

May 1, 2020

**Central District Health Recommendation for Open Streets Model to Enhance Physical Distancing
During COVID-19 Pandemic**

There continues to be growing evidence of COVID-19 transmission risk from infected persons with or without symptoms and/or before the onset of recognized symptoms. CDC guidance to keep six feet of distance between people can be difficult in practice, in part because of the sheer limitations of space in cities. Even as households limit the number of trips, people still need to venture out, and it only takes a few people on a narrow sidewalk to cause crowding. Restaurants will also begin to serve clients on patios and dining rooms. **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advise that we continue to focus on reducing transmission through physical (social) distancing of individuals in affected areas. As Idaho moves towards recovery from COVID-19, it is important to consider new and innovative ways to support our community to prevent spikes in spread, causing further delays to our progress, extending a recovery stage longer than necessary, and/or causing us to have to return to a more restrictive environment.**

Streets comprise a major part of available open space in our cities. In normal times, making sure that streets meet the needs of the greatest number of residents is the right thing for a city to do. But in the crisis brought on by COVID-19, converting specific streets to Open Streets has become an innovative and critical way for cities to ensure the health and safety of residents.

Wherever possible and when physical distancing is especially challenging, cities, highway districts and counties should **consider an Open Streets model to encourage sustainable, physically distant alternative transportation, pedestrian activity, and to support restaurants in expanding outdoor dining, allowing them to serve more patrons safely.** Open Streets would temporarily open streets to people by closing them to cars where it is challenging to maintain a safe distance on an existing sidewalk and restaurant patio.

It is undeniable that some people need cars to move through a city. For the elderly and disabled, access to transportation is more important than ever. The same is true for ambulances and first responders. For these reasons, we recommend that Open Streets remain flexible, where access can be granted to emergency services with the simple movement of a few barriers.

We support efforts to close streets where there is an existing lack of open space and to ensure there is equitable access to Open Streets across our communities to prevent the spread of COVID-19, especially as we enter a phased approach to reopening when more people will be making trips outside the home.

Sincerely,



Russell A. Duke, District Director

Sources:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Guidance for Where You Live, Work, Learn, Pray and Play](#)
- [Cities look at expanding sidewalk patios to help restaurants get back on feet](#)
- [Denver to Temporarily Close Select Roads to Thru-Traffic Amid COVID-19 Physical Distancing Rules](#)