



County of Inyo

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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Letter to the Community from Dr. James Richardson, Inyo County Health Officer

I write today to provide some insight into the efforts the Inyo County Public Health Department is taking to help protect our communities and visitors from the COVID-19 pandemic.

But first, I want to acknowledge the numerous effects this pandemic has on our communities. Not only does COVID-19 directly threaten the physical health of our citizens and visitors, but the necessary health precautions taken to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 also affect the economic and psychological health of our communities. A key County priority during these difficult times is to keep businesses open so long as the public is protected from the spread of COVID-19. This priority is why we must all adhere to the local and state public health orders and industry guidance including face covering, social distancing, and avoiding gatherings. If you would like to learn more about how these orders help prevent the spread of COVID-19, please review the materials found here: <https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202004.0203/v1>.

The enforcement process in Inyo County is not about punishing small businesses. Our process seeks to support our local business while also protecting the health care system and our residents and visitors. Upon receiving a complaint about a local business, we reach out to the owners of businesses to provide education about the health orders, and to support them if they need help changing their operations to comply with those orders. For example, when the State announced the closure of outdoor dining, we immediately worked with the Inyo County administration to help streamline the encroachment permit process so our restaurant businesses could continue to operate. We've also provided businesses with free masks and face shields, free county-produced signs, and we provide one-on-one technical assistance to support planning and operationalizing the state's COVID-19 industry guidance.

While nearly every Inyo County resident and business owner is doing their best to comply with the face covering and distancing requirements, we do occasionally run across businesses where the owners are adamantly opposed to taking these small steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. When those businesses will not work with us, will not participate and will not listen, only when we have no other recourse will we pursue civil and criminal penalties against a business who is breaking the law. We do this not to punish the business, but to protect our population. We do this only after providing education, free services, free supplies, and giving a business many, many chances.

Businesses of Inyo County – we are here to support you. When others are making decisions that endanger all of us and our County's ability to stay open and contain the spread of this disease, we will enforce the law and ensure they can no longer put us all in danger. When we enforce our Public Health orders, it is in SUPPORT of us continuing to stay open and in SUPPORT of our small business.

Sincerely,

Dr. James Richardson
Inyo County Health Officer