

## **Rural Association of Northern California Health Officers (RANCHO) Statement in Support of Restaurant Indoor Dining with Stipulations**

August 1, 2020

Health Officers in the far Northern California region have established a work group, Rural Association of Northern County Health Officers (RANCHO) and this group has been meeting weekly for several months, as the coronavirus pandemic has unfolded. Although our meetings are often fairly informal, we did recently prepare a position paper on issues related to school opening and presented it to CDPH as a representative statement of agreed upon conclusions. We feel that we have the capacity to speak in a unified way on a number of issues, as we are all similarly situated, with relative small size, and rural location.

The current ruling by CDPH and the Governors' office has negatively impacted some counties in our region in a way that is out of proportion to the expected gain. The main current issue of greatest concern is the modification to restaurant dining. Although this is feasible in some areas in our region, particularly along the coast, the realities of high summer temperatures inland along with the challenges of creating outdoor space for many locations, particularly along state highways, make the concept of outdoor service impossible or impractical in places like Shasta or Modoc Counties, for example. We have polled our most active members and to date we have no outbreaks or clusters associated with dining, few identified cases that may be related to dining, and, for at least half our counties, there are no known cases associated with indoor dining. As with much of the rest of the state, we are seeing other sources as the main drivers of transmission. While we do understand that congregate social settings may increase case counts as our local prevalence increases, moving dining to outdoor settings does not appear to be an important public health strategy for limiting transmission at this time for many counties in our region.

That being said, we recognize some of the inherent risks in restaurant settings where there is bar service as we all have concerns about the higher risk level for transmission in bars due to several factors including alcohol use, social interactions with non-household members and lack of distancing and inability to mask while drinking.

Therefore, we are asking the State to consider allowing individual counties that are not on the County Monitoring List, upon request to the State, to be granted local flexibility in allowing indoor dining with the following restrictions in place and with local and state enforcement as needed:

- Restaurants would be limited to seated, at table dining and drinking. There would be no service while sitting or standing at the bar or sales to customers directly from the bar. Alcoholic beverages would be served only in conjunction with a seated meal within the restaurant or in its outdoor seating area.

- Restaurants would be required to follow all state guidance including specified reductions in capacity.
- Bars which are not part of restaurant operations remain closed. Bars utilizing outside vendors such as food trucks are not considered restaurants and are not allowed to operate until bars themselves are allowed to be open per state and local orders.
- Restaurants not adhering to these specifications would face possible loss of alcohol and food service licensure.
- Prior to opening indoor dining, restaurants would be required to undergo a self-certification process and subsequent onsite review.

With these parameters in place, we believe restaurants could operate safely at the present time in many of our counties. We recognize the landscape may change and this may not be feasible over the entire course of the pandemic.

As RANCHO, we support our regional partners who wish to request this flexibility from the state based upon their local epidemiology and preparedness. We all understand the concern at the state level about disease management becoming too challenging, but this is a difficult case to make in counties with few cases, rare to no hospitalizations to date and capacity to do timely contact tracing.

We ask that the State reconsider the mandate to cease indoor dining uniformly in our region and allow each county to make a case for a waiver, to be reviewed on a regular basis, as we continue to proceed through the pandemic.