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Press Release

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RCSCW fitness centers, indoor pools close Monday

The Recreation Centers of Sun City West will close its four fitness centers, including the gyms and indoor pools, starting Monday, Dec. 21, and continuing through at least Jan. 3 to slow the spread of COVID-19.

The move comes as the three metrics used by the Arizona Department of Health Services on its Business Covid Dashboard have all entered into the red, meaning they are considered “substantial.”

The metrics must be in the red for two consecutive weeks before the entire dashboard moves into the substantial range. As of today, Maricopa County is still listed as moderate because there has only been one week with all three metrics in the red. However, the latest numbers are for Nov. 29 since there is a two-week lag time to allow for late reporting on case information.

“Although we are seeing only one week of substantial range in the county as of yet, we know next week’s numbers will be worse than this week’s due to the Thanksgiving surge, and all of the numbers lag by two weeks. So we have no doubt the entire county officially will be in substantial range next Thursday when new numbers are posted,” said General Manager Bill Schwind.

When the dashboard was first announced, state officials indicated a move into the red for two weeks would trigger closures of gyms and fitness centers. Since then, however, Gov. Doug Ducey has stepped back some of those comments, indicating he might not enact new closures.

The Rec Centers is closing the fitness centers as part of its ongoing efforts to ensure the safety of residents and employees most of who fall into the high-risk category for COVID-19 due to our demographics. More than 50 employees have been quarantined since the start of the pandemic due to testing positive for COVID, or being exposed to someone who has tested positive. At least 11 clubs have seen members with positive cases.

“The Rec Centers has been proactive from the beginning of this pandemic, and we will continue to do what we feel is necessary to keep our residents and employees safe,” said General Manager Bill Schwind. “Whether the Governor enacts closures or not, we signed an attestation with the Arizona Department of Health Services when we were first able to reopen our fitness centers, and we will abide by that attestation. That means we are closing the gyms now that the county is in the red on all three metrics.”

Other departments within the Association remain as is, but their status could change at any time. Residents should check suncitywest.com/COVID19 for the latest. This includes chartered clubs, who are seeing a spike in cases within their facilities; many of these have involved hospitalizations, and a few have been fatal cases. Those club members who may have been exposed are notified as soon as cases are reported, and the facilities are cleaned above and beyond the usual cleaning schedule to account for these cases.

As of now, the departments open/closed schedule is as follows:

Fitness Centers (including indoor swimming pools and spas, racquetball, table tennis, massage, personal training and group fitness): Closed through Jan. 3. The closure will be extended if needed. Outdoor facilities (tennis, pickleball, lawn bowls, walking tracks, etc.) will remain open; bring your own equipment.

Golf & Sports Pavilion: Open with existing precautions in place.

Clubs: Most open with the exception of social clubs and those that can't physically distance. Some clubs have chosen to close on their own accord due to COVID cases (check suncitywest.com/COVID19 for the latest). Clubs are strongly encouraged to enact voluntary closures at this time; closures may be mandated in the future. All indoor fitness/dance activities in Palm Ridge Summit A and B are closed.

Member Services: By appointment only. Call 623-544-6100.

Administrative/Governing Board Offices: By appointment only. Call 623-544-6000.

Library: Curbside pickup for materials; Data Resource by appointment only. Call 623-544-6130 but expect wait times on the phone as we are extremely busy.

Village Store: Open with existing precautions in place.

The Association's Pandemic Task Force is enacting the new closures because we have been and will continue to follow the guidance of state and national health officials who are encouraging all Arizona residents to "mask up and shrink your circles." The latest sobering warning came from Dr. Marjorie Bessel, chief clinical officer for Banner Health, which operates both Del E. Webb and Boswell Hospitals in the Sun Cities.

Bessel on Friday morning reported some of its facilities are now using refrigerated trucks for body storage at one facility, with another on standby. She said Banner was speaking up as the White House Coronavirus Task Force has stated Arizona mitigation efforts must increase as the state is back in a period of uncontrolled spread.

Bessel said the state has seen the highest number of hospitalized COVID patients since the pandemic began, exceeding the summer surge. COVID cases account for 49 percent of all hospitalizations in Arizona. "Think about that for a minute," Bessel said. "Nearly half of patients being cared for in our Arizona hospitals are there for a disease that didn't even exist last year."

Bessel advised that those in ICU for COVID require a higher level of care than a typical ICU patient due to the nature of the disease; on average, COVID patients in the ICU spend two weeks on a ventilator. "For those who are fortunate enough to leave the hospital, they have a slow road as full recovery can take months."

COVID hospitalizations increased 93 percent in November. They increased again by that same number in the first 15 days of December. Exponential growth doubling time was four weeks in November; it was two weeks in December. "There is concern this will go into one week and then four days over the Christmas holidays," she said.

ICU occupancy is 150 percent of a peak year at this time. While all ICU beds are not full, that's because the hospitals have increased their ICU capacity by doubling up beds in rooms and adding ICU beds to new areas, she stated. Arizona has not enacted its crisis care triage procedures, which determines who gets care, but that would go into effect if ICU staffing and supplies fall short.

Details on Dr. Bessel's presentation are expected to be released later today at Bannerhealth.com/newsroom.

For the latest closure information at the Rec Centers, visit suncitywest.com/COVID19, and sign up for the weekly enews at suncitywest.com/enews.