



# RYE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

555 Washington Road Rye, New Hampshire 03870



Kevin Walsh  
Emergency Management Director /  
Police Chief  
(603) 964-5522

Mark Cotreau  
Assistant Emergency  
Management Director

To: Rye Board of Selectmen  
From: Chief Kevin Walsh / Rye Emergency Management Director  
Date: March 18, 2020  
Re: Closing Town Property to Public

*KW*

Amid growing concerns about coronavirus community transmission, the Rye Emergency Management Director and Deputy Emergency Management Director are urging the public to observe the CDC recommendations for preventing the transmission of the virus. Residents should observe this guideline when deciding whether or not to attend public meetings or visiting public places.

As temperatures continue to climb and the days grow sunnier, people will be heading to coastal communities around the United States to meet and congregate. This is especially prevalent in Rye because grade schools, colleges, and businesses have closed and people are going out of their homes for activities that have been deemed "safe," outside walks, hikes, etc.

Rye has a day trip population that can increase on a warm weather day to thousands of people. With Seacoast Science Center being closed and local businesses closing, people will still come to Rye beaches. The concern is what was reported March 17, 2020 by State of New Hampshire Homeland Security. All the new cases have no identified risk factors, indicating New Hampshire is experiencing community-based transmission of COVID-19. In total, 26 COVID-19 have been identified in the State of New Hampshire as of March 17, 2020.

Assistant Emergency Management Director Mark Cotreau and I are asking the Board of Selectmen to support the closing of town property, to include the town beaches. I have been collaborating with Chief Richard Sawyer of the Town of Hampton, NH. Chief Sawyer is the Emergency Management Director for the Town of Hampton, NH. Chief Sawyer and I have had conversations with New Hampshire Parks Director Phil Bryce about State Parks closing all New Hampshire State Parks at all New Hampshire beaches. Chief Sawyer and I have concerns of large crowds of people who will come visit Rye and Hampton beaches and would be in close proximity of each other. Public beaches could quickly become a "hot spot" with larger crowds venturing out of their homes to one of the few places believed to be "safe," but can quickly evolve to a crowded area. Public beaches can easily become a place that violates the recommended social distancing of 6 feet.

When the crowds start to arrive at the beaches, it will be impossible for State Parks and town employees (police) to manage and inform of the social distancing. Rye has the longest coastline in the State of New Hampshire and draws not only New Hampshire natives, but also individuals from the two states surrounding New Hampshire, Maine and Massachusetts. Tasking 10 full-time police officers with removing crowds from the beach as the days get warmer will most definitely take away from addressing the quality of life complaints. The word "impossible" comes to mind with this pandemic.

In order for this proactive, preventive measure to be successful, I would like to reach out to New Hampshire State Parks, New Hampshire Port Authority, Seacoast Science Center, Rye Recreation, and the Rye School Board to post that the properties are closed to the public to prevent community spread of COVID-19. Until the federal government and State of New Hampshire can get enough testing to evaluate how many people are actually infected with COVID-19, I feel it is our responsibility to prevent the spreading.

If State Parks close public rest rooms, gates to parking areas, and Jenness Beach is barricaded off, vehicles will be forced to park on the street. As officers patrol, parking tickets will be issued. The message will convey that the parks and beaches are closed. I want to avoid comparing COVID-19 to the Boston bomb investigation. Neighborhoods and businesses were closed down to keep the public safe. This will help jump start the voluntary compliance. This will take time. If we start now, the message will get out to public to please keep activities in small numbers and close to home.

I want to share this letter with the other service providers listed below. I have also listed the locations I am recommending be closed.

School (play grounds)

Rye Recreation (fields, play grounds)

Town Forrest (due to the property being between recreation and Parsons Field property)

Parsons Field

Town beaches

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I would like to ask the New Hampshire State Parks to close state beaches and I would like to ask Port Authority to close Rye Harbor to the public, and remain open only for essential private and Port Authority personnel and that no members of the public use water crafts for recreational use.

I realize the public relations and liability I am putting the Town of Rye, State of New Hampshire, New Hampshire Port Authority in, however, I feel strongly that if all are not proactive in prevention, and when the testing catches up with the real number of people infected and business were to continue as usual in the Town of Rye at our public locations (hosting everyone from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine), the question will be, "did we all do what we could to avoid what is going on around the world?" In Italy, the health care providers cannot keep up with the demand of the number of people that currently have COVID-19 and they are unable to tend to the most vulnerable people who need direct medical attention. We do not want to end up like Italy.

On 03/18/2020 Doctor Gail Snow, Town of Rye Health Officer has stated she agrees with the closing of areas where people can gather in large numbers. She agrees this would be proactive in prevention of spreading the infection.

On 03/18/2020 Director Phil Bryce of New Hampshire State Parks responded to me by e-mail. The general stance with the Governor is he would like our parks to be available for public use even while we address this crisis. However, we share the concern about larger than normal crowds and we are working on strategies. All of this is changing and developing every hour, there are new developments. Director Phil Bryce ended the e-mail suggesting we speak tomorrow, Thursday, March 19, 2020.

I am requesting permission sooner rather than later. The longer that Rye waits to make these decisions, the more challenging it will be to try and close areas to the public and prevent large gathering spaces in Rye. With the governor closing private businesses, the numbers of people coming to Rye will increase. The question is, how quickly.

I do understand unless everyone declares these areas closed at the same time the plan of this magnitude will not work. I appreciate everyone taking the time to review this. I am open for more ideas and you may have.

Thank You,

Cc: Rye Fire Chief

Rye Department of Public Works

Rye Recreation

SAU Superintendent Salvador Petrallia

Rye School Board

New Hampshire Port Authority Director Geno Marconi

New Hampshire State Parks Director Phil Bryce

Chief Richard Sawyer, Town of Hampton Police

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