase capacity. Newly able to open to varying degrees are bars, movie theaters, libraries, museums, and recreational facilities, including pools and gyms. Gatherings of less than 50 people are allowed including outdoor recreational sports for adults and youth. High-risk individuals should still use extreme caution with potential exposure, but there are no limits on their activity.

#### **When and How Does San Juan County Move to Phase 3?**

[As laid out by the Governor's plan](#), there must be a minimum of three weeks between Phases. With that in mind, June 13<sup>th</sup> is the earliest that the islands could initiate the process to move into Phase 3. As with the move to Phase 2, in order to progress to Phase 3, the San Juan County Health Officer, Board of Health, and County Council all need to support advancing to Phase 3. If approval is given by local leaders, San Juan County is required to go through an extensive application process that will be reviewed for approval by the WA State Secretary of Health.

It is expected that the measures required to move to Phase 3 will be similar as the move to Phase 2. Current status of those capabilities is available online: <https://www.sanjuanco.com/1711/SJC-Readiness-Dashboard>

#### **I Manage a Business or Other Entity and Want to Prepare for Phase 3 Now, What Do I Do?**

Any business or entity operating in Phase 3 needs to complete a safety plan. A template for doing so is available here: [https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/BusinessTemplate\\_Phase3\\_1.pdf](https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/BusinessTemplate_Phase3_1.pdf). This is the baseline requirement.

In addition, specific industries and activities have additional guidance from the Governor that must be followed. That is available here: <https://www.governor.wa.gov/issues/issues/covid-19-resources/covid-19-reopening-guidance-businesses-and-workers>

The exact date that San Juan County may potentially move to Phase 3 is unknown, but preparing now is certainly a good idea.

### **Opening Up has Risks for our Community, How do we Minimize Them?**

We all know that COVID-19 has not gone away. There is currently no vaccine available that prevents the spread of this disease, and there are not yet medications available to treat this disease. While cases have remained low in the islands, and are diminishing in Western WA, there are other places where things aren't going so well, including in many communities in Eastern WA.

Anyone of any age who has symptoms of COVID (including a fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, new loss of taste or smell, nausea, sore throat, or diarrhea) should immediately contact their health care provider to talk about getting tested. Everyone needs to stay home when sick, and minimize all contact with others until they have been cleared by their provider.

Our primary tools to minimize risk are basic but vital: aggressive hygiene and hand washing, social distancing whenever possible, and the wearing of face coverings in public. The efforts of both residents and visitors are absolutely essential to allow our islands to move forward while managing the spread of the disease.

In addition, active public health efforts are a critical tool to prevent disease transmission. These include rapid case investigation, contact tracing, ability to isolate and quarantine ill or exposed individuals, outreach to vulnerable populations, and ongoing support of community testing efforts.

Finally, San Juan County Health & Community Services has developed a new asymptomatic testing program that builds on efforts we completed in collaboration with local providers to test over 300 essential workers in April. This program will be done in partnership with larger local public facing businesses and organizations whose staff or volunteers have high exposure to the general population, including visitors.

With perseverance and focus, all of these strategies have the ability to continue to avoid community transmission in San Juan County. The situation will need to be monitored closely, and the possibility always exists that we could move backwards if the health of the islands is threatened.

### **Why would San Juan County Consider Moving to Phase 3?**

Everything about this crisis has focused on striving for a balance between minimizing the public health risk while also avoiding the destruction of the social fabric that makes our islands special. It is not easy, and the answers are nuanced and complicated. It is truly a balancing act, and in many cases, there is no one "best" or "right" answer. San Juan County is moving forward as safely as possible, but with clear awareness of potential impacts, both to the economy and to public's health.

From the beginning, San Juan County has followed national and state guidelines, coupled with available data and science. The Health Officer has not been shy about making decisions that protect public health, even if they are unpopular or go a different direction from the rest of Washington. Public health will always come first. The limits on lodging and moorage, the requirements for signage on the ferries, and the regulations around mask wearing are all unique to San Juan County.

Most of us want to resume some of our normal activities as long as it is safe to do so. To move from one Phase of the Governor's plan to another requires a minimum of three weeks of data to demonstrate our ability to cope with any outbreaks or hotspots, should they develop.

San Juan County has a high number of residents who are older, retired and at higher risk for the disease. We also have a large number of families who live and work in our islands, many of them providing essential services or employment opportunities that allow all of us to call this special place home.

The reality of life in the San Juan Islands that without those services, without those workers, and without income, life on our islands is not sustainable for many of the families and working people who live here. Balancing the need to ensure safety with the need to keep our vital businesses and services for our islands viable and open is the crux of the challenge ahead. Please know that San Juan County is working hard to keep our health, safety and economy moving forward equitably and thoughtfully.

**Thank you Islanders.**

Throughout this crisis, islanders have conducted themselves with grace, patience, generosity, thoughtfulness, decency, and ingenuity. There is no community anywhere that is better suited to handle something so difficult, and there is no group of citizens that are a greater pleasure to serve.