



# **HOCKING COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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## **Community Statement Concerning the Re-Opening of Transient Rentals in Hocking County**

On March 11, 2020, Governor DeWine shared that Ohio had its first community spread of COVID-19. At that time, there were many unknowns concerning this new virus. No one knew how quickly it would spread or how lethal it would turn out to be. Due to these unknowns, the goal was to contain the virus as much as possible to give our health care system time to prepare for the projected onslaught of cases and not be overwhelmed. Basically, this was to save as many lives as possible.

On March 11, 2020, public health did not have many weapons in its arsenal to deal with this threat and therefore had to go old-school with social distancing and self-isolation. On March 22, 2020, the Director of the Ohio Department of Health, Dr. Amy Acton, issued the first Stay at Home Order which stated *“With exceptions as outlined below, all individuals currently living within the State of Ohio, are ordered to stay at home or at their place of residence except as allowed in this Order.”* All non-essential businesses and operations were to cease. The order outlined prohibited activities and prohibited and permitted travel. Vacations were not listed as an essential activity or reason for permitted travel.

Since the main mode of transmission for COVID 19 was person to person through respiratory droplets, the purpose of the SAH was to keep people from moving around and spreading the virus. This was not working in Hocking County. As a result, in order to protect the health our residents and visitors, the Hocking County Health Commissioner issued the Rental Cabin Order requiring *“All transient rentals (cabins rentals), regardless of size or number of bedrooms, are to close effective midnight March 23, 2020 to the public. This is due to the renting of cabins, lodges and etc., not being an essential service and the service of providing rental cabins encouraging leisure travel which is not essential travel.”*

The Hocking County Health Department Rental Cabin Order was amended on March 24 to provide limited exceptions including allowing clients to stay to the end of their reservation and allowing person(s) requiring isolation, person(s) providing essential services, displaced person(s), and minimum basic operation for upkeep and security.

With cases rising in Ohio, Director Acton issued the Amended Director's Stay at Home Order on April 2, 2020. The intent of the order was to *"ensure that the maximum number of people self-isolate in their place of residence to the maximum extent feasible, while enabling essential services to continue, to slow the spread of COVID-19 to the greatest extent possible."* Many businesses including campgrounds were ordered closed unless there was no other viable place of residence. Cabins, mobile homes, and other fixed structures, meant for a single family were also closed unless no other viable place of residence existed.

The Hocking County Health Department along with the Hocking Hills Tourism Association held a virtual meeting on April 26 for owner/operators to discuss guidelines to be followed once the transient rentals re-opened that would minimize the transmission of the COVID-19 virus to staff, guests, and the community. The meeting was held as Governor DeWine was developing a plan to slowly open up closed businesses in Ohio.

Several owners had already developed plans which were then shared with the group. Four areas to be addressed by owners included staff, guests, facility, and the community. Owners must take these guidelines seriously especially in asking guests to wear face coverings when visiting local businesses along with other COVID-19 safety measures including to stay home if they feel ill and when visiting a local business to wear a face shield, practice social distancing, washing and sanitizing their hands, and covering their cough or sneeze.

The Governor is asking health departments to ensure businesses are operating in a manner that protects their staff and guests. For the safety of the community and its residents, we are asking that everyone involved take the requirements and the consequences of not doing so seriously.

On April 27, Governor DeWine shared the state's plan issuing a list of Continued Closures that including campgrounds. Mandated guidelines were also issued for all businesses to follow and these are listed in Appendix A.

While we recognize that in medical terms, one of the best solutions for stopping the spread of COVID-19 is for everyone to self-isolate. However, continued self-isolation negatively impacts mental health and the economy. Ohio's Stay at Home orders worked. Between March 22 and April 28, Ohio's COVID-19 infection rate stabilized, personal protective equipment for health care workers and first responders was increased, and health care facilities were better equipped and prepared. Using face coverings, proper cough and sneeze etiquette, and social distancing became the normal. Testing for the virus and antibodies is on the rise and research on the virus

continues. We are in a much better place than a month ago and overall, Hocking County and the state of Ohio are in a higher level of preparedness to deal with the virus.

Therefore, based on these improvements, discussions with our Board President, Medical Director and the Ohio Department of Health, and the desire of the transient rental owners to follow the guidelines listed in Appendix A, we feel transient rentals may resume business on May 4, 2020.

We also ask owners to assist in keeping infection rates down by discussing with all potential clients on the use of face coverings, handwashing, and proper sneeze/cough etiquette. If infection rates rise in Ohio, not just in Hocking County, then the state will have no choice but to issue new Stay at Home Orders. You can help prevent this by sharing these messages through your various social media methods.

We appreciate your patience and recognize the impact this pandemic has had on all businesses throughout the world. We also recognize your dedication, commitment and pride in operating your business in a way that will protect your staff, guests and this community and possible save lives.