

LARAMIE COUNTY RECOVERY PLAN

Effective Date: November 1, 2020

This version supersedes all previous versions

Planning Subcommittee

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IMPORTANT NOTICE #1

This version of the Recovery Plan is consistent with the Fifteenth Continuation of Statewide Orders effective November 1, 2020. It also discusses the countywide mask mandate that became effective on November 2, 2020.

This version has undergone an extensive revision to deemphasize specific timelines for a return to pre-pandemic activities, since this is not possible to predict. Instead, the plan focuses on measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 while allowing as many businesses and activities as possible to function as normally as possible consistent with safety.

Events that fall outside current State orders also must be approved as “variances” by both the County and State Health Departments. There is a new section on variances, and how to apply for one.

IMPORTANT NOTICE #2

For the general public, wearing of a face covering or mask, in public when social distancing is not possible, protects members of society from infection as well as indicating a commitment to the safety of others.

The countywide mask mandate approved by the Wyoming Department of Health and the Cheyenne/Laramie County Health Department on November 2 requires masks by members of the public while inside, or waiting to enter, any retail or commercial business, or government office. The mask mandate covers municipal and county offices, but a subsequent memo from Governor Gordon extends the mandate to state offices. Staff in these organizations are required to wear masks when serving the public.

Numerous exemptions are allowed, and reference is made to the actual mandate for details. People with certain medical conditions or disabilities may be exempted from mask requirements.

Like the current statewide orders, the mask mandate is an emergency public health order allowed under the state of emergency declared by Governor Gordon in March 2020.

There is no requirement to wear a mask while outside during general open-air activity (walking, exercise, outdoor work) when not near other members of the general public. Private households, clubs and other areas not open to the general public are not covered by the mask mandate, but are encouraged to follow mask and social distancing recommendations as much as possible to prevent transmission of the virus.

Faith-based organizations are also exempted, but are encouraged to follow public health safety guidelines for reducing the spread of COVID-19.

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Section 1 – Background

On April 16, 2020, the Federal Government introduced guidelines for "Opening up America Again". These guidelines proposed 3 levels (phases) of community actions based on data on the COVID-19 outbreak. Following this, the State of Wyoming issued *A Transition Plan for a Healthy Wyoming*, to create a clear pathway toward easing restrictions and reviving the state and local economy. However, the ongoing pandemic has made it impossible to define specific phases of recovery, especially now that COVID-19 disease activity is increasing dramatically.

The Cheyenne/Laramie County Health Department (C/LCHD), continues to follow the lead of the current statewide orders and guidance from Governor Gordon and the Wyoming Department of Health. The Fifteenth Continuation of these orders has been released and forms the basis for this plan in its current form. These orders are issued by the state every two weeks, and are subject to change.

In addition to the statewide orders, there is now a county-wide mask mandate, issued on November 2, 2020 by the C/LCHD and approved by the Wyoming Department of Health.

Current Statewide Orders

Every two weeks, Statewide Orders are reissued and amended to reflect current COVID-19 activity in the state. The current orders are:

- Fifteenth Continuation and Modification of Statewide Public Health Order #1 Regarding Bars, Restaurants, Theaters, Gymnasiums, Childcare Facilities, K-12 Public Schools, Colleges, Universities and Trade Schools
- Fifteenth Continuation and Modification of Statewide Public Health Order #2 Regarding Gatherings of More Than Fifty People
- Fifteenth Continuation and Modification of Statewide Public Health Order #3 Regarding Nail Salons, Barber Shops, Massage Therapy Services, Tattoo, Body Art and Piercing Shops, and Cosmetology, Electrology and Esthetic Services

General Strategy

The strategy for relaxing restrictions in Laramie County (and Wyoming in general) balances two concepts:

- The need for life to return as close as possible to normal
- The need to do this as safely as possible

Section 2 – Current Status of COVID-19 in the US.

Since COVID-19 first emerged in the US in early 2020, it has caused unprecedented social disruption and economic hardship. The initial response consisted of widespread closures and stay-at-home orders. Because no specific treatment or vaccine has been available, and the population has no immunity, initial spread was explosive and for many people deadly.

Here are some important national numbers as of September 18, 2020¹. Wyoming numbers are readily available and summarized daily in the news. We will not repeat them here.

- Laboratory-confirmed U. S. cases: over 9.2 million. Because many infections do not cause symptoms, it is likely that this number is an understatement
- Confirmed U. S. deaths: over 231,000. This may also be undercounted, since many deaths likely occurred before there was any testing available for this disease
- People who have been diagnosed but recovered: about 3.1 million. This number includes people who were hospitalized, at considerable cost

Some have questioned whether the fatality count for COVID-19 is exaggerated or artificially inflated. The fatality data are credible. They come from death certificates completed by physicians who cared for the patients. Details are available at the National Center for Health Statistics: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/index.htm>.

For perspective, Table 1 shows the leading causes of death in the US in 2018². COVID-19 has now become the third leading cause of death in the US in 2020, after heart disease and cancer.

Cause	Deaths	Rank
All causes	2,839,205	
Heart Disease	655,381	1
Cancer (malignant neoplasms)	599,274	2
Preventable injury	167,127	3
Chronic lower respiratory diseases	159,486	4
Stroke (cerebrovascular disease)	147,810	5
Alzheimer's Disease	122,019	6
Diabetes Mellitus	84,946	7
Influenza and pneumonia	59,120	8
Nephritis (kidney disease)	51,386	9
Suicide	48,344	10

Some other comparisons are: US deaths due to traffic accidents in 2018: 36,560³; and deaths due to combat casualties during the Vietnam War: 58,220⁴.

Although Wyoming has been relatively fortunate to have low COVID-19 numbers, **the disease continues to be a significant threat to the health and safety of Wyomingites.**

We have been fortunate in Wyoming to have a relatively small number of hospitalizations and deaths, but recent numbers show cases and hospitalizations increasing dramatically.

¹ Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

² National Safety Council, <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/all-injuries/deaths-by-demographics/all-leading-causes-of-death/>

³ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/traffic-deaths-2018>

⁴ National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics>

Section 3 – Evolving Approach and Metric Overview

Wyoming’s Evolving Approach to COVID-19

The planned recovery in Laramie County initially envisioned three phases of gradual easing of economic and social measures based on public health epidemiologic data, following early federal guidelines. However, given the ongoing presence of COVID-19 in the community, and its unpredictable behavior, a specific timeline is not realistic and cannot be guaranteed.

The goal is to advance through this process safely. Because of ongoing outbreaks in Wyoming and other parts of the U.S., further easing of restrictions is being undertaken in a very measured way, guided by orders and guidance provided by the Wyoming Department of Health and the Governor’s office.

The endpoint is unclear. Everyone wants COVID-19 restrictions to end, and a return to normal life, but a specific date or time cannot be predicted. Lack of widespread immunity, rapid testing, or other treatments leave us with non-pharmacologic interventions (social distancing, face masks, sanitation, contact tracing, quarantine and isolation) as the only effective measures for limiting the spread of the disease.

State-Wide Metrics

In making its decisions regarding easing of restrictions, the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) monitors a set of general state-wide COVID-19 metrics⁵ using the dashboard shown in Figure 1. There is no single metric that triggers a return to pre-pandemic activities. Rather, an analysis of overall trends in the composite data (Figure 1) is considered. The metrics are continuously updated and provide a snapshot of two broad areas:

- Overall disease and testing data
- Hospital capacity, including ICU bed availability

WDH also provides county-level data which will include:

- County level epidemiological curve (incidence of new cases)
- Percent of cases attributable to the risk factor referred to as “community spread”
- Daily lab testing volume
- Percent of positive test results
- Running two-week average of percentage of total tests that are positive
- Age group data
- Number of cases recovered

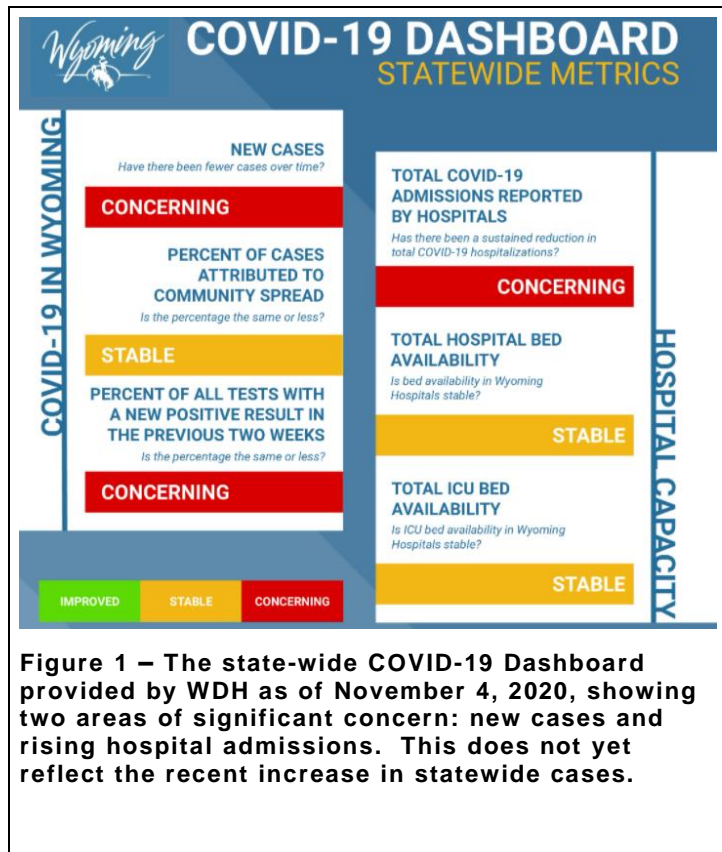


Figure 1 – The state-wide COVID-19 Dashboard provided by WDH as of November 4, 2020, showing two areas of significant concern: new cases and rising hospital admissions. This does not yet reflect the recent increase in statewide cases.

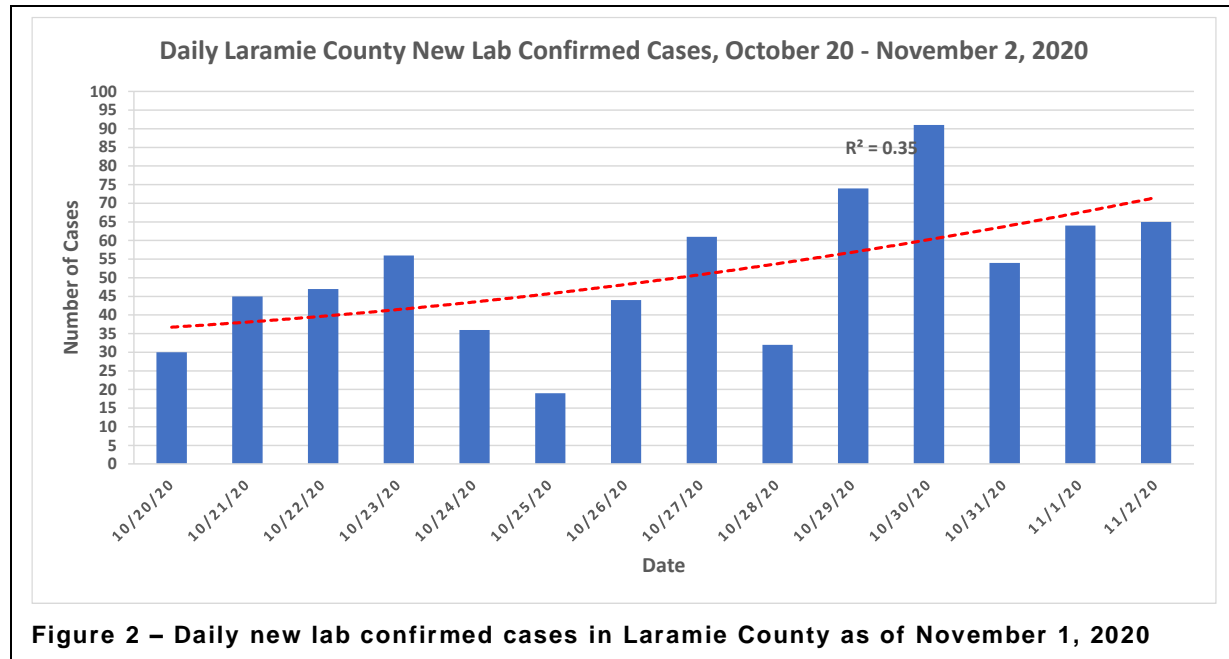
⁵ Wyoming Department of Health, <https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/infectious-disease-epidemiology-unit/disease/novel-coronavirus/>

- Statewide hospital resources related to COVID-19. These are posted online at <https://sites.google.com/wyo.gov/exec-covid19/hospital-resources>.

Laramie County Metrics

C/LCHD will monitor various specific county-level metrics (goals) but in general will not move faster than current state public health orders allow. There is a process for providing exemptions (variances) from certain aspects of the state orders for events, organizations and businesses. The process for applying for a variance is explained below. Local and statewide disease metrics are considered in the variance process.

1. County-level epidemic curve (Figure 2) – New Daily Cases



2. Percentage of cases due to community spread

“Community spread” is defined as cases who have no identified contact with another lab-confirmed case, and therefore are assumed to have contracted the disease due to a random contact. The graph presented in previous versions of this report is no longer provided by the WDH web site, but case management and contact tracing by C/LCHD staff clearly indicate widespread and currently uncontrolled community spread.

3. Total hospital admissions due to COVID-19

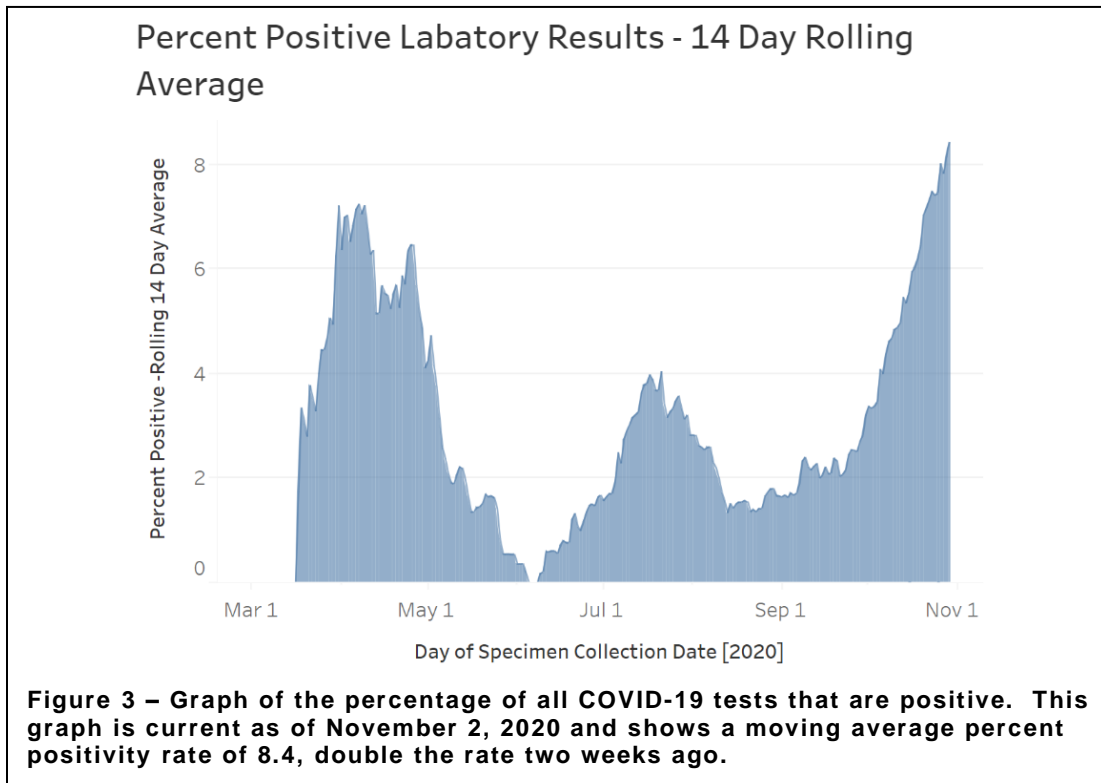
Tracked through Cheyenne Regional Medical Center (CRMC). As of November 4, 2020, there are 37 patients hospitalized at CRMC, with eight patients in the ICU. Four of these patients on life support at this time. These numbers are dramatically worse than two weeks ago.

4. Percentage of ICU beds occupied by COVID-19 patients

CRMC has a 14-bed ICU and 8 of these are occupied by COVID-19 patients, for an ICU occupancy rate of 57%, which is unfavorable. The remaining beds are occupied by other patients. Although the hospital can care for critical patients in other areas, the limiting factor in being able to do this is staffing.

5. Percentage of COVID-19 tests that are positive (Figure 3)

Individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19 positive patients are encouraged to be tested to minimize spread in the community. As we increase testing, we expect to find more positives. Therefore, the percentage of tests that are positive is a better indicator of overall disease activity than the actual number of tests.



Laramie County Stoplight Report

Starting this month, I am bringing back the “green-yellow-red” stoplight report presented in previous reports, displayed in Figure 4.

Phase Goals	GREEN LIGHT Improving Metric	YELLOW LIGHT Cautionary Metric	RED LIGHT Danger Metric
County level epidemic curve			X
Percentage of cases due to community spread			X
Total hospital admissions due to COVID-19			X
Percentage of ICU beds occupied by COVID-19			X
Percentage of COVID-19 tests that are positive			X

Figure 4 – Laramie County dashboard report as of November 4, showing all metrics in the “red” column, indicating worsening pandemic conditions in the County.

Section 4 – What’s New This Time?

Order #1 – no new changes from last time:

Restaurants:

- Social distancing requirements for booth seating are removed. Restaurants may now seat patrons back to back in adjacent booths
- Social distancing requirements for tables remain the same (6 feet between patrons) except that the language "preference of 10 feet apart" has been removed
- The allowable number of people at a table is increased from 6 to 8

Movie theaters: Seating for groups now increased from 6 to 8

Order #2 – no new changes from last time:

- The size of seated or standing groups attending events is increased from 6 to 8
- The language "preferably of the same household" has been removed from groups of attendees seated or standing together
- The language "close contact between members of different households is prohibited before, during and after the event" has been removed

Order #3: no changes

County-wide mask mandate

- Now in effect for certain indoor locations, with exceptions
- This is posted on the C/LCHD web site at https://www.laramiecounty.com/departments/Health/coronavirus_info.aspx

Section 5 – Statewide Orders

There are three (3) statewide orders in force that are issued under the emergency proclamation signed by Governor Gordon in March, 2020, and they apply to every county in Wyoming. The State reviews and reissues the orders every two weeks, and each set of orders has an expiration date two weeks after the date of issue. The State modifies the orders as needed to adapt to the changing pandemic situation.

There is now a Laramie County mask mandate issued by the C/LCHD and approved by WDH. This order became effective on November 2, 2020.

The Wyoming Attorney General (AG) reviews all state and county public health orders to assure compliance with legal and constitutional standards. All county orders undergo additional scrutiny by the County Attorney prior to the review by the State AG.

Below is a list of the statewide orders and the types of activities that they cover. Detailed review of these orders is beyond the scope of this document, but individual businesses, organizations and event planners should review the content of the orders that affect them.

The orders are posted on the Wyoming Department of Health web site at <https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/infectious-disease-epidemiology-unit/disease/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-orders-and-guidance/>.

They are also posted on the C/LCHD web site at https://www.laramiecounty.com/_departments/health/coronavirus_info.aspx.

The Laramie County Mask Mandate is posted on the C/LCHD web site at https://www.laramiecounty.com/_departments/Health/coronavirus_info.aspx

In addition, many types of specific guidance documents are available on the WDH and C/LCHD web sites at the links shown above. Organizations should be aware of these, as they often provide practical details and clarifications that are not in the orders themselves.

Statewide Public Health Order #1 (Fifteenth Continuation)

This order covers the following organizations:

- Restaurants
- Bars
- Theaters
- Gymnasiums
- Childcare facilities
- K-12 schools
- Colleges and universities
- Trade schools

Paragraphs 10 and 11 on page 9 of State Order #1 provide details on exemptions and variances, and the relative roles of the county and state public health authorities.

Statewide Public Health Order #2 (Fifteenth Continuation)

This order provides guidance regarding the size of gatherings. The basic order prohibits gatherings of more than fifty (50) people, but there are numerous exceptions. Paragraph 4 on page 2 of State Order #2 lists specific activities exempted from the order. We will not list those here, but all businesses, organizations and event planners are encouraged to consult this list to see if their business or organization falls under an exemption.

Paragraph 5 on page 3 of State Order #2 allows indoor gatherings of 250 people or less, and outdoor gatherings to a maximum of 1,000 people, with some restrictions as spelled out in that paragraph.

Organizations and activities that are exempted in this order are still encouraged to follow safe practices for preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The virus behaves the same way whether it is in a church, a grocery store or at a livestock auction.

Paragraphs 6 and 7 on page 5 of State Order #2 provide details on exemptions and variances, and the relative roles of the county and state public health authorities.

Statewide Public Health Order #3 (Fifteenth Continuation)

This order covers the following types of businesses and activities:

- Nail and hair salons
- Barber shops
- Massage therapy
- Tattoo, body art and piercing shops
- Cosmetology, electrology and esthetic services

Paragraphs 4 and 5 on pages 3 – 4 of State Order #3 provide details on exemptions and variances, and the relative roles of the county and state public health authorities.

Section 6 – Variance Requests

There are no businesses or organizations currently closed under the statewide orders. However, some businesses and organizations may still find the current restrictions unduly onerous. They are welcome to submit a request for a Laramie County variance or exemption.

Before requesting a variance, businesses and organizations should develop a plan to operate effectively under the current orders. Some examples of possible approaches may include:

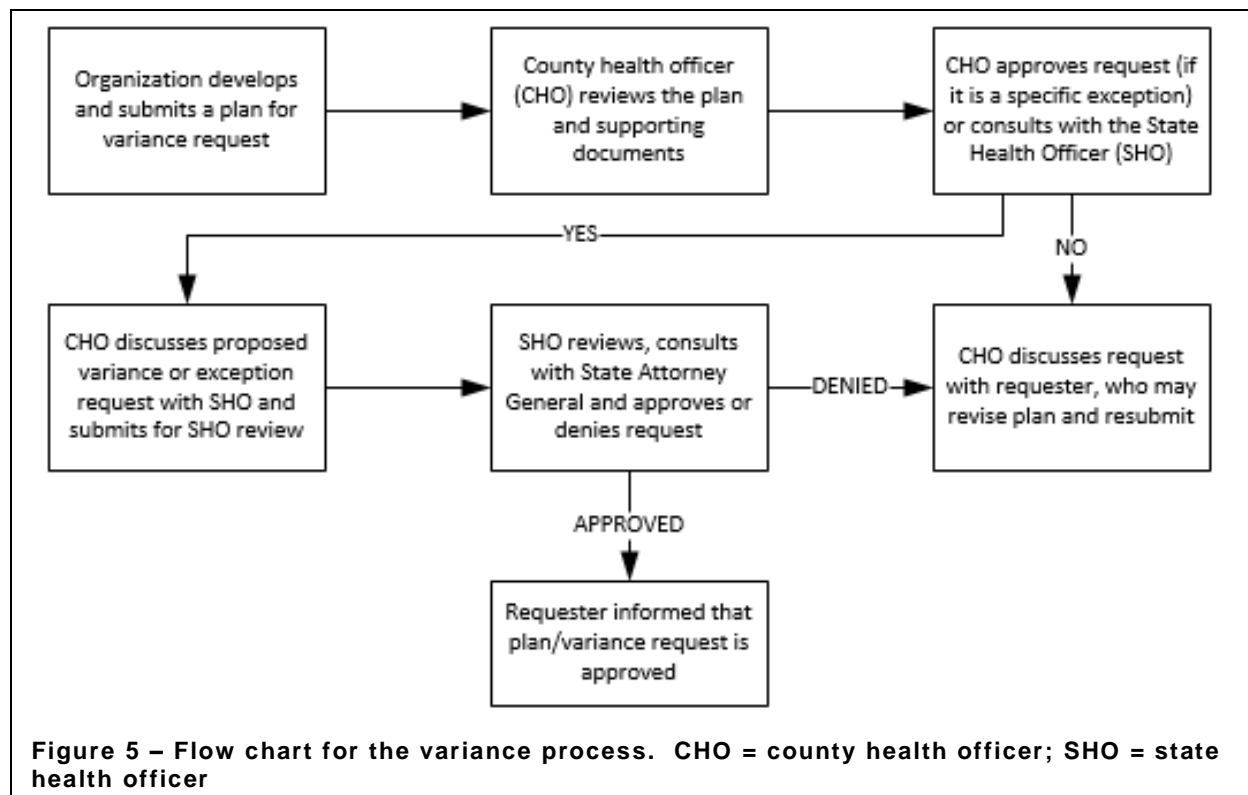
- Changes to the prior business model to make it more adaptable to the current reality
- Re-engineering key processes to minimize disease risk and maximize safety of staff and clientele, while allowing the business to operate efficiently
- Re-arranging or redesigning work areas to increase capacity and maintain safety

The Cheyenne/Laramie County Health Department is happy to review any plan, consult with the Wyoming Department of Health, and determine if a variance is needed. C/LCHD has reviewed many plans and variance requests and in most cases a variance was not needed.

If a variance is required, Figure 5 shows how the process will flow.

Exemptions and variances from current statewide orders must be approved by the Cheyenne/Laramie County Health Department (C/LCHD) and by the Wyoming Department of Health. Organizations or events that wish to have a variance or to be exempted from any provision of the statewide orders must submit a formal request to C/LCHD with a reason why the exemption or variance is justified. C/LCHD will then work with the submitting organization or business to assist with the process.

C/LCHD can review plans for events and assist the event planner to come up with a plan that complies with current state guidelines, and possibly avoid the need for a variance.



Section 7 – Definitions

- Community spread – cases appearing in patients who, after contact tracing, have no identifiable contact with someone with COVID-19.
- Contact tracing – a primary intervention by public health to mitigate the spread of disease. It consists of interviewing individuals with a contagious disease, eliciting that person's social contacts, and following up with those individuals for symptom monitoring, counseling, and referral for appropriate treatments and services. This activity is a cornerstone of public health practice.
- Masks and face coverings – These refer to any fabric covering of the lower face including the mouth and nose. Overwhelming evidence indicates effectiveness in reducing the spread of coronavirus. Masks are especially important when social distancing cannot be maintained.
- SARS-CoV-2 – a short form of “Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2”, the name of the virus that causes COVID-19. COVID-19 is the name of the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2. The term COVID-19 is an acronym for **C**orona **V**irus **D**isease 2019, for the year it first emerged.
- Social distancing – the practice of staying at least six feet away from other people while in public, except for others who share the same household. Because the virus that causes COVID-19 is transmitted through the air and on contaminated surfaces, social distancing (along with frequent cleaning and hand hygiene) is a primary method for preventing spread of the disease.
- High-risk populations at risk for severe COVID-19 disease:
 - Persons 65 years or older, regardless of baseline state of health.
 - Individuals with underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune system is compromised (such as by cancer therapy, or certain medical conditions).