

GOVERNOR ERIC J. HOLCOMB
Getting Indiana Back on Track
May 1, 2020

Remarks as prepared for delivery

Hoosiers, it was eight weeks ago, when I first spoke to you about the unprecedented scourge attacking our state and the steps we would take to fight it.

For these past weeks, I've said that we were only at the beginning of what would be a long race and there are many miles to go.

Today I can report, that thanks to the discipline and actions of 6.7 million Hoosiers, we are ready to move ahead in a measured way.

I want to share those measured next steps that we'll take together to begin to reopen our state.

But before I do that, I need to say a few words of remembrance and appreciation, to reflect on those we've lost, and to thank the heroes who've been on the front lines, saving lives – all, despite great personal risk.

I'm a history buff, and I'm reminded in this moment in the Gettysburg Address, when Lincoln said, "The world will little note ... what we say here," and added that no speaker – even one of his power and eloquence – had the power to dedicate, consecrate... or hallow that sacred ground.

Lincoln was acknowledging that words are inadequate to the task of honoring the fallen. Words cannot capture the pain and grief so many of us are feeling.

When we provide our daily updates, we use a lot of numbers, the number of COVID cases, the number of hospitalizations, the number of deaths.

But let us never, ever, forget for one second that the more than 1,000 Hoosiers we have lost to this disease are not numbers.

They are our grandparents and parents and children ... our friends and neighbors and loved ones.

Each life was precious, and, like ripples in a pond, each touched scores of people in ever-widening circles. We are all grieving, and the depth of our grief is commensurate to how much we loved them.

And, so, we will honor their memories by never forgetting them – their smiles, their laughter, their love, their wisdom, their good works while they were here.

We will also never forget the countless heroes who have answered this call, during this crisis.

At a time when we all have been touched by loss, we have also been filled with immense pride and gratitude at the countless acts of generosity and sacrifice, coming out in every corner of our state.

On behalf of all Hoosiers, thank you, thank you to all the health care workers who put their lives on the line every day to protect us.

When the pandemic came, the call went out to Indiana's nearly 17,000 licensed physicians and more than 150,000 nurses. Joining them were thousands of more volunteers.

That includes the nurse practitioner of 30 years who was about to retire but sprang into action, the army veteran who works full time in a hospital but added nights and weekends so he could help even more, the mental health therapist who said she would do anything to be of service.

In our greatest hour of need, you are there for us.

And of course that includes our own Dream Team of medical experts: Doctors Box, Sullivan, Rusyniak, Weaver, Kaufmann, and Dauss.

The Lieutenant Governor and I also share our appreciation for all those essential workers who are keeping us safe, keeping us fed, keeping the lights on, and keeping the shelves stocked: our police officers and our fire fighters, our farmers and food producers and supermarket cashiers, our long-haul truckers and delivery drivers and trash collectors.

All of you are working unselfishly, so we can continue living without a far worse disruption.

I share our appreciation for the ministers and priests and rabbis and imams, and all those who are comforting us in our suffering and grief.

I also share our appreciation for everyone who has taken this virus seriously and kept their distance – despite the hardships. Your patience and discipline have helped keep the terrible toll from being even worse.

Finally, I want to share my appreciation to all Hoosiers for rising together in our time of crisis.

There have been too many acts of caring, kindness and ingenuity to share – everything from companies and individuals donating food and money to making needed medical equipment and researching treatments and testing to working overtime to do whatever it takes to serve those most in need.

But I think it was Captain John Mehling, of the Fishers Fire Department, who captured it best.

He said: “For all the madness this pandemic has wrought, it has also brought out a deeper humanity and empathy than the likes most have seen in this lifetime. It is an honor serving a community ... in a state which not only touts ‘Hoosier Hospitality’ but lives it.”

John’s comments are not isolated.

Across Indiana, we have witnessed a spirit of cooperation and caring for others that has touched my heart. May this spirit of appreciation for one another carry on long after the torment of COVID-19 is behind us.

We are doing this together!

And together, we will overcome this disease, and come out a stronger Indiana.

Now let me turn to the next steps to getting Indiana back on track.

I know this has been a very challenging time for Hoosiers. COVID-19 has disrupted our lives beyond description, brought grief to so many and financial difficulties to many more.

When we planned our initial response to this global virus, our goal, our mission was clear: slow the spread and flatten the curve in order to protect our health care system from a surge. That response remains data-driven.

That will continue to be our practice as we consider a sector-by-sector reset with the goal of getting Indiana back on track.

We will follow 4 guiding principles to determine how plans to reopen various sectors of the economy move forward:

First – that the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients statewide has decreased for 14 days.

Our current data show that, as a state, COVID patient admissions have decreased over the past 2 weeks.

Second, that the state retain its surge capacity for critical care beds and ventilators.

Currently, state-wide ICU bed and vent availability has remained above 40% and 70% respectively for the last 2 weeks.

Personal protective equipment – or PPE – is critical for businesses as they resume operations, with masks in particular demand. The state is working with Hoosier companies that have already converted their lines of work to PPE or currently supply such materials.

We're developing the Indiana Small Business PPE Marketplace to provide reliable access to PPE for small businesses that need help to comply with safe workplace precautions.

Businesses and non-profit entities with fewer than 150 employees and registered to do business in Indiana will be eligible. More details will be outlined in the coming days.

In addition, we will be distributing 300 million dollars to counties, cities and towns via a population-based formula, which is the first installment from the Coronavirus Relief Fund.

The third principle is that we can test all Hoosiers who are COVID-19 symptomatic.

At the outset of the virus, Indiana deployed a dozen strike teams to congregate settings – especially nursing homes – to quickly respond to suspected COVID cases. These teams will continue to play a vital role in keeping Indiana on track and will focus on detecting new cases as early as possible.

To help in the early detection of new cases, the state has partnered with OptumServe to add 50 testing locations in strategically located parts of the state.

These sites will enable over 100,000 more Hoosiers to get tested per month, and aide in the early detection of new cases.

Hoosier employers, employees, and consumers can have confidence anyone concerned they may be sick due to their symptoms, or having been in contact with someone who is, will have the ability to get tested.

Which leads me to our fourth guiding principle for getting Indiana back on track – which is to contact all individuals who test positive for COVID-19 and expand contact tracing.

We will aggressively track new cases through a centralized contact tracing program to help slow the spread of the virus.

While ISDH, in cooperation with local health departments, has engaged in contact tracing since the first positive case of COVID-19 was reported in early March, centralized contact tracing will begin May 11. This will enable the state to ensure all future cases are tracked and recorded in a uniform and timely fashion.

All Hoosiers who test positive in the future will receive a text, email, and a call from one of the state's over 500 contact tracers currently being onboarded. These tracers will identify other Hoosiers potentially at risk and help provide resources individuals may need.

So, to ensure we can make steady progress getting Indiana back on track, we will continue to watch that our number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients are diminishing, that we retain sufficient critical equipment, that we're able to test all citizens who might be symptomatic, and that we can track those who test positive.

Given the trends moving in the right direction on all 4 fronts, I am ready to announce the next steps.

We have developed a 5-stage roadmap that with our collective efforts, can help us reach the goal of having Indiana back on track by July 4th – Independence Day.

Of course, this roadmap is subject to change. New guidance is provided regularly and more is known about this disease every day.

Since March 24, we've been hunkered down. We're calling this Stage 1.

During this time, essential manufacturing, construction, infrastructure, government, business, healthcare and other critical businesses and operations have been open, while K-12 school buildings remain closed and all their activities are canceled.

Since Monday, Hoosiers have been able to resume having elective medical procedures.

Stage 2 will roll out over the next 3 weeks.

Nearly all of Indiana will move to Stage 2 this Monday, May 4th.

Marion and Lake – our two most populous counties – may begin Stage 2 on May 11th to ensure our new testing and contact tracing programs are up and running. Cass County, which recently had an outbreak, may start Stage 2 May 18th to make sure they don't overwhelm the health care system.

As we work to get back on track, we must still protect the most vulnerable among us.

That's why, in Stage 2, Hoosiers 65 and over and those with high-risk health conditions – who are the most susceptible to the coronavirus – should remain at home as much as possible.

In Stage 2, we'll be easing restrictions in a measured way – although local governments may impose more local strict guidelines as conditions dictate.

We are lifting the essential travel restrictions and permitting social gatherings of up to 25 people, following the CDC's social distancing guidelines.

State government offices will begin to open for limited interaction with the public.

In addition, the remaining manufacturers, industrial and other infrastructure operations that had not been considered essential will also open.

Retail and commercial businesses will open at 50% capacity.

Examples include apparel, furniture, jewelry and liquor stores that have been operating as curbside or delivery only.

Shopping malls may open at 50% capacity with indoor common areas restricted to 25% capacity.

Restaurants and bars that serve food may open starting May 11 at 50% capacity, but bar seating will remain closed.

Personal services, such as hair salons, barber shops, nail salons, spas and tattoo parlors also may open on May 11 by appointment only and must follow social distancing guidelines.

Those who work in office settings are encouraged to continue to work remotely whenever possible. In fact, if anyone can work from home, we encourage you to continue to do so.

Before I discuss Stage 3, let me make this one point clear: Starting May 8th, for all 92 Indiana counties, indoor worship services may also convene, following specific social distancing guidelines – while those 65 and older and those at elevated risk will be asked to stay home.

Our preference is that you continue virtual and outdoor services. And church leaders – we need you to keep your congregations safe.

If health indicators remain positive, on May 24th we'll move to Stage 3.

Individuals at risk, including those over 65, may venture out cautiously. Those who can work remotely should continue to do so.

Social gatherings of up to 100 people may occur.

Retail stores and malls may move to 75% of capacity.

Movie theaters may open at 50% capacity and mall common areas – such as food courts and sitting areas – may further open to 50% capacity.

Playgrounds, tennis courts, basketball courts, pools, campgrounds and gyms and fitness centers may open with restrictions and social distancing.

All the while, we will be constantly monitoring what is happening in every community across our state.

We will be looking at hospital admissions, how many ventilators and critical care beds are available in each region, our capacity to test more Hoosiers, and how our contact tracing system is working.

That is the data that has guided us every day since this emergency began, and we're not going to let off the gas now.

We will continue to monitor every day.

And while we're hopeful that we have the momentum to move into this stage later in May, we will be cautious and make the best decisions for Hoosiers based on the situation at that time.

If still on track, on June 14th we'll advance to Stage 4.

We hope we can open up the state even more in mid-June – to get you back to even more of the activities you and your family are used to – and missing so much in recent weeks.

In Stage 4, face coverings will be optional and social gatherings of up to 250 people may take place, and large venues may open with adherence to social distancing guidelines.

State government buildings will reopen to the public.

Professional office building employees may resume work at full capacity.

Retail stores, malls open at full capacity with social distancing guidelines in place.

Dining room service may open at 75% capacity, bar seating in restaurants may open at 50% capacity.

Cultural, entertainment and tourism may open at 50% capacity.

This includes museums, zoos, bowling alleys, aquariums, and like facilities.

Recreational sports leagues and tournaments may resume, and amusement parks, water parks and like facilities may open at 50% capacity.

Our goal is to have all areas of the state reach Stage 5 beginning July 4th.

Even in Stage 5 we will continue to do social distancing, but conventions, sports events, fairs, festivals, state fair and like events may resume and remote work will be optional.

Retail stores, malls, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, gyms and personal services may operate at full capacity.

Restrictions will be lifted at amusement parks, water parks and like facilities.

At this time, we will decide how to approach the next school year.

So, Hoosiers, this is our 5-Stage plan to get Indiana back on track. It's a methodical, step-by-step plan for steady progress which we'll carefully monitor.

You can read more about this at [BackOnTrack.in.gov](https://www.backontrack.in.gov).

Now comes the hard part.

As life starts to slowly return to normal, making progress towards being fully back on track will require constant vigilance – from all of us.

As we lift restrictions and more people return to work, visit a store or restaurant, and participate in more activities, the number of COVID-19 cases will increase.

If we cannot continue to meet our 4 guiding principles, all or portions of the state may need to pause, or even return to an earlier phase of our stay-at-home order.

In other words: this is up to each of us, and all of us.

A.J. Foyt – 1 of only 3 men who have won the Indy 500 four times, was once asked about his strategy for winning.

He said, “The race is won in the last 50 laps.” He knew that the keys to such a long race are patience, discipline and perseverance.

My friends, I have seen with my own eyes your incredible patience, discipline and perseverance.

And I've learned from this moment of trial, that there is nothing we cannot do when we work together.

And I truly believe that because of what we will do together, future historians will look back on this moment and say for Hoosiers, this was their finest hour.