

Trump announces guidelines to 'open up' U.S. economy, ease coronavirus restrictions

Chris Matthews

Capitol Report

Published: April 16, 2020 at 7:31 p.m. ET

The suggestions do not indicate a specific time frame



Trump speaks on April 16

Getty Images

The White House unveiled new guidelines for states and localities on lifting coronavirus-related restrictions on citizens and businesses, as President Trump looks to bring the nation's focus toward reigniting an economy battered by efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19.

The protocols, titled "Opening Up America Again," do not suggest a time frame for when states should lift restrictions, as the president had suggested they might earlier this week. "Governors will be empowered to tailor an approach that meets the diverse circumstances of their own state," Trump said during a press conference Thursday evening.

The White House proposed a list of six metrics states should "satisfy before preceding to a

phased opening.” They include:

- A decline in influenza-like illnesses reported within a 14-day period and a downward trajectory of covid-like cases reported within a 14-day period;
- A decline in documented cases of COVID-19 within a two-week period or a decline in the share of coronavirus tests that come back positive, if test volume increases or remains flat; and
- Hospitals within a jurisdiction should have the capacity to treat all patients without “crisis care” and there should be a “robust testing program in place for at-risk health care workers” including tests for COVID-19 immunity.

If states meet these criteria, the guidelines suggest a three-phased approach to reopening the economy. The first stage would involve reopening of some businesses, including gyms, restaurants, movie theaters and places of worship “if they adhere to strict physical distancing and sanitation protocols.” The guidelines suggest schools should remain closed, while employers should continue to encourage telework when possible and that nonessential travel be minimized.

If states and regions show no evidence of a rebound in coronavirus cases over another 14-day period, they will be advised to move to phase two, during which schools and youth activities can resume and large venues can operate under “moderate physical distancing protocols.” Inpatient elective surgeries could also resume under phase two.

During both phases one and two, the guidelines suggest the elderly and individuals with serious underlying health conditions should continue to shelter-in-place.

Under phase, after a third 14-day period without a COVID-19 resurgence, restrictions would be greatly relaxed, with visits to senior care facilities and hospitals allowed to resume, while restaurants, bars, movie theaters, sporting venues and places of worship could operate under “limited physical distancing protocols.”

The guidelines are a departure from the posture the president took earlier in the week, when the president suggested a May 1 date for when many states could lift restrictions. He also [claimed](#) to have “absolute authority” in determining when restrictions would be eased, despite it being largely governors who instituted coronavirus restrictions. The president has little constitutional power to force state governments to change laws and regulations regarding public health, [constitutional experts say](#).

Despite these federal guidelines, some states have already committed to keeping current restrictions in place, including New York, which will maintain its shutdown order [through May 15](#), at least, while California [published its own guidelines](#) on Tuesday for when it will begin to ease restrictions. Meanwhile, states in the Northeast, Midwest and West Coast have entered into regional pacts that will involve close interstate coordination on coronavirus policy going forward.