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PORT ALLEN, LOUISIANA

## Welcome to Phase 3

### What that means for local schools, businesses and bars

STAFF REPORT  
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#### Hybrid students will return to Monday - Friday schedule

Louisiana moved into Phase 3 of reopening on Friday, but the transition will take a bit longer for local schools. Under Phase 3, West Baton Rouge Schools will remove its alternating schedule for middle and high school and welcome all students on campus five days a week.

Caneview, Port Allen Middle and Port Allen High schools will begin having all students on campus every day Monday, Sept. 21. Brusly Middle and High School will follow suit on Monday, Sept. 28.

Superintendent Wes Watts said more adjustments are required to accommodate class sizes at Brusly Middle and High.

As of Monday, six students and eight teachers are quarantined due to potential exposure or illness, Watts said. That's about .3% of the district's population of roughly 4,700 students and teachers.



Photo by Breanna Smith

Jerry and Jill Saia, owners of Jack's Place, a historic bar in downtown Port Allen, hoped to reopen under Phase 3 but will continue to wait. Under the executive order Gov. John Bel Edwards signed Friday, Sept. 11, only parishes with a positivity rate of 5 percent or lower for two consecutive weeks may opt-in to open bars for on-premises consumption.

Watts said a majority of the potential exposures and coronavirus cases were contracted outside of school. He expects more coronavirus cases in the coming weeks as students return to campus five days a week.

All Phase 2 protocols, including masks, increased handwashing and social distancing, will remain in place in Phase 3. Watts said students have adjusted to wearing masks regularly and the schools are continuing to encourage social distancing.

All virtual academy students will continue with virtual learning through at

least the end of the semester.

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#### Phase 3 puts damper on reopening plans for lounges

Jill Saia had hopes last week that she and her husband Jerry would soon see some friends they had not seen in a while.

It did not happen.

The long-awaited move into Phase 3 led them to believe that looser restrictions would allow them to reopen Jack's Place.

Under the executive order Gov. John Bel Edwards signed Friday, Sept. 11, the reopen policy for on-premises consumption in Louisiana in Phase 3 is based on the parish's percent positivity of coronavirus cases for a two-week period.

Only parishes with a positivity rate of 5 percent or lower for two consecutive weeks may opt-in to open bars for on-premises consumption, under restrictions in the Governor's order.

This two-week percent positivity will be updated every two weeks by the Louisiana Department of Health, with the next update scheduled for Sept. 16.

When reopened, bars will open at 25 percent capacity, up to 50 people, indoors for customers seated for tableside service. They may have no more than 50 customers outdoors, socially distanced and seated for

tableside service.

Case positivity higher than 5 percent in West Baton Rouge keeps the doors of Jack's Place and other lounges closed at least for two weeks.

For Jack's, Phase 3 continues a shutdown that began Mar. 16. It opened briefly during the summer but shut down again when bars were ordered closed after a spike in COVID, which consisted largely of congregate gathering at bars.

The Saia's hope to reopen. They redid the floors, changed the doors and made other improvements through the money they secured from an SBA loan.

They have also applied for whatever additional assistance they qualified for. "In the meantime, we're still paying bills - electricity, cable and the security system," Jill Saia said.

As owners of the entire building, they are remodeling the other parcels and hope to rent out the spot once occupied by a payday

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## New research shows disproportionate rate of coronavirus deaths in polluted areas

*The type of pollution emitted by many chemical plants in Louisiana's industrial corridor is correlated with increased coronavirus deaths, according to new peer-reviewed research from SUNY and ProPublica.*

BY LYLIA YOUNES, PRO-PUBLICA AND SARA SNEATH

This story was originally published by ProPublica.

The industrial plants in the riverside Louisiana city of Port Allen have worried Diana LeBlanc since her children were young. In 1978, an explosion at the nearby Placid oil refinery forced her family to evacuate. "We had to leave in the middle of the night with two babies," said LeBlanc, now 70. "I always had to be on the alert."

LeBlanc worried an industrial accident would endanger her

family. But she now thinks the threat was more insidious.

LeBlanc, who has asthma, believes the symptoms she experienced while sick with the coronavirus were made worse by decades of breathing in toxic air pollution.

"That is the one time in my life I thought, I'm not going to survive this," she said. "I'm going to become a statistic. I was that sick."

New research, conducted in part by ProPublica, shows she could well be right.

COVID-19 can be made more serious — and, in some cases, more deadly — by a specific type of industrial emission called hazardous air pollutants, or HAPs, according to new peer-reviewed research by ProPublica and researchers at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and

Forestry. The study, published Friday in the journal Environmental Research Letters, found this association in both rural counties in Louisiana and highly populated communities in New York.

The analysis examined air pollution and coronavirus deaths in the roughly 3,100 U.S. counties and found a close correlation between levels of hazardous pollutants and the per-capita death rate from COVID-19.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines HAPs as chemicals known or suspected to cause cancer and other serious health problems.

Under the Clean Air Act, industrial facilities emitting these pollutants are

subject to regulations.

Hazardous air pollution may help explain the disproportionate number of COVID-19 deaths in communities like West Baton Rouge Parish, home to Port Allen. With 39 deaths as of Sept. 7, the parish's per-capita death rate from COVID-19 ranked it among the top 3% of all U.S. counties with at least 30 deaths. Several of its neighbors in Louisiana's industrial corridor also rank near the top of the list.

#### COVID-19 and Air Pollution Exposure

The coronavirus pandemic, which has claimed over 189,000 lives across the country, including more than 4,900 in Louisiana,

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## West Baton Rouge residents, businesses donate 600 meals to Anacoco community



Photo courtesy of Casey Johnson  
Casey Johnson (left) and Anatole Vincent at the Anacoco High School distribution site.

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Casey Johnson, Head Baseball Coach of Anacoco High School, posted a request for ham and bread on Facebook to provide for people in his community, many of whom were without power for nearly two weeks following Hurricane Laura. His friends in West Baton Rouge vowed to do him one even better and immediately began gathering supplies and planning a trip.

WBR Parks and Recreation Director Anatole Vincent, Jimmy Dunn, Burke Fiscus and Brusly High School Head Baseball Coach Mike Forbes gathered donations from local businesses and citizens then hit the road.

The four began the three-hour drive to Anacoco at 4 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 5 to set up shop at Anacoco High

School to serve more than 600 jambalaya plates to anyone in need.

As people arrived at the drive-thru, they were greeted by students and other volunteers who passed out hot meals, bags of groceries, bottled water and ice.

Vincent said none of it would have been possible without the generous support of West Baton Rouge businesses. Andre's Crackling stand, Benoit's Country Meat Block, Bergeron's Cajun Meats, Bennedettos and Hubbens Supermarket, Couyons BBQ and West Baton Rouge residents donated funds and goods for the distribution site. Donations also came in from Mud Bugs and Market Basket in neighboring Leesville.

"It was nice to see our community step up and help another community that's a lot like ours," Vincent said.



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