



# NEW MEXICO BUSINESS COALITION

## **Analyzing New Mexico's Coronavirus Response**

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The Governor's early response to the coronavirus slowed the spread and saved lives. Two months later, however, we've learned much more about COVID-19, how to manage it, and the much lower than anticipated mortality rates. We now know that COVID-19 is something that can be effectively handled while allowing life to continue.

To better understand where New Mexicans stand on the handling of COVID-19, NMBC conducted an open survey of over 1,100 participants from all over the state. The results:

95% feel the economy should have been opened no later than May 15<sup>th</sup>;

93% feel it is important or very important for ALL small businesses to open immediately;

84% were dissatisfied with N.M. officials' response in handling the shutdown and lacking a reopening plan;

73% were dissatisfied with the unemployment response;

85% said 'The Governor's leadership and/or decisions do not support what is best for all New Mexicans.'

Why such a high dissatisfaction with the Governor and the state's current status?

For one thing, it's disturbing that members of the Governor's staff call those who are concerned about the overall wellbeing of New Mexicans a '[death cult](#)'. Secondly, there are a growing number of New Mexicans who agree the shutdown of our state has disproportionately hurt minorities, the poor and business operations for too long.

The unprecedented lock down appears to be an ongoing 'order' by the Governor that will continue (she warns), "until science indicates otherwise." But [the science being used is questionable](#) and has hurt minorities, the poor and business operations leading to a lack of faith in requirements and the inability to care for families. Here are some of the Governor's directions as well as what she says will dictate next phases of reopening:

1) Mandatory mask use. The Governor stated that enforcement has proven problematic in other states and that it is unknown if she would win legal challenges that result from a requirement to use masks. Beginning on 5/16/20, however, she said masks are mandatory for anyone in a public area and the use will be enforced by peer pressure and strong words from state police.

There is a large amount of conflicting information about the use of masks or face coverings, much of which is sourced to [qualified doctors and professionals](#). This includes

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the original warnings against their use by [Dr. Fauci](#) as well as the [World Health Organization](#) that cautioned, "The wide use of masks by healthy people in the community setting is not supported by current evidence and carries uncertainties and critical risks."

The overwhelming desire of New Mexicans is to do the right thing in limiting the spread of the virus. With the new mandatory face covering requirement while in public, many New Mexicans are in compliance. Some, however, are not convinced that the position change is the correct path forward and when certain leaders state this may be the [new normal](#) until there is a vaccine, some New Mexicans find that hard to accept.

2) Widespread testing prior to the state being fully functional. That is ludicrous because we've already seen that a test today does not mean you won't be infected tomorrow. Is the state proposing testing all New Mexicans every day or even weekly to assure safety in resuming life activities? That is cost prohibitive and simply not realistic.

3) Required immunizations. Immunizations could take 18 to 24 months for widespread availability. Like other viruses, immunizations for COVID-19 will have to change seasonally as the virus morphs into new forms. Plus, there will be those who will opt out of immunizations for various reasons. If the Governor attempts to keep New Mexicans in some state of lock down, such as continued stay-at-home instructions, mask use, and/or limited school and business operations until there is widespread immunization use, the state will not be fully functional during this term of her administration. This fact is not lost on New Mexicans and those who are dissatisfied with how long this shut down has already gone on. Many find that length of extension unacceptable.

The truth is these measures have intentionally or unintentionally skyrocketed inequality and hurt minorities, the poor and small home-grown business the most. Huge corporations and big box stores have been operating since the beginning with little competition while our native small businesses were unnecessarily prohibited from operating and now many have closed permanently.

These small businesses are not "greedy" or "looking for a quick buck". These are hardworking New Mexicans, who put everything they had on the line to provide for their families as well as opportunities for great employees to do the same. These owners have spent years, decades and even multiple generations sacrificing to build a good and meaningful life, often foregoing a paycheck to ensure their employees are paid.

Now these same people are watching their entire life's investment be destroyed in a matter of months by arbitrary decisions that have benefitted some large companies while penalizing our small, native businesses as "non-essential".

The growing damage of these decisions has not only destroyed our economy, but has contributed to massive increases in suicide, alcohol and substance abuse and increased domestic violence. There is much more at stake than money because people don't do well when confined and are living in fear.

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We need to restore our state to one that functions properly because the disaster of the ongoing shutdown is real and is going to [destroy many lives](#).

In addition, since early diagnostic services and elective surgeries (other than dental elective care) have been stopped, there is a growing concern that New Mexico will see an increase in cancers, heart disease, diabetes and other maladies that could have been successfully mitigated if caught early.

Hospitals have been practically shut down, waiting for an onslaught of coronavirus cases that now, fortunately, seems unlikely to occur. As a result, there have been massive furloughs adding to the growing list of New Mexicans who may be struggling to provide for their families.

And yet, [the state caused an Albuquerque Nursing Home to evict long-term patients](#) aged 70 to 102 years old in order to have additional beds available for COVID-19 patients. The state is currently paying \$600/day for virus patient beds as well as \$600/day for up to 30 empty beds. That equates to a minimum of \$18,000/day for empty beds, which seems to be the current status of that facility - empty.

[The old Lovelace hospital was renovated at a cost of millions of dollars](#). Yet, Human Services Cabinet Secretary Dr. Scrase stated during the last press conference that the building is still vacant. They are now considering what other uses it could fill.

We do not downplay the seriousness of the virus and offer our sincere condolences to anyone who has lost a loved one. Around the world, however, we see government leaders taking a different approach from that in New Mexico:

An article in [Germany's Bild Newspaper](#), 'Lockdown Was a Huge Mistake,' 5/11/20, "legendary" journalist Patricia Riekkel, stated, "I am in favor of the Swedish way, with recommendations that distance be kept and that people who are at risk stay at home. What we have seen in the last six weeks has been excessive," Riekkel adds: "We have become a people of compliers and snitches."

[South Dakota Governor Noem](#) never instituted business closures and lock down measures. Instead she trusted her people "to do the right thing for themselves and their loved-ones," after advising them of recommended safety measures. She wisely recognizes they are not out of the woods, but her state has one of the lowest virus infection and death rates in the country and her economy has suffered little in the way of unemployment and lost revenue.

With a growing number of court challenges throughout the U.S. over coronavirus requirements, [Wisconsin's Supreme Court](#) denied its governor the right to extend the stay-at-home order.

Many news articles as well as the Governor's weekly or more frequent press conferences, focus almost exclusively on how bad the virus is in New Mexico. But that is

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not the whole story. If you look at all of the facts, you'll see far better statistics in regards to the virus than those that are bad. In fact, there is fantastic news that the virus is nonexistent or almost so in some counties. The spread of the virus has been significantly curtailed in almost every part of the state. And of those New Mexicans being tested, we're only seeing positive test results 4.5 percent of the time. In addition, the number of recoveries is growing with one elderly [New Mexican at the age of 108 years](#) recovering from the virus. This is news worth celebrating and would be inspirational to those who are fearful of the virus.

As of 5/18/20, New Mexico has recorded 5938 COVID-19 cases and 265 related deaths. While the numbers continue to increase, those increases are due, at least in part, from patients being brought in from out of state. And if [an out-of-state coronavirus patient](#) unfortunately dies in New Mexico, our statistics will count that as a New Mexico death because that's where the death certificate is signed. The death certificate will not reflect where the person is from or where they contracted the virus only where they passed and from what cause.

While we agree that New Mexico should help our neighbors however we can, we don't believe the cases should be attributed to Bernalillo County where they are flown for assistance or for the state as a whole.

Why is this important? Because decisions to reopen our state are being based, at least in part, on these numbers and we are not receiving full disclosure of numbers attributable only to New Mexico.

In our state, there are three counties that have no recorded virus cases or deaths; 16 counties that have 32 or fewer COVID-19 cases and no deaths; and 7 counties that have less than 50 cases and three or fewer deaths. We agree that some counties, like McKinley, have serious and unique circumstances, but we see no value in continuing stay-at-home instructions for the entire state because of certain isolated hot spot areas.

In the meantime, hundreds of New Mexico businesses have closed permanently, including [210 restaurants](#) and thousands of jobs have been lost. Those numbers will continue to increase significantly, if there isn't an immediate change of direction. All of these closures are leaving many New Mexicans with little or no means to provide for their families except with government aid that will eventually run out.

Businesses take significant pride in their personal plans to protect employees and customers. The last thing any business owner wants is for someone to contract the virus on their premises. Many owners, however, are no longer willing to stay closed or significantly restricted because their lives and that of their employees are on the line.

Out of fear of losing their business completely, and with an abundance of caution and safety measures, there were a few owners in New Mexico who began operating prior to the latest orders which allowed them to do so. It appears the trend for more openings

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prior to authorization will continue. To many, the safe opening of their business is the last ditch effort to preserve what's left of their lifelong investment and the jobs they worked so hard to create.

This is in no way a political statement or act of defiance. Rather it is business owners who are desperate to save what's left of a business they put everything on the line to create. These are people who often forego a paycheck in order to assure their employees are paid. But as bills continue and debt increases, they have a very difficult decision to make.

In addition, the confusion and frustration continues to grow around the state as new orders come out once or twice weekly. We're seeing the desperation growing for some business owners who are still not able to operate with the blessing of the Governor and we're receiving more calls about businesses that are closing. There is a growing number of people who support those business owners and don't want to see any more fail.

New Mexicans are hardworking people who take pride in providing for their families while honoring and respecting others. To them, this is not an either or proposition. They are responsible adults who put safety first. That's why New Mexico Business Coalition believes the South Dakota model of trusting people to do the right thing, is the best approach for New Mexico. It should be implemented immediately.

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We want to offer a special note of gratitude to the many people who reviewed this article and offered thoughtful input. We appreciate of their time and opinions and feel that the final product is much better because of them.

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*The New Mexico Business Coalition (NMBC) focuses on improving the business environment for companies and the quality of life for all New Mexicans. Its nonpartisan educational efforts focus on providing New Mexicans the facts about issues impacting business opportunities and job creation in our state. [nmbizcoalition.org](http://nmbizcoalition.org); email: [nmbiz@nmbizcoalition.org](mailto:nmbiz@nmbizcoalition.org).*