

Governor Abbott Issues Executive Order, Implements Statewide Essential Services And Activities Protocols

March 31, 2020 | Austin, Texas | Press Release

Governor Greg Abbott today issued an Executive Order implementing Essential Services and Activities Protocols for the entire state of Texas. The protocols direct all Texans to minimize non-essential gatherings and in-person contact with people who are not in the same household. The Governor's Executive Order renews and amends his previous order enforcing federal social distancing guidelines for COVID-19, including closing schools and instructing Texans to avoid eating or drinking at bars and restaurants. The protocols allow exceptions for essential activities and services based on the Department of Homeland Security's guidelines on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce. Examples of these essential services include healthcare, grocery stores, banking and financial services, utilities, child care for essential service employees, and government services.

Today's Executive Order follows the decision by President Trump and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to enhance social distancing guidelines and extend the deadline for these guidelines to April 30th.

Governor Abbott was joined for the announcement by Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, House Speaker Dennis Bonnen, Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Commissioner John Hellerstedt, MD, Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) Chief Nim Kidd, and Texas Education Agency (TEA) Commissioner Mike Morath.

"Social distancing is our best tool in the fight against COVID-19, and the actions we have taken thus far have proven to be effective in limiting the spread of this virus," said Governor Abbott. "Now it is time to redouble our efforts to reduce further exposure as much as possible and flatten the curve. As with all the actions the state is taking, the Essential Services and Activities Protocols is informed by the expertise and guidance of the CDC as well as state and local health officials. I urge my fellow Texans to heed these heightened social distancing directives to protect their health and the health of those around them. By following these guidelines, we will limit the spread of COVID-19 and overcome this challenge together."

The Executive Order renews and expands the Governor's previous directive to minimize social gatherings and minimize contact with people who are not in the same household. It also renews the Governor's directive to avoid eating or drinking at bars, restaurants, and food courts, and visiting gyms or massage establishments, and it expands the order to include tattoo studios, piercing studios, and cosmetology salons.

In accordance with federal guidelines, people are still prohibited from visiting nursing home, state supported living centers, assisted living facilities, or long-term care facilities unless to provide critical assistance. Additionally, schools will remain temporarily closed to in-person classroom attendance through May 4, 2020.

This Executive Order does not prohibit people from accessing essential services or engaging in essential daily activities, such as going to the grocery store or gas station, providing or obtaining other essential services, hunting or fishing, or engaging in physical activity like jogging or bicycling, so long as the necessary precautions are maintained to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and to minimize in-person contact with people who are not in the same household. The order also includes exemption

for religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship. All critical infrastructure will remain operational, and government entities and businesses will continue providing essential services.

TDEM will maintain an online list of essential services specified in the Governor's Executive Order at www.tdem.texas.gov/essentialservices/. Other essential services may be added to this list with the approval of TDEM.

These orders will be effective on a statewide basis starting at 12:01 AM on April 2, 2020 and will end on April 30, 2020, subject to extension thereafter based on the status of COVID-19 in Texas and the recommendations of the CDC.