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PRESS RELEASE

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Rec Centers prep to reopen fitness centers when state benchmarks/approvals are met

Although Maricopa County has not reached the new benchmarks established by the state to lift Gov. Doug Ducey's closure of gyms and fitness centers, the Rec Centers of Sun City West is preparing for that eventuality.

Ducey's order originally closed gyms through July 27. However, that was extended and was set to be "reviewed for repeal or revision every two weeks." This week, the Arizona Department of Health Services released new benchmarks for gyms, fitness centers and theaters to reopen. Those benchmarks require cases, percent positivity in tests, and COVID-like illnesses reported to hospitals to be below their current levels before affected businesses can reopen.

Once the benchmarks are reached, the Rec Centers will move to reopen its facilities as soon as possible, but there is a formal process to complete with the Arizona Department of Health Services before that can happen.

"We would like to remind our members that this is not as simple as unlocking the doors," said General Manager Bill Schwind. "The executive order requires us to submit a formal response to the Arizona Department of Health Services, attesting to the fact we meet the current ADHS COVID-19 guidelines for business operations. Once that is accepted, we will reopen."

Additional details about the benchmarks can be found on the ADHS website under its Business Dashboard. They include two levels; in the first, the centers may reopen at 25 percent capacity; in the second, the centers may reopen at 50 percent capacity. The Rec Centers will likely open at even lower capacities due to physical distancing requirements and the need to eliminate congregation points.

In summary, the state's benchmarks include the following (for two consecutive weeks in Maricopa County):

- Cases per 100,000 must be below 100 per 100,000 population
- Percent positivity must be below 10 percent
- Hospital visits for COVID-like illnesses must be below 10 percent

Plans call for the fitness centers at R.H. Johnson and Palm Ridge recreation centers to open once the benchmarks are met; once the Association's "attestation" is accepted; and as soon as personnel and adequate cleaning supplies are in place. That may require the centers to open on different dates. Logistics are still being worked out. The reopening would not include the table tennis and racquetball at R.H. Johnson in the initial reopening. Kuentz and Beardsley will remain closed. (Clubs at Kuentz and Beardsley that were opened earlier remain open.)

"Once the benchmarks are met, we would only open two fitness centers for the foreseeable future," said Schwind. "There are two reasons for this. First, the Kuentz renovation and expansion is well under way, leaving much of the facility inaccessible at various times; plus we don't want to mix residents with construction equipment. Secondly, we are having to shift some of our staff from Beardsley and Kuentz to the other two facilities to meet the ADHS requirements for reopening."

Shifting of personnel may mean that only one center opens initially. Additional staff are needed to provide temperature checks, continuous sanitation practices, and ensure members are wearing masks, as required by ADHS. "As we've mentioned before, you don't have to like the masks, but you do have to wear them," said Schwind. "Failure to comply can result in ADHS shutting us down and member privileges being revoked. Sadly, we've already had to revoke privileges for a few members after they failed to heed multiple warnings and continued to refuse the health-related county mandate."

All members entering the fitness center/pool lobbies will be screened with contactless thermometers, regardless of whether they are entering a gym, pool or indoor walking track.

Once reopened, the fitness centers will have a sign-up sheet for one-hour reservations. Between each one-hour block, a half hour is reserved for staff to sanitize the entire gym and equipment. Additional cleaning will occur on the equipment between users, per ADHS. Members must sign up in person; guests are not allowed. No more than 10 individuals and up to two residents who are utilizing personal training services will be allowed in the gyms at one time.

The last phase of the Rec Centers reopening plan involves the social clubs and those such as dancing, exercise and others that require physical interaction. Those are still closed until further guidance from the CDC and ADHS allows for them to resume operations. Some clubs that opened earlier have announced they are voluntarily closing. Check suncitywest.com/covid19 for the latest on club openings.

Watch for all the latest at suncitywest.com/covid19 and sign up for the enews at suncitywest.com/enews.