

Phase 3 to Begin Tomorrow: A summary of the governor's June 29 press conference



Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo speaks at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Providence Pedestrian Bridge.

Governor Gina Raimondo, DOH director Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott and commerce director Stefan Pryor gave the COVID-19 press briefing today at 1pm from The Vets.

“Rhode Island is continuing to trend in the right direction,” the governor announced today. DOH is reporting 107 new positive cases of COVID-19 since Friday. There were 60 and 31 new cases reported on Saturday and Sunday respectively, leaving only 16 from today. Seventy-three people are hospitalized for reasons associated with the coronavirus; 15 are in the ICU and 14 are on ventilators. DOH also reports a total of 19 new fatalities since Friday. Three people were in their 70s, nine in their 80s, six in their 90s and one person was over 100. Rhode Island stands in contrast to other states seeing surges. The governor took pains today to note that the country on June 22 reached a new single day high for new COVID cases, over 44,000.

Phase 3 starts tomorrow, the governor announced today. However, Raimondo has been in talks with governors in other states, like Governor Abbot in Texas. His state has had to take steps to close down the economy and close hospitals to non-critical procedures to free up room for COVID patients. Florida, Los Angeles, Florida and Texas have also closed bars, something that concerns Raimondo going into Phase 3. “I want us to continue to lead the nation, I don’t want setbacks,” said the governor. “We are where we are, because people of RI have been following the rules. If you stop following the rules, we’ll have to shut down the economy again.”

The new phase of Rhode Island’s reopening will come with more limitations than the governor announced last week. Raimondo is responding to surging case numbers across the country and therefore, limiting large social gatherings to 25 inside and 50 outside. Weddings have an exception called out if they have a caterer and can be treated more like a restaurant setting. Weddings (and other catered events) can have a max inside capacity of 50 people and a max outside capacity of 100.

Public events and other venues are limited indoors to 125 people, or 66% capacity with appropriate social spacing. Their outside limits are 250, as long as they follow DOH guidelines. Any July 4 celebrations are subject to the same rules as beaches/parks. Anyone who plans to host more than 250 people must submit a plan to the state for review. Masks must also be worn and social distance must be maintained. Seated venues can open to 66% capacity (like movie theaters) and ‘free-flowing venues’ like museums, arcades and cultural institutions can have one person per 100 square feet. This is all providing that 6-foot spacing can be maintained.

Raimondo said today she was worried about the July 4th weekend, and brought up the example of Texas

again. According to Governor Abbot, Texas had a test positive rate of under 4% before the Memorial Day weekend. Due to large social gatherings and people not following CDC guidance (mask wearing, distancing, etc), the Lone Star State now has a daily positive test rate of over 14%.

Today the governor also announced new travel restrictions. Anyone coming to Rhode Island from a state with a COVID positive test rate of 5% or higher would be asked to quarantine for 14 days. Anyone who has gotten back a negative COVID test in the past three days would be exempt from following this rule. The rule will apply to 23 different states in America, and DOH will provide a list of states every week available for viewing on the website. If a Rhode Islander travels to one of these states and comes back, they must also get a negative COVID test or quarantine for 14 days.

Governor Raimondo acknowledged today her goal of 10,000 tests a day by July was a little aggressive. Rhode Island's testing capacity is over 5,000, but daily tests tend to peak around 4,000, leaving the state with plenty of room. She set a revised goal of seeing a big uptick in testing around the back to school season later this summer.

Motif today asked about the process to fine a business for noncompliance with the new reopening regulations. Director Pryor said most businesses received at least one or two inspections and/or a phone call ensuring they were following regulations. A handful of businesses received two warnings and a further action item. Pryor declined to specify the exact number of businesses fined so far, saying he would get back to *Motif* with that information.

The state's next press conference is Wednesday at 1pm. You can watch it live on Capitol TV, social media streams, or read our live-tweeting of it on Twitter. We'll have our summary up later that day.