

**EMBARGOED UNTIL COMPLETE DELIVERY:  
Ad Astra: A Plan to Reopen Kansas, speech**

Good evening, fellow Kansans.

Thank you for tuning in tonight as I outline the next steps of our coronavirus response efforts in Kansas. I also want to extend my appreciation to our broadcasting networks for providing this platform so the people of our state can hear about these plans directly, in full.

We have been through quite an ordeal these last two months. The breadth of change we've all been forced to accept in a matter of weeks has been drastic, disorienting, and utterly disruptive.

But in more ways than one, this crisis has brought out the best in Kansans.

From the Lindsborg police officers who made a special stop at the home of a woman who had been forced to spend her 96<sup>th</sup> birthday alone, in quarantine...just to bring her cupcakes.... to make sure she knew she had not been forgotten.

To the Northeast Kansas farmer who – now famously – sent an N95 mask leftover from his farming days to Governor Cuomo in New York, when his state's shortage of protective gear for healthcare workers reached a crisis point.

To the Gardner nurse, who hugged her four-year-old daughter goodbye and voluntarily flew to New York City -- straight to the front lines -- working 12-hour shifts at the peak of the pandemic...doing her part to support a health care system on the brink of collapse.

These stories of everyday Kansans – and there are so many others -- remind us what truly matters in life, and how much we need each other. It has redefined everyday heroism and humanity, and taught us to notice these things -- and to give thanks for them -- more intentionally.

On that note, I want to offer a special message of gratitude to Kansas frontline workers -- healthcare professionals, first responders, food industry and transportation workers, city and state employees, and all those Kansans who have been trudging to work every day amid this pandemic, risking their lives, with or without personal protective gear, and bringing new meaning to the word "essential."

But this has also been a period of unimaginable sorrow and loss. It has shined a glaring spotlight on the fractures of our society, the inequities of our economy, the strains on our public health infrastructure, and the dangers of our politics. It has expedited numerous crises that were in the making long before COVID-19 turned our world upside down. And it will force us to confront those vulnerabilities and pressure points before this emergency subsides.

Despite these challenges, I am immeasurably proud of how the people of Kansas met the moment. Thank you all for the sacrifices you made in recent weeks to embrace these painful changes. I know it has taken a toll... financially, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and professionally.

For some, whose jobs and health remain intact, these changes may have been a matter of adjusting to inconvenient, uncomfortable new routines and restrictions.

For others -- Kansans who have lost their jobs, Kansans who have lost family members -- or both -- to this horrible virus, life will never be the same. We grieve with you, and we will do everything in our power to support you as you put the pieces of your lives back together.

This pandemic has impacted us all in different ways, but one thing is certain. This is a “before and after” moment for our state, for our nation, and for our world. In the years ahead, when we reflect on this time, we will instinctively think about life as “before COVID” and “after COVID”.

We still have a long road ahead before we will be in a position to “reflect” on COVID-19 at all. But because of the sacrifices you’ve made in recent weeks, and the patriotism you have displayed toward your state and your country by taking this seriously and hunkering down, Kansas has been hit far less hard than other states.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment remains confident that our state is close to reaching its projected “peak” infection rate, if we haven’t surpassed it already. If that holds, Kansas will soon find itself on the downward side of the slope, and closer than ever to finally flattening that elusive curve we’ve all been talking about for the last two months.

They are now focused on “boxing the virus in.”

This approach has four cornerstones:

One: Wide-scale, rapid testing capabilities across the state, so that we can identify people who may be infected as quickly as possible, before they unknowingly infect others. Kansas has made great strides in expanding our testing abilities in the last week -- securing 18 times the test supplies we had this time last week.

Two: Protecting the capacity of our public health infrastructure so that our hospitals remain equipped to provide Kansans the treatment they will need to recover.

Three: Ensuring that Kansans who have been exposed have a safe place to quarantine, so they don’t put others at risk.

Four: Recruiting hundreds of new workers for a robust contact tracing program. This is how we help infected Kansans retrace their steps, so we can warn anyone who may have been unknowingly exposed to the virus and get those individuals tested, arrange for care if they're ill, and stop the virus from spreading. Already, KDHE is in the process of recruiting and training 400 contact tracers.

In addition to continued adherence to personal hygiene and social distancing protocols, "boxing the virus in" will be the key to re-opening the Kansas economy and preventing additional, prolonged stay home orders.

Which brings me to the purpose of my message tonight.

A few moments ago, my administration posted a new framework for transitioning from the "response" phase to the "recovery" phase of this crisis.

It is available now at [covid.ks.gov](https://covid.ks.gov)

This evening, I will walk through the details of this plan and explain what it means for you, your family, and your business.

Over the last several days, I've hosted a number of discussions with a diverse roster of leaders from hospital systems, public health officials, emergency management teams, members of my Cabinet, local chambers of commerce, trade associations, faith leaders, Labor leaders, business executives, local units of government, economists, budget analysts, and more.

I studied our present circumstances from every angle I could think of in an exhaustive attempt to incorporate as many ideas and concerns as possible.

The feedback ran the gamut, depending on industry, region, and specialty. Some believe it is too soon to even consider next steps. Others want a complete rollback of all COVID-related restrictions, immediately. A number of entities outlined their own recommendations for re-opening their sector of the economy. Everyone brought their best ideas to the table.

I have been involved in a number of policy negotiations throughout my 16 years in public service. The framework I am releasing tonight was a painstaking, intensive exercise in balance.

It's an effort to balance non-negotiable public health considerations with jaw-dropping, unsustainable economic realities.

It's an effort to balance state obligations to keep Kansas communities safe with the need for returning flexibility to local leaders.

And it's an attempt to balance the need for stability in the future with *agility* as we continue to adapt to a rapidly evolving, lethal threat.

Every component of this framework came after rigorous discussion and analysis.

Each step carries specific benefits and unavoidable risks.

None of these determinations were simple, one-sided, or easy.

Actually, the whole process reminded me a bit of a Jenga tower -- the classic game that requires players to delicately rearrange a tower of building blocks, one at a time, without damaging the tower's ability to stand upright. One misstep can cause the entire thing to come tumbling down on itself.

It's an accurate metaphor, but make no mistake...this is not a game.

This is deadly serious, with both lives and livelihoods hanging in the balance. The decisions we make in the coming weeks and months -- including the order in which we make them and the pace at which we implement them -- will determine what Kansas looks like after this pandemic has run its course.

Before I walk through the specifics of the framework, let me first clarify what it is NOT.

This framework is NOT etched in stone. Its fundamental purpose is to provide as much predictability as we can for both families and businesses. But Kansans must consider it a living document, subject to ongoing analysis and evaluation. We anticipate that we will -- at some point -- need to reconfigure our approach, as lessons are learned, as new trends emerge in the data, or as unforeseen circumstances confront us on the ground.

This framework is NOT a suggestion that local communities roll back safety measures automatically, simply because it is technically permissible to do so. The state is making a concerted effort to return local control and flexibility to this process, but the state framework should be considered the floor for safeguards -- not the ceiling. Local communities are both allowed and strongly encouraged to take additional steps as they deem appropriate.

Finally, and most importantly, this framework is NOT a return to the life we knew just a few short months ago. Until a vaccine for COVID-19 is developed, we must continue to adhere to the fundamental mitigation practices that have kept us alive up to this point.

That means social distancing must continue. Good hygiene and frequent handwashing will remain essential. Isolation and quarantine orders issued by health officers must be followed. If your job enables you to continue working remotely, we encourage you to pursue that option.

You should consider wearing cloth masks when you leave your home. Clorox, Lysol, and hand sanitizer should remain on your list of household essentials, but treat them like you do all dangerous chemicals -- keep them out of reach of your young children.

So with those caveats, here are the basics of what will come next:

Kansas will approach this process slowly, gradually and cautiously.

The Framework is divided into three phases. During each phase, specific guidance is outlined for individuals, for employers, for educational facilities, activities, and venues. We have taken into consideration guidance released by the federal government, stakeholder groups, and public health experts.

Mass gathering limitations will remain in effect at each phase, but we will scale back the restrictions at each point.

The process for returning to work safely will differ for each business, and will not happen all at the same time. Industry-specific guidance has been included on the state website, [covid.ks.gov](https://www.covid.ks.gov), and of course, all of this is subject to local approval.

Additionally, each phase of this process will remain in effect for a minimum of 14 days.

Phase one will begin on Monday, May 4th, at which point I intend to lift the statewide Stay Home order.

Mass gatherings will remain limited to 10 or fewer people.

There will be some limitations on specific types of establishments -- which I will speak to in a moment. But by and large, if localities determine that the time is right, businesses that can maintain at least 6 feet of distance between consumers and adhere to industry-specific guidelines can begin to transition back to work.

The state will NOT issue blanket limitations on total occupancy at this time. However, we will require that businesses abide by mass gathering limitations in areas of their establishments where physical distancing is difficult. This includes areas like entrances, lobbies, or break rooms.

Unfortunately, certain types of establishments -- simply by the nature of the services they provide -- require unavoidable human contact that cannot be responsibly mitigated or distanced at the present time, especially with our present limitations on Personal Protective Equipment. Therefore, the following establishments will NOT be included in the first phase of re-opening:

- Bars and night clubs, excluding curbside and carryout services
- Non-tribal Casinos
- Theaters, museums, and other indoor leisure spaces
- Fitness centers and gyms

- Nail salons, barber shops, hair salons, tanning salons, tattoo parlors and other personal service businesses where close contact cannot be avoided.

Similarly, certain activities and venues will also remain “on pause,” including:

- Community centers
- Outdoor and indoor entertainment venues with capacity of 2,000 or more
- Fairs, festivals, carnivals, parades, and unfortunately graduations
- Swimming pools (other than backyard pools)
- Organized sports, sporting facilities, and tournaments
- Summer camps

I’ll say again: these are the baseline standards. This pandemic has impacted our communities with varying levels of severity. All communities may enact additional limitations as needed.

Finally, during phase one, I also encourage Kansans to begin seeking or rescheduling non-emergent, non-COVID related medical care. Our hospitals have done a phenomenal job of proactively building their surge capacity over the last two months, and they are ready now to begin seeing non-COVID-related patients.

My administration will monitor overall progress and health metrics daily. Assuming data trends continue to move in the right direction, I will issue an executive order to begin Phase Two no sooner than May 18th, 2020.

During Phase Two, mass gatherings will be allowed for up to 30 individuals.

The establishments specifically prohibited in stage one -- places like fitness centers and barber shops -- will be allowed to open, as long as they comply with the other baseline limitations. They should follow industry-specific guidelines that have been posted on the website at [covid.ks.gov](https://covid.ks.gov).

Non-tribal casinos will also be allowed to open, but only if they comply with uniform guidelines approved by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Bars and night clubs will be allowed to open at 50% of total occupancy and can otherwise continue operating curbside and carryout services.

Certain activities and venues will remain prohibited, including:

- Outdoor and indoor entertainment venues with capacity of 2,000 or more
- Fairs, festivals, carnivals, parades, and graduations
- Public and private summer camps

We will again evaluate our progress after 14 days, no sooner than June 1, 2020. If all goes well, this will propel us into phase three.

At this point, mass gathering limitations will be expanded to 90 individuals, and all business, activity, and venue prohibitions will be lifted as long as they comply with baseline limitations outlined at the start of this process.

Ideally, should all trends continue downward, Phase 3 will culminate in a “phase out” of most state restrictions, no sooner than June 15, 2020.

This framework does NOT answer all the questions I know still weigh heavily on your minds.

We don't yet know what school will look like in August. Or if college dorms will open to students for the fall semester. It's unclear what steps we need to take to protect our elections in August and November.

I'm sure we'd all enjoy taking in a baseball game this summer, or schedule that family vacation for a much-needed rest...outside the house.

I've heard heartbreaking stories about engaged couples left in limbo, unsure of whether they can proceed with their wedding plans. And I know that the thousands of hardworking Kansans who so suddenly found themselves without work are desperate for the certainty they need to begin their job searches.

Sadly, even if we do everything perfectly for the next few months, everything remains subject to the whims of this unwieldy virus.

There is still so much we do not know about COVID-19. Just a couple of days ago, the CDC doubled the list of symptoms. Researchers also estimate that anywhere between 25 and 50 percent of cases are asymptomatic -- meaning people may have no idea they are carriers and are at high risk for infecting others.

And although coronavirus is a respiratory pathogen, largely attacking our lungs, a growing body of evidence also suggests potential links to stroke and cardiac arrest. We presume those who have been infected and recovered from the disease develop some type of immunity, but even that remains uncertain.

And with summer months approaching, we anxiously await an opportunity to learn how seasonality will impact the coronavirus.

Put another way: even if Kansans do everything perfectly for the next couple of months, new outbreaks are almost inevitable until a vaccine is developed, manufactured, and made widely available.

But tonight's framework is a starting point for this long, slow transition back to some semblance of the lives we remember from just a few short months ago.

I don't know if life will truly ever go back to "normal."

After all we've been through, we will probably think about everything a little differently in the future. From shaking hands, to going to the grocery store, to how we take care of our own personal health...and how we take care of each other.

But I do know this: we are going to make it through the daunting days ahead, no matter what lies in store.

Because as I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, hard times have a way of bringing out the best in Kansas.

When the Lindsborg police officers explained why they felt it was important to pay a visit to a 96-year-old woman in isolation on her birthday, they said: "We know this is tough... we want to connect with people who may be forgotten."

When the northeast Kansas farmer suddenly became a national media sensation after donating his N95 mask to a doctor or nurse in New York, he said:

"I was just looking to help someone out."

And when the nurse from Gardner talked about why she chose to volunteer on the front lines of this pandemic, she said Kansans "Love big. We love very big."

I couldn't have said it better myself.

This is the spirit of generosity and grace that defines the people of this state. It's what makes me so proud to be your governor. And this is the courage and resilience that will propel Kansas to the stars, through difficulty, once again.

Ad Astra per Aspera... and to all the people of Kansas, God Bless you and our Great State of Kansas.