

NORTHWEST LOUISIANA COVID 19 PANDEMIC: HEALTHCARE DRIVERS FOR REOPENING THE ECONOMY

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Northwest Louisiana: Health Drivers in Reopening the Economy

The leadership of our NWLA health systems – WK Health Center, Ochsner, Christus, LSUHSC, VAMC, BAFB as well as multiple business organizations – have joined together to create this website outlining “Health Drivers in Reopening of the Economy”.

This is borne out of concern about finding balanced solutions to the concurrent health and economic crisis facing our community. Our individual health systems felt the need to speak with one voice in making recommendations.

Over the last couple of months, we have all taken up some new phrases – phrases like flatten the curve, stay at home, social distancing, and shelter in place. Our whole community practices these phrases every day.

As a result of a lot of sacrifice on the part of our entire community, the number of new cases, hospitalizations and ventilators related to COVID-19 is dropping. Our health systems want to help our communities through a safe and phased reopening of our businesses.

Health systems understand both the health and economic aspect of this pandemic. We developed this website to help our business and community as a whole as we get going again.

We know our region's business community is searching for reliable information on safe practices in the midst of this pandemic. This website provides some guidance and recommendations on a general basis as well as more sector driven recommendations. We leave any mandates to the state and local government. Our intent is to simplify and help make restart easier for our community.

We thank LABI and BRAC as much of this document expands and modifies the foundation of their Safe at Work document. We thank the Chamber of West Alabama for some of the excellent specific guidelines by sector. And we thank leaders in the business community for trusting us enough to ask our opinion.

We are all in this together.

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INTRODUCTION

The Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI) and The Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC) hosted small groups of business leaders over the last few weeks to develop ideas for getting the economy restarted and getting people back to work safely when allowed to move forward by national and state governments.

There is a recognition that is developing solutions to the health crisis related to the COVID-19 viral pandemic and the economic crisis related to broad base stay at home and temporary business closures are not in conflict. We have two crises to tackle at one time – each carrying significant short and long-term consequences.

There is a recognition that stay at home orders and safe at work guidance are not in conflict – as has been seen in business sectors that have remained open as essential businesses and industries over the last couple of months. This includes continued social distancing and efforts to reduce unnecessary exposure to the virus by encouraging work at home when possible.

In ongoing discussion with business leaders, it is deemed important that health system leaders be a primary driver in developing the community's economic reopening plan. This was discussed with Shreveport Chamber leaders who discussed with leaders of other business organizations. The consensus is this LABI/ BRAC model is an excellent foundation on which to build some guidance for local business from healthcare leaders in Northwest Louisiana. The following represents health system leadership from Shreveport/ Bossier speaking with one voice about health issues related to reopening the economy.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Recognition of the need to develop guidelines to balance health and economic priorities
- Recognition that “stay at home” orders and “safe at work” guidance is not in conflict
- Recognition of importance of continued social distancing and work at home arrangements where feasible.
- Recognition of importance of limiting large scale gatherings.
- Businesses see the health system as primary consideration for reopening the economy

- Businesses in the community have great trust in the local healthcare community to advise on the balance of health and economic considerations
- Businesses need healthcare leaders to speak with one voice in making recommendations for economic restart efforts

HEALTHCARE ASPECTS OF REOPENING THE ECONOMY: SAFE AT WORK

The following five areas of concern provide the foundation of healthcare recommendations related to reopening the economy.

- **Social distancing and personal protection equipment** use in work and everyday life
- **Official guidance of approved protocol to manage employee and customer safety** – including temperature screening, diagnostic and antibody testing, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) use, aggressive cleaning protocols, work-based social distancing; and illness and return to work protocols
- **Sufficient COVID testing** and protocols for use to support community safety and business needs
- **Develop benchmarks to follow to anticipate a second wave of infection i.e.** for example, hospitalizations, ventilator census, new COVID cases
- **Monitoring and developing hospital capacity where feasible** - ICU's, hospital beds, ventilators, PPE

SAFE AT WORK GUIDANCE: MANAGING EMPLOYEES AND CUSTOMER SAFETY

The following are general recommendations related to managing employee and customer safety across the spectrum. These concerns are basic considerations in all business environments.

- Strong “stay at home when sick” policy. If symptoms suspicious of COVID-19 (cough, fever, breathlessness, and extreme fatigue), recommend COVID testing before returning to work.
- 20-second handwashing frequently / cough into elbow / waving greetings
- Practice 6-foot distancing to the degree possible in employee spacing and physical distancing; customer waiting rooms; and employee interactions.

- Protective face coverings with or without eye shields encouraged for all employees but especially in spaces where there is difficulty maintaining distancing between employees or in an environment with a lot of contact with customers
- Gloves worn by those handling edible products but not required for all.
- Special considerations given for employees with high risk conditions
- Encourage work at home strategy – more people participate in scheduled rotations at home
- Properly spaced appointments to avoid crowded waiting rooms
- Deep cleaning protocols and surfaces wiped multiple times daily
- Temperature screening considered but not required
- COVID diagnostic and antibody testing of employees with symptoms - not required if asymptomatic

SAFE AT WORK: COVID-19 TESTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Note the degree of community testing for COVID-19 is considered very important by health experts and U.S. Chamber of Commerce to inform economic reopening strategies. For that reason, these recommendations could expand over time. This will depend on a great degree on availability of diagnostic and antibody testing, benefit risk analysis of testing, and the determined reliability of these tests to predict immunity. At present, high risk people considered for COVID 19 testing are the following:

- **Healthcare workers and first responders with potential exposure**
 - Routine viral testing of minimum of 5 days post known exposure or every two weeks; whichever is applicable
 - Baseline serology testing followed by repeat serology for those that were initially viral negative and then become viral positive
- **People in workforce with frequent interactions with customers**
 - Representative random sampling of select individuals every two weeks for viral testing along with baseline serology and follow up serology after becoming viral positive

- **People with COVID-19 symptoms** – especially fever, cough, breathlessness, and extreme fatigue
 - Immediate testing by rapid testing or reference lab with at least 24-36-hour turnaround times
- **Admissions to the hospital**
 - Immediate testing via either rapid testing or clinical lab if signs and symptoms are present
- **Pretesting for surgeries and medical procedures considered**
 - 48 – 72-hour pretesting with a max of 24-36-hour turnaround times if patient has symptoms compatible with COVID 19
- **People living or working in hot spot areas** where a higher number of cases present in the community
 - Immediate testing via either Point of Care testing or reference lab with at least 24-36-hour turnaround times
- **People working in enclosed large workplaces** like manufacturing plants, casinos, with positive test
 - Representative random sampling of select individuals every two weeks for viral testing along with baseline serology and follow up serology after becoming viral positive

SAFE AT WORK: BENCHMARKS TO FOLLOW TO ANTICIPATE SECOND WAVE OF INFECTION

Daily monitoring of benchmarks is helpful in monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic as the economy is reopened and stay at home and business closure community recommendations are loosened.

This will let us get ahead of second wave occurrences of the pandemic. The following health benchmarks are already being monitored locally and statewide and are the best indicators of disease spread and determining the threat of overwhelming local health systems.

- **New cases of COVID-19**

- LDH should perform contact tracing to limit spread
- **COVID-19 tests**
 - State needs to regionally increase testing capacity to accommodate greater testing volume
 - Centralized real time reporting
- **Hospitalizations – Confirmed/ suspected COVID 19 cases**
- **Patients on ventilator – COVID 19**
- **Mortality rate – COVID 19**
 - Statewide centralized real time reporting to determine mortality rate

This data broken down at the state, region, city and or neighborhood and building level will be evaluated for trends on a daily basis. This information will be used to make decisions about the allocation of resources, testing, and policy modifications.

Using this data, health and government officials can take less of a shotgun approach. As an example, this detailed analysis could help policy makers recognize a positive trend of new cases or hospitalizations that come from only one part of the city or even just one nursing home. The shotgun approach to aggregated data might be to consider community lockdown. However, the data-based approach would be appropriation of more resources to the causal area.

We know the ramifications of the COVID-19 virus pandemic and we know the economic ramifications of broad-based stay at home and temporary business closure policies. We must avoid both and are more likely to be successful at handling both crises with the implementation of an ongoing data driven solution to the development of solutions and policy changes.

SAFE AT WORK: IMPORTANT SUBSET MANAGEMENT

As strategies are developed in reopening the economy, substantial thought and analysis of specific strategies for important subsets of people must be implemented. Aggressively managing high risk subsets not only reduces the risk in that subset but speeds the safe reopening of the economy while lowering the chance of a second wave of COVID-19.

The vulnerable population to COVID-19 are identified medically by age, obesity, diabetes, and other chronic disease. There is a high incidence of these risk factors in high poverty areas and among the African American population.

The COVID-19 pandemic allows us the opportunity to rethink population management for our community and nation. The cost to the health of our society and potential deaths resulting from

chronic disease has been a long-term problem. The COVID-19 pandemic makes it even more a vital concern. The importance of prevention, health screening, and proactive management of chronic disease process has never been more illuminated than in the COVID-19 pandemic. Important subsets to create strategies are:

- **Vulnerable populations – Age over 65, obesity, diabetes, presence of chronic disease**
- **Nursing homes**
- **Hot spot sections of the community** – Places with high hospitalization and mortality rate from infection with COVID 19
- **Large enclosed businesses** – Manufacturing plants, casinos, indoor shopping malls

STAY AT HOME

As we get back to work, there is a great temptation to resume our after-work life as before COVID 19. However, the greatest danger in the community is resuming congregating in large groups without attention to physical distancing. Certainly, resumption of activity to pick up products, receive services, and shop while following social distancing and face covering guidance is encouraged.

OTHER KEY ISSUES FOR REOPENING THE ECONOMY

- **Legal protection for recovering businesses**

Businesses are at significant risk of litigation as they take steps to get back into business. Businesses should put in place safety policies and protocols to prevent COVID-19 spread. In return, the governor and Louisiana legislature should support businesses who are trying to restart the economy and hire back employees during this period of a declared state disaster. Either by executive order or state law, or both, employers should have expanded protection from COVID lawsuits.

- **Childcare / daycare / camp / summer school**

Businesses are very concerned about the provision of childcare for employees returning to work because of the closure of schools and the lack of daycare and day camp / summer camp alternatives. Local communities should work together to provide solutions for this critical need for reopening the economy.

Some daycare considerations that are adopted in other countries such as Denmark may provide suggestions for a framework:

- A recommended floor area of 8 – 10 square feet per child, meaning some institutions may not be able to accept all children back at first.
- Children to play with the same small groups of three to five, mainly outside.
- Children sit six feet apart at tables.
- Food is not shared.
- Staff to supervise the children washing their hands at least every two hours, including after coughing or sneezing, and before and after food.
- Regular cleaning, including toys and disinfecting surfaces such as faucets, toilet flushes, tables, door handles, handrails, and light switches twice a day.
- Staff meetings to be held outside or via telephone/video call.
- Those that travel on buses provided by daycare are to sit two meters apart. More buses will be provided, as necessary.
- Drop off and collection to be done at intervals if possible, outside.

The social distancing and health and safety protocols that are put into place for adults in the workplace will be compromised if employees' children are gathering with each other and being kids (putting everything in their mouths, touching, sneezing, and coughing on each other). With intense attention paid to preventing spread among adults, it would be helpful if medical experts and epidemiologists also advise on quality practices to prevent spread of the virus via our children attending camps and daycares.

- **Personal protection equipment supplies for business owners**

Supplies of PPE for employers is a concern in efforts to reopen the economy. Employers may require local, regional, or state assistance to gain access to and / or create a stockpile of employer PPE. It could be advantageous to purchase in bulk as a community and sell to employers for a temporary period.

BUSINESSES AND SECTORS CONSIDERED FOR PHASE 1 REOPENING – SEE MODIFIED LABI/BRAC SAFE AT WORK DOCUMENT

- **Businesses deemed essential** but closed or working only at a small scale because of strict stay at home orders
- **Small businesses** that need employees to be physically present in the workplace to conduct business
- **Healthcare sector** – Hospitals / physicians / dentists / outpatient procedures
- **Manufacturing** – Encouraged to scale up toward “new normal” manufacturing practices while enacting general safety standards associated with the pandemic.

- **Court system** – Appropriate capacity limitations and general safety standards enacted
- **Government offices** – Appropriate capacity limitations and general safety standards enacted
- **Professional offices** - Smaller staff at office to ensure social distancing and general safety standard with more people scheduling rotations for work at home as much as possible
- **Restaurants** – Determination of restrictions with input from local owners– Examples are table spaced 6-foot distance / parties limited to those residing in the same household / no greater than 8 people per table / restriction to fire marshal 50% capacity / personnel wear gloves and masks
- **Retail locations** – Determine capacity restrictions if needed and meet general safety guideline standards
- **Salons / Barber shops / Nail salons/ Spas** – Appointment only and meet general safety standards and social distancing concerns
- **Parks** – Determine capacity restrictions

BUSINESSES TO BE EVALUATED FOR FUTURE OPENING

- Transportation services
- Adult recreation – Theaters, concerts, casinos, racetracks, bars
- Children’s recreation –Playgrounds and outdoor sports
- Personal care business – Massage parlors, tattoo parlors
- Indoor shopping malls

GRADUAL REOPENING: CONSIDERATIONS TO RESTARTING THE ECONOMY

ADOPTED BUT MODIFIED FROM LABI/ BRAC: SAFE AT WORK DOCUMENT

A gradual reopening of the economy might require stages of industry sectors to reopen. Those already deemed essential businesses but who have closed or minimized employment should return immediately. For the rest, this could entail ranking those industries/occupations based upon their need to be physically present in the workplace in order to conduct business. Those for whom this is most necessary might be encouraged to return first. Those who can remain remote might need to do so longer.

1. **Health care sector restart.** The health care sector is our front-line first responder in this disaster, but the industry sector is now facing significant financial challenges. Our executives have recommended that health care be allowed to fully restart as soon as possible. The health care community is best prepared to understand and follow safety standards and social distancing. They should be allowed to return to elective procedures, clinic visits, screenings and elective surgeries, following proper safety protocols. This will stabilize hospitals and clinics' revenues, and help citizens get back to critical services such as routine screenings, preventive care, mental health assistance, and postponed procedures. With thorough office safety procedures implemented, this should be considered for dentist's offices as well.
 - Doctors would be required to use facial mask coverages and gloves as needed or required to visit directly with patients. Surgeries could be performed in surgical clinics if properly staffed and equipped per the state's medical standards and protocols. All appointments must be properly spaced to avoid crowded waiting rooms. Temperature checks for patients could be considered but not required.
 - Dentist and their assistants have been wearing protective masks and gloves for years and should continue to do so. Goggles might be recommended to further protect both the dentist, the assistants, and the patients. Regular dental appointments would be permitted. All appointments must be properly spaced to avoid crowded waiting rooms. Temperature checks for patients considered but not required.
 - In addition to PPE, the health care sector advocates for and requires substantial emphasis on administrative and environmental changes as a focus. This involves increasing telehealth scheduling, separating high-risk patients from low-risk patients, screening and monitoring.
 - Offices should continue to actively promote the options for telemedicine to encourage remote visits where they are feasible and provide safer alternatives to in-person care.

2. **Maximize those current essential businesses to enable them to get fully back to business.** There are business and industry sectors currently unable to fully operate do business today, even though they are considered essential.

- While emphasizing safety and social distancing, clearer guidance should be given to encourage essential businesses to **maximize** employment and business activity within the limitations and following the guidance of accepted safety requirements. Many businesses that should not have closed after the Governor's Stay At Home order are closed nonetheless, either because they don't understand the guidance, have economic pressures forcing them to close, feel uncertain on procedures for how to be open, or feel their customers are not allowed to do business with them because of "Safer At Home" standards.
- **The Governor's Stay At Home website should expand the "You Can" behaviors to include** "go to work once your business or store has implemented the required safety standards" and "shop safely wearing a mask at eligible small businesses and local stores, especially seeking to buy local goods online and pick-up at curbside where possible and practical."
- **Health Safety Standards for Returning Employees and Employers.** Similar to the idea above official recommendations on employer safety standards for offices, consumer-facing enterprises, warehouses, and industrial sites are important. Safety standards would give guidance on wearing facial coverings, cleaning standards, returning to work from COVID positive infections, and COVID-19 testing usage.

3. **Small businesses** *that are not shut by Stay At Home orders* should be encouraged, counseled, and supported to restart their operations and contact with customers. Louisiana's small businesses should be assisted with:

- Guidance and counseling regarding health and safety protocols for safety for their employees and their customers
- Encouragement and clarity that customers can go shop at their local stores, under certain safety conditions - <https://gov.louisiana.gov/home/>
- Guidance and access to technologies that support buy-online-pickup-in-store, shop-by-appointment, or pickup-curbside capabilities
- Increased access to delivery services for products to reach customers
- Readily available recommendations on where and how to access free legal advice, business counseling, and financial advice, and/or access to capital beyond the resources of the SBA (such LED, regional EDOs and chambers, SBDCs, SCORE, Entrepreneurial Organizations, and others).
- Statewide marketing, robocalls or other communications outreach to promote state and local services that are available to assist small businesses recovering.

4. **Manufacturers** – While not shut by Stay At Home, many manufacturers have reduced work sites to protect from virus spread for their essential teams. Many have also suffered from demand destruction, as the global economy has contracted and reduced the size of their markets. As much as possible, manufacturers should be encouraged to scale up toward full, “new normal” manufacturing practices to every extent possible. While this is constrained by global demand, this push should apply to direct employees, as well as for non-essential and contract maintenance and construction employees, after implementing social distancing, acceptable PPE, and other screening and safety protocols.

5. **Government sector:** Many government jobs in our communities are on hold. City, Parish, and State Government offices should return to operation with staff being spaced by distance or work shifts to effectively achieve social distancing. Employees should be encouraged to wear facial coverings or masks, practice social distancing, and follow other state health and safety guidance for office environments workforces. Working from home should be encouraged and permitted. Furthermore, the City Court and District Court Systems should be reactivated. The presiding judge, with consultation of health and safety guidance from LDH (or other state agency), should be able to determine the number of allowed persons involved in a matter and regulate attendance to insure appropriate social spacing. Attorney, clients, defendants, plaintiffs, and court personnel should be encouraged and permitted to wear facial coverings. Members of juries can be spaced as needed, and deliberation areas provided to ensure social distancing.

6. **Professional offices**, doctors, dentists, surgeons, attorneys, engineers, architects, accountants, veterinarians, banks/bankers, corporate headquarters, business offices, school and university staffs and administrators should be permitted to reopen their offices, with a smaller staff to insure social spacing. Alternatively, they might use a type of office shift to permit some to work on-site, while others work at home, and then switch as needed or desired. This would include clerical and administrative staffs. Masks, facial coverings, and gloves would be recommended and encouraged, following the recommended health and safety guidance.

7. **Restaurants** should be reopened to on-site dining. All tables should be spaced to meet the six-foot distance criteria. Parties might be limited to those residing in the same households. No tables larger than eight customers. Children under 15 years of age would have to be accompanied by an adult. Restaurant personnel should be required to wear gloves and masks, provided by the restaurant. Employees should be subject to health and safety screenings, following the recommended health guidance.

8. **Other retail locations:** Each retail outlet can control entry to a certain number of customers, using the Fire Marshall's capacity limit as a guide, and the store should not have over 50% of that capacity figure (at any one point in time) during this trial period. All employees would be permitted to wear gloves and/or facial coverings, following health and safety guidance. All open areas should be regularly cleaned and sanitized. Consistent policies should be developed for clothes being tried-on for sizing, for alterations being permitted after a confirmed purchase, and that making clothing sales final without the opportunity for exchange or returns. Salons and barber shops could open, and all appointments would have to be scheduled in advance to ensure no over-crowding of waiting areas. All utensils or equipment used in the process must be

properly sanitized between each use. Providers should use face coverings and gloves, as recommended by health and safety standards.

9. Transportation services. Louisiana airports and transit systems should be evaluated that they have the capacity and protocols to return to broader operation. They should have cleanliness protocols in place immediately to be prepared for the day when air service and transit service can return to normal. The state should recommend guidance for ride sharing services, delivery services, and taxi services that define cleanliness standards and safety protocols.

10. Health Clubs and Fitness Centers could be opened, perhaps not immediately. They could be limited to a percentage of their capacity, based on the designated Fire Marshall's maximum capacity limits (think, 25 or 50% of allowable capacity), and with anyone inside being limited from being within 6-10 feet of each other while working out. No one under 18 years old would be permitted. Possibly they should restrict admission to those with previously set appointments to be sure that capacity limits are not exceeded. After each use of any equipment or machine, every item must be fully cleaned and sanitized. Restroom facilities can be used, but shower facilities should not be made available for use.

11. Reopening those non-essential, closed business sectors: Other sectors that were explicitly closed should be reviewed one by one, sector by sector, to determine whether and when they can reopen in a safe manner that prevents COVID-19 spread, setting future dates or safety guidelines for each sector:

- Places of public amusement, including locations with amusement rides, carnivals, amusement parks, water parks, trampoline parks, aquariums, zoos, museums, arcades, fairs, pool halls, children's play centers, playgrounds, theme parks, any theaters, concert and music halls, adult entertainment venues, racetracks, casinos, and other similar businesses.
- All personal care businesses, including but not limited to, nail salons, spas, massage parlors, tattoo parlors, and other similar businesses.
- All malls

OTHER READINGS ON RETURNING TO WORK

Brookings: How cities can reopen after COVID

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/03/24/how-our-cities-can-reopen-after-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

McKinsey Implications and business restart considerations:

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/risk/our-insights/covid-19-implications-for-business>

WSJ: The Employer Will Test You Now: Reopening the economy will depend on companies diagnosing coronavirus cases in the workplace

https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-employer-will-test-you-now-11586714684?mod=opinion_lead_pos6

US Chamber on Implementing National Return to Work concept

<https://www.uschamber.com/coronavirus/implementing-national-return-to-work-plan>

OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID 10

<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

10 Steps All Workplaces Can Take to Reduce Risk of Exposure to Coronavirus, OSHA Poster

<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3994.pdf>