



PRESS RELEASE

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Buncombe County Adopts Additional Measures to Reduce Transmission of COVID-19

As of Wednesday, Dec. 23, 2020, Buncombe County's cumulative COVID-19 cases count is 8,220. Our community has experienced the death of 143 of our own neighbors related to COVID-19. The average cases per day continue to grow, and we are adding about 135 new cases per day to our local count. Buncombe County now has a positivity rate of 8.3 percent, up approximately 5 percent from Nov. 23.

This coupled with our growing new case rate is indicative of substantial and increased community transmission. Our local hospitals have seen an increase in the daily inpatient numbers associated with COVID-19. Mission Health system is currently reporting over 100 inpatient COVID-19 patients on average each day.

As a result of these key metrics, our county has now been designated orange in the state's COVID county alert system. The state has reached more than 494,000 identified cases of COVID-19 cumulatively, and we are adding record numbers of new cases in recent days. On Dec. 22, 2020, Governor Cooper announced that more than 90 percent of North Carolina counties are now designated as red or orange. This means that there is significant or critical community spread of COVID-19.

Buncombe County, City of Asheville, and Town of Montreat will move to add more stringent measures in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. The new local order signed on Dec. 23, 2020, reduces the capacity for indoor dining in restaurants from 50% of stated fire capacity to 30% and lowers the number for an indoor mass gathering for social

gatherings with individuals from outside your household from 10 persons to 2 persons. The new supplemental declaration is attached.

In addition to these new restrictions, public health officials continue to stress the simple and effective precautions of wearing a mask, keeping six feet apart and washing our hands often to reduce our risk and flatten this curve. We must limit our interactions. Each encounter with someone outside our household, is an opportunity for spread.

“Over the past month, we have been alarmed to watch the steep rise in not only the number of cases of COVID-19 in Buncombe County, but also the rapid rise in the number of people becoming so sick from COVID-19 that they require hospitalization,” said Board Chair Brownie Newman. “The two provisions adopted today are intended to reduce the situations where people gather in close proximity within crowded indoor environments and where wearing a protective mask or face covering is either impossible or often not used.”

While these new restrictions will take effect on Saturday, Jan. 2, 2021 at 5 p.m., previous orders remain in place, and Buncombe County continues to align with the Governor's executive orders related to COVID-19 prohibitions and restrictions.

County officials ask that you rethink your holiday this year and limit your celebratory gatherings to only those in your household. Share fellowship with your extended family and friends in other ways. If you partake in a holiday gathering, keep it small. Limit the number of people invited. Keep it outdoors if possible. Even with your family and friends, keep 6 feet apart, and wear masks.

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