



PRESS RELEASE

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Parks Access Expanded in New Health Order

Driving to inland parks allowed. Beach parking areas remain closed.

SANTA ROSA, CA— Sonoma County's health officer today further eased restrictions on outdoor recreation during the Covid-19 pandemic by issuing an order that allows park agencies to reopen some parking lots and sports facilities.

The health order means residents can drive to inland parks beginning Wednesday, May 13, 2020. The order keeps Sonoma Coast parking areas closed to prevent crowding at beaches but allows coastal residents to walk or bike to nearby parks during limited hours.

The directive by Dr. Sundari Mase is the latest easing of a full parks closure ordered in late March when record numbers of visitors traveled to parks despite calls to shelter in place. Two weeks ago, Mase softened the closure to let residents use only those parks they could walk or bike to from their homes.

"I feel comfortable reopening some parking lots and recreation areas as long as we remain diligent about hygiene, social distancing and face coverings," Mase said. "Sonoma County residents have made an extraordinary effort to slow the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Still, we must all continue to do our part and protect the progress we've made."

Mase's order requires park visitors practice social distancing and wear face coverings if they come within 6 feet of other visitors. It also encourages park users to limit their travel by continuing to walk or bike to parks near their homes.

The order allows park managers to determine on a park-by-park basis if they can open tennis courts, disc golf courses, basketball courts and other shared sports facilities in compliance with social distancing restrictions. Those rules limit use to a single individual or members of the same household. Under the previous order, park use was restricted to walking, hiking, jogging, bicycling, and fishing.

Facilities that encourage gatherings or have frequently touched surfaces remain closed. These include playgrounds, dog parks, outdoor gym equipment, picnic areas, drinking fountains and barbecues.

“We’re very pleased more residents will be able to reach their parks for essential exercise,” said Susan Gorin, chair of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors. “The loosened restrictions mean our collective effort to slow the virus’ transmission is working. But as we enjoy parks, we must be vigilant about protecting ourselves and others. Please use parks close to home, wear a face mask when social distancing isn’t possible, and follow new rules meant to keep us all safe.”

The health order applies to all parks, trails and recreation areas in Sonoma County, including those managed by private organizations.

“This public health emergency is going to continue into the foreseeable future, and the parks and services we provide are going to be increasingly critical for maintaining the physical and mental health of our community,” said Bert Whitaker, director of Sonoma County Regional Parks. “We’re pleased to be helping residents get back to their parks.”

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