Cuomo: Rules on reopening keep New York from becoming other states with higher infection rate

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"We have rules on our reopening – and we enforced the rules on our reopening. If you didn't have rules on the reopening, we would be called Florida, Texas, Arizona and the 34 other states that are now seeing increases," he said. "The rules on the reopening is what keep the infection rate down. We're enforcing the rules, because without the rules the infection rate will go up."

Secretary to the Governor Melissa DeRosa added, "When people are drinking, then they let their guard down; they aren't as cognizant of social distancing. You get closer. And that's what you're seeing with these big clumps of people. We can't stick our head in the sand and ignore the lessons from around the country that we're seeing that's causing these … infection spikes to go up."

State and local leaders encourage "New York Forward" safety compliance in New York bars and restaurants.

NYS Travel Advisory

Cuomo has a travel advisory in place, wherein residents must quarantine if spending more than 24 hours in a state with positive test cases in excess of 10%, or the number of positive cases exceeding 10 per 100,000 residents, over a seven-day rolling average. Currently, 36 states are on that list.

Stapleton said, "We're getting a lot of calls. A lot of concerns that people have about people they know, people they see that they know went out of the area and came back and aren't quarantining."

He called it a "risk" for people to visit these locations.

"You take a risk of having to be out of work for 14 days; needing to stay home," Stapleton said. "We know that some people have gone away, and that state is added to the list on the day when they're there. And that's unfortunate, but people need to really take this serious and make sure they understand what the ramifications are, the risks involved.

"The No. 1 thing is we don't want anybody going to a state that has a high level of infection and bringing that back to Niagara County. That hurts our business. It hurts our residents. And that's something we want to make sure people understand. There are consequences to the decisions you make, and some of them are very serious; so, really think twice before you do traveling outside of our area.

"Niagara County is beautiful this time of year. Stay local, try to encourage people to support the businesses that are here, and stay put, because you're putting yourself at risk if you decide to go and then that state is listed on the quarantine."

Wydysh said, "I think people were confused about the fact that, if they left to go on their vacation, and that state was not included yet, if you are gone on your vacation and that state gets added, you are going to have to quarantine when you come back. So, very important to maybe look ahead if you're making that decision about whether or not to travel. See where that status falling in the numbers and if it looks like there's a chance that could happen while you're gone; because it will apply to you even if you left before that state was on the left."

Reopening of Schools

Cuomo and his team of state and international health experts will evaluate school reopening plans next week. The governor said phase four regions can allow in-person teaching if the daily infection rate remains below 5% or lower using a 14-day average since "New York State on PAUSE" was lifted.

Wydysh told Stapleton, "You've said the way the numbers look right now we stand a very good chance of heading towards some form of opening in the fall."

He explained, "I've met with all the superintendents. I talk with them on a weekly basis. … We're providing guidance to those superintendents.

"We know that most of the schools are going to try and open, but their No. 1 priority – and our priority – is to make sure it's done safely. So, will that mean a hybrid, where half of the week is spent online, the other half is in person? Will it mean that some children just won't be able to go to school like they normally do? That's probably a good possibility.

"We do know it's not going to be like it ever used to be. Each school is a little different. Some have space to do this, some don't. Some have a really vigilant program to do things online, and some don't. So, they all have to get up to that same standard to be able to provide a consistent, quality education. And at the same time, No. 1, make sure, not only for the students, but also for the staff there, for the bus drivers, for the school bus aides, for all those people, the vendors, people who transport children, and who teach children and make sure children are safe, all of them are working together.

"We do know that the Academy of Pediatrics has said that, for children, it's more important for them to be in school, than to be out. The risk is higher for them to completely stay at home for all their schooling, rather than to be at school at least some part of the week.

"So, it's really a hybrid; it's really trying to maneuver all those moving pieces. But I know right now the school districts are under the gun to make sure this happens quickly. Next week, the governor's office will be reviewing all those plans and deciding if their plan meets the criteria that they need.

"We'll continue to work with them on a regular basis for guidance and make sure that everyone's efforts in making sure kids can go to school safely, that all those efforts come together to make sure that not only is it a high-quality education, but it's also safe."

Trusted Traveler Program and Sales Tax

Last week, the Department of Homeland Security announced a reinstatement of the Trusted Traveler Program in New York.

Wydysh said she is "very happy to see that the Trusted Traveler Programs such as Nexus and Global Entry are now again available to New York residents.

"As you may recall, the federal government had taken away our state's participation in those programs over a dispute on the state's 'Green Light Law.' When the borders do finally reopen, this is going to be a very important piece to our cross-border commerce – and we need to do everything we can, of course, to get our economy moving again once that happens. So, glad to hear that we'll be able to apply for those again, get those renewed, and use them like we were in the past.

"Related to that, I know it's not surprising to hear that Niagara County revenues have taken a major hit during the pandemic. Much like any other business or household, the county has suffered, as well, financially. But this week we learned that our sales tax revenue for the month of June was actually up slightly over last year's number, which is good. We are not sure if this is a temporary blip, or the start of a trend.

"Of course we're optimistic, but we know that online sales have changed significantly; we've had businesses that have been closed that are now reopening. So, of course, we anxiously await that sales tax news to see where we're heading from here.

"Despite the good news in June, overall sales tax revenue for the county is down 3% year to date, so down slightly. We're hoping that that increases again next month, but it's a wait and see approach."

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