

For Immediate Release

A Public Health Guide to Safely Restoring Local Economies

*“Work in the Time of Pandemic,” a Special Report from the
National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University*

NEW YORK, April 27, 2020 – The National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University’s Earth Institute issued a groundbreaking report today outlining a phased plan to safely reopen local American businesses, while still protecting the health and safety of workers and customers.

The first of its kind report, called “Work in the Time of Pandemic, Phase I: A Guide for Restoring the Economy that Matters to Americans,” offers a series of practical steps that should be taken in order to implement a phased reopening of local businesses.

“This new report deals with the detailed planning that will allow for the safe reopening of local businesses. People need to get back to work; and the challenge is how to make that happen without putting employees and customers at risk of contracting COVID-19,” explained Dr. Irwin Redlener, Director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness and co-author of the report. “These recommendations are geared toward your local retail shop, neighborhood restaurants, the barber shop and the corner nail salon.”

Dr. Joseph Fair, Consulting Virologist and Senior Fellow in Global Health at The Smithsonian Institution, was the co-author of the report. According to Dr. Fair, “We wanted to make sure that these guidelines incorporate everything we currently know about the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the COVID-19 it has caused.”

Dr. Redlener added, “Unfortunately, there is so much we don’t know about the virus, including when we’ll get a second wave of the outbreak, how likely a single infection will provide persistent immunity to an individual and so on. Right now, we want to provide concrete guidelines for how and when to open the stores in your neighborhood.”

The report provides nine examples of how the country can begin to reopen the economy when the pandemic threat begins to measurably diminish.

Businesses addressed in the report include:

- Retail, sales-based businesses
- Restaurants
- Personal services
- Public Transportation
- Businesses that can function effectively without physically gathering employees together

- Theatres
- Museums
- Taxis and car services
- Auto Dealerships

First and foremost, several conditions, include widespread testing and tracing, must be in place before these businesses can reopen, the report said.

“We need to have rapid ‘point of care’ testing for the presence of the virus available everywhere. And we also need to perfect antibody testing to help determine who is and who is not immune to the offending virus,” said Dr. Redlener. “We are going to need much, much more testing. We are going to need a huge workforce to do proper contact tracing and follow-up. And we are going to need strict new rules to protect employees and customers. If the above conditions are met, we can talk about getting back to work.”

He also cautioned that it is important for the public to understand that no matter what precautions the nation takes, “the country needs to be prepared for a resurgence or even multiple waves of the outbreak.”

In the event that a fully protective vaccine is not discovered in the next year or two, seasonal surges of COVID-19, like the flu, could become part of the new reality.

“Under such circumstances, annual imposition of public health control strategies, including limited lockdowns may be in our future,” according to the report. “Adaptations and coping will be part of the new norms in the U.S. and across the world.”

The full report can be found [HERE](#). For additional information, please visit ncdp.columbia.edu.

About the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University’s Earth Institute

The National Center for Disaster Preparedness at the Earth Institute of Columbia University works to understand and improve the nation’s capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. NCDP focuses on the readiness of governmental and non-governmental systems; the complexities of population recovery; the power of community engagement; and the risks of human vulnerability, with a focus on children. The Pandemic Resource and Response Initiative is a new program of the NCDP at Columbia University’s Earth Institute.

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