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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Merced County Health Officer Places Temporary Hold on COVID-19 “Social Distancing and Safety Plan” Requirements for Businesses**

In response to feedback from the local business and agricultural community, the Health Officer is temporarily suspending Section 5 of the most recent Public Health Order from April 24, 2020 regarding essential businesses and additional COVID-19 precautionary measures until further clarification can be developed.

Section 5, which was scheduled to become effective Friday, May 1, required businesses to develop a “Social Distancing and Safety Plan.” This Plan included several elements to help slow the spread of COVID-19, including limited capacity (five people per 1,000 square feet), door monitoring to ensure proper numbers, cloth face masks for employees and patrons, telecommuting options, employee screening, and several others.

The rest of the Health Order remains in effect. While Section 5 is suspended, Merced County will reevaluate that portion of the Order and its requirements to better allow local businesses to improve their COVID-19 safety protocols without overburdening their essential operations. Additional guidance documents will also be developed and provided to businesses as they look to follow the updated Health Order.

Some businesses have already been able to establish the safety protocols detailed in the Health Order, and their commitment to customer and employee safety is greatly appreciated. However, each business within our community is unique in terms of how it serves the public, and those that need additional time and guidance to improve their COVID-19 safety response protocols will be afforded that opportunity.

Merced County remains committed to protecting public health while concurrently working with businesses to assist them during this difficult time.

County officials are already evaluating preliminary options for reopening parts of the economy without putting our community at risk for a spike in cases. As part of the most recent Health Order, the definition of essential services was expanded to include drive-up services for faith-based organizations, animal care facilities, drive-through automatic car washes, and pool maintenance.

Local entities (such as Merced County) must operate within the confines of the Governor’s Executive Order and cannot supersede its directives. Any business operating within a city that has taken stricter measures than the County or State directives must adhere to the stricter measures. As the Governor opens various parts of the economy, Merced County Public Health will continue to issue guidance documents to ensure our business community can reopen in a timely manner.

Any future revisions to the Health Order will continue to be shared with the public and our business community moving forward. For the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19 in Merced County, please visit [www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus](http://www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus).

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