

Western New York enters phase 4 of reopening

SO, WHAT ABOUT GYMS, MALLS & MOVIE THEATERS?

At a Monday morning press conference, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced air conditioning filters with a minimum efficiency reporting value (MERV) rating capable of filtering COVID-19 particles or similar air exchange measures will be mandatory for large mall reopenings.

A COVID-19 particle is approximately 0.125 microns in diameter. Filters with a high MERV, such as high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, have been shown to help reduce the presence of COVID-19 in air filtration systems.

"There are air filtration devices – air filters that can actually help with the COVID virus and NASA has studied these," Cuomo said. "There are HEPA filters, which are high-efficiency particulate air filters that can actually filter out the COVID virus. The COVID virus is 0.1 microns. There are HEPA filters that can filter out 0.01, so any malls that will open in New York – large malls – we will make it mandatory that they have air filtration systems that can filter out the COVID virus."

"For many of these systems, it depends on what filter you install, called the MERV rating of the filter. But they have different filters that filter out different sized particles, and they have filters that can actually filter out and catch the COVID virus."

"For large mall reopenings – which we haven't done yet – but we're going to make this mandatory. I would recommend – the state recommends – for all businesses and offices, they explore the potential for their air-conditioning/air-filtration system, adding a filter that can filter out the COVID virus. We have been looking at this issue, because we look around the country and you're seeing malls, you're seeing air-conditioning systems, indoor spaces that have been problematic. And we think this offers promise."

Last Friday, Cuomo explained, "Gyms, theaters, malls, we are still looking at the science and the data. There has been information that those situations have created issues in other states. If we have that information, we don't want to then go ahead until we know what we're doing, right?"

"This is a road that no one has

travelled on before. Logic suggests if you see a problem in other states that you explore it before you move forward in your state, and that's what we're doing with gyms, theaters and malls."

He further noted, "The reason ... we slowed on the malls, movie theaters, gyms ... these interior spaces with large numbers of people that have recirculating air conditioning systems pose an issue. And I've spoken to a number of engineers about it. You get a movie theater, you get a mall, you have a large number of people. So, there's a possibility that you have the virus in the air, because you have a large number of people."

Cuomo said, "We are looking at gyms. There's a variety of information on gyms. It's impractical, most gym operators say, to tell people they have to wear a mask while exercising; so you don't wear a mask when you're on a treadmill, etc., because it restricts your breathing when you're running. So, now you have a number of people on treadmills, breathing in and out deeply on a treadmill."

"The deeper breaths, laughing, etc., shouting, tends to put more of the virus in the air, if you are positive. OK. If you are running and you're breathing deeply, exhaling deeply, you're on a treadmill, that might put more virus in the air. If you're a gym that also has an air conditioning system that is recirculating the air – then getting back to this whole filter conversation – that might be problematic."

Speaking Monday afternoon on LCTV, Niagara County Legislature Chairwoman Becky Wydysh said, "We certainly will attempt to get more clarity on this issue and pass it along as we hear it. We know that gyms, especially, have been a big one that have come up: Gym owners having very good cleaning and safety protocol guidelines in place, that they feel that they could get opened up at this time. We will continue to advocate for that on our regional control room calls."

"We do know that many gyms are holding outdoor training classes, as they are allowed to do at this point; so, you might want to check with your facility to see if there are options available to you that you can use."

On Tuesday, Gov. Andrew Cuomo cleared Western New York to enter into phase four of his "New York Forward" reopening plan. He said his global health experts cleared the region for this stage of operations.

This phase includes the reopening of cultural organizations such as museums and aquariums, but not gyms, malls or movie theaters.

•LOW-RISK INDOOR/OUTDOOR ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT: Per the "New York Forward" website: indoor industries allowed to reopen include "indoor museums, historical sites, aquariums, and other related institutions or activities. This guidance also applies to art galleries, except retail galleries."

Outdoor industries allowed to reopen include low-risk outdoor arts and entertainment activities, including "outdoor zoos, botanical gardens, nature parks, grounds of historic sites and cultural institutions, outdoor museums, outdoor agritourism, local agricultural demonstrations and exhibitions, and other similar institutions or activities."

•HIGHER EDUCATION: The "New York Forward" website reads, "Higher education institutions must develop and submit a plan for reopening and operating for the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency. See 'Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Higher Education' and 'Checklist for Higher Education Institutions Reopening Plans' for more information."

•MEDIA PRODUCTION: "New York Forward" noted, "These guidelines apply to media production businesses/activities in regions of New York that have been permitted to reopen. For the purpose of this guidance, 'media production activities' encompass all activities undertaken in motion picture, music, television, and streaming productions on set, on location, or at any production or recording site."

•ALSO: Cuomo said **houses of worship** could expand the number of in-person participants from 25% to 33%. However, U.S. District Judge Gary Sharpe reversed that order last week and said religious institutions are entitled to the same number of indoor occupants as retail stores in phase two (50%). In addition, he said there is no cap on people



With Western New York entering phase four of "New York Forward," the Aquarium of Niagara opened for members on Tuesday and welcomes the general public back on Saturday. (File photo)

attending outdoor religious functions.

Gatherings, in general, can expand from 25 to 50 people.

The Central New York, Finger Lakes, Mohawk Valley, North Country and Southern Tier regions began the final phase of reopening last Friday.

This is Not the End

Speaking on a conference call Monday morning, Niagara County Legislature Chairwoman Becky Wydysh said phase four doesn't mean the end of the coronavirus in Western New York.

"I think it's very important to see what's happening in other states around the country and realize that this is not over; the virus is by no means gone just because our numbers are well and doing good here."

"There is still potential for this to come back and to have a second wave, and that's really what we need to avoid. We know that the distancing and the masks work; we made it happen. We don't want to undo all of that hard work and sacrifice."

Wydysh is part of the Western New York regional "control room." The reopening task force is headed by Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul.

"I know that everyone – especially during the summer – we want to get things back to normal; we want to have fun things to do. It's difficult, and there are businesses that are really, really suffering right now that still aren't open," Wydysh said. "And so, we, of course, continue to advocate for those businesses to be able to open safely, and hope that the state gives more allowances that way."

"But again, it's very important to see what's happening in those other states and know that we don't want to be in that situation also. So, just very important for people to keep following those distancing guidelines, wear your masks."

"I know that it's very tempting when you're at something like a graduation party with friends and family to not worry about that, or not think it's important, but it is."

"As we open up and we get further into these phases, more businesses are open, more people are out and about, we're all coming back together again – and that's where the risk increases of passing the virus."

"So, just really need to keep reminding everyone that opening

up is wonderful and we want to see that, but a piece of doing that safely is to continue doing the distancing and the masks, and we just can't stress it enough."

Phased Reopening

Per Empire State Development, "New York Forward" allows nonessential businesses to "reopen on a regional and industry-specific basis, as each region meets the criteria necessary to protect public health. The State's plan focuses on getting New Yorkers back to work – without triggering renewed spread of the COVID-19 virus or overwhelming local hospital systems."

Cuomo is using the "Percentage Positive Results By Region Dashboard" as a determinant to when regions can enter a new phase. This chart "includes the total daily number of COVID-19 tests conducted and, of those tests, how many were positive each day."

Among the metrics:

√ Total Persons Tested: The number of tests of individuals performed on the test date. This total includes positives, negatives, and inconclusive results.

√ Total Tested Positive: The number of new persons tested positive for COVID-19 infection on the test date.

√ % Positive Results: Percentage of positive test results over the total tests performed.

√ % Positive Tests per Day (7-Day Rolling Avg.): The average share of tests that are positive over the last seven days.

Niagara County Health Director Daniel Stapleton said, "We watch our daily numbers, hospitalization, infection rate. The infection rate on a daily basis, we have hovered around 1%, which is a really great number. I think last week we had a number was 0.25%. Today, we're at, I think, 0.59%. So, it changes; we expect that. But if you can hover right around (1%), that's a strong and very good rate for us."

He added, "I have about five different graphs that I look at on a daily basis, with all the metrics and the numbers that are really important. And the hospitalization was one they were originally the most worried about, because we worried about a surge for the hospitals that they couldn't handle. Our hospitals planned with us; they put in the precautions to make sure they can handle that surge."

Stapleton noted, "All our numbers right now are going in the right direction."

Steven V. Grabiec, M.D. of Adult and Pediatric Allergy & Asthma of WNY, 6930 Williams Road, Suite 3700, Niagara Falls, NY closed his office effective June 5, 2020, due to unexpected medical reasons. Dr. Grabiec wishes to thank his patients, fellow physicians, staff and friends for their trust in his allergy & immunology practice over the past 50 years.

Patients are to call the office (716-298-3541) Monday-Thursday from 10am-2pm to arrange to pick up their medical records. Or, patients should call and leave a message where to send the medical records. Please leave the name and the date of birth of the patient. The deadline to pick up / send patient medical records is July 30, 2020. **After July 30, 2020 check our website for further information.** www.theallergyasthmadoc.com

Dr. Grabiec is referring all his patients to the following board certified allergy & immunology physicians to continue to administer quality care.

Board Certified Allergists:

- Buffalo Medical Group:
 - Aires Liu-Helm, 325 Essay Road, Williamsville, NY, Phone: 630-1130
 - Roland Honeine & Dr. Andrew Green, 3900 North Buffalo Road, Orchard Park, NY, Phone: 656-4988
- Buffalo Amherst Allergy Associates:
 - Michael Fanning, Dr. Madeline Lillie, Dr. Kathleen Donovan
500 Corporate Parkway, Buffalo, NY, Phone: 631-0380
- Dr. Jeffrey Rockoff, 22540 Sheridan Drive, Tonawanda, NY, Phone: 874-8980
- Dr. Sean Brady - UBMD Physicians Group - ADULTS ONLY - 1020 Youngs Road, Amherst, NY, Phone: 961-9900

