

LOCAL

Planned ReOpen Bucks picnic feels like just a day at the park

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Dozens of children were already scaling playground equipment of Doylestown Township's Central Park when Josh Hogan laid out food under the pavilion Sunday afternoon.

While the picnic organized by ReOpen Bucks County PA was at heart a protest of social distancing and business closures, Hogan said recent changes to the state's reopening plans made the event feel more like a normal day at the park for many of its members.

Hogan is one of several administrators of group who had previously organized a protest in Doylestown Borough calling on county officials to lift stay-at-home orders and business closures.

The picnic was originated from a post on the group's private community page to take place last weekend, but the group had already planned a similar demonstration at Menlo Park in Perkasie that weekend and rescheduled.

Gov. Tom Wolf made several changes to the state's three-phased reopening plans since last week that Hogan said has eased the frustrations of many in the area group.

On May 22, Wolf announced that all counties will be moved out of the red phase and into the yellow phase by June 5, lifting stay-at-home orders and some business restrictions for counties in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Bucks County health and safety officials also recently offered guidance to municipalities who wanted to reopen parks and playgrounds, amenities most towns in the county appear ready to reopen.

Wolf then added more changes to the state's plan this past week allowing outdoor dining and expanding allowable retail businesses to open under the yellow phase.

“It’s definitely a different tone now because even the business owners who aren’t open yet, they all have their plans and they coordinating,” Hogan said Sunday.

Businesses like salons or massage parlors are still unable to open under the “yellow phase” of the state’s plan because their work requires employees and customers to be in close contact, state Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine has said previously.

Hogan added the Doylestown Township Police Department had already taken down the caution tape at the playground next to the park pavilion for the group’s gathering.

None of the picnic attendees appeared to be wearing masks or attempting to distance themselves from others for the duration of the picnic between 3 and 5 p.m.

Victoria and Asher Greb, of North Wales, said they felt confident in the safety of their three boys — a 9-month-old, a 2-year-old and a 9-year-old — given the lack of community spread reported by county officials.

“At this point I’m not really concerned about COVID... I just want to move on,” Victoria Greb said, her infant son harnessed across her chest.

Bucks County Health Department Director Dr. David Damsker has reported fewer and fewer new coronavirus cases outside of nursing homes and health care workers in recent weeks.

A case of community spread generally indicates the county’s health officials cannot trace the source of a new infection to another person confirmed to have the virus.

Bucks County reported 40 new cases on May 29, with only three of those cases contributed to “pure community spread” after interviewing all but nine of the new patients as of Friday, a county news release states.

In a virtual town hall Monday, Bucks County Commissioner Robert Harvie said a “small spike” in coronavirus cases could be expected, as more people get tested.

“We should be able to handle small spikes,” he said. “Could we go back to red? We’d have to see a really dramatic increase in cases to revert us back to red. I think that’s unlikely to happen.”

State figures also were on the decline. On Monday, the Department of Health reported just 365 new positive cases, bringing the statewide total to more than 72,000.

Asher Greb added the recent national protest and riots that have followed the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minnesota have likely turned a lot of focus away from the pandemic.

Diana and Jason Donnelly, of Yardley, said they have been looking for an opportunity to get their sons JJ, 7, and Joey, 4, out to socialize with other children whenever possible.

Like the Grebs, Yardley parents Diana Donnelly said she was comfortable letting her sons play outdoors with little community spread of the virus.

At this stage of the pandemic in Bucks County, the Donnellys said its more a matter of personal responsibility than isolation to prevent becoming sick.

“If you’re sick, stay home ... use common sense,” Diana Donnelly added.