



# Stay Home

Home → Stay Home

This is the text of Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo's order of March 24, 2020. Questions on the order can be submitted to [stayhome@cjo.hctx.net](mailto:stayhome@cjo.hctx.net).

## ORDER OF COUNTY JUDGE LINA HIDALGO

### Stay Home, Work Safe

**Whereas**, on March 11, 2020, Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo issued a Declaration of Local Disaster for Public Health Emergency to allow Harris County to take measures to reduce the possibility of exposure to COVID-19 and promote the health and safety of Harris County residents in accordance with Section 418.108 of the Texas Government Code; and

**Whereas**, on March 13, 2020, a Declaration of State of Disaster was issued by Governor Abbott to take additional steps to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 to protect the health and welfare of Texans; and

**Whereas**, on March 16, 2020, President Trump acknowledged the gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic, releasing strict new guidelines to limit people's interactions, including that Americans should avoid groups of more than 10 people; and

**Whereas**, on March 17, 2020, the Harris County Commissioners Court issued an Order at a Special Meeting of Commissioners Court approving the extension to March 25, 2020, of the Declaration of Local Disaster for Public Health Emergency declared by County Judge Lina Hidalgo and signed on March 11, 2020; and

**Whereas**, on March 19, 2020, County Judge Lina Hidalgo issued an Order effective as of 8:00 a.m. on March 17, 2020, and continuing until 11:59 p.m. on March 31, 2020, requiring restaurants and bars to provide only carry-out, delivery or drive-thru services as allowed by law, and closing nightclubs, lounges and taverns, and restricting private clubs; and

**Whereas**, on March 19, 2020, Governor Abbott issued the first Public Health Disaster Declaration released in the State of Texas since 1901 and an Executive Order which, among other things, prohibits Texans from gathering in groups of more than 10 people; and

**Whereas**, on March 24, 2020, the Harris County Commissioners Court issued an Order approving the extension until April 29, 2020, of the Declaration of Local Disaster for Public Health Emergency declared by County Judge Lina Hidalgo and signed on March 11, 2020, and extended at a Special Meeting of Commissioners Court on March 17, 2020 to March 25, 2020; and

**Whereas**, the COVID-19 virus is contagious and spreads through person-to-person contact, especially in group settings; and

**Whereas**, the COVID-19 virus causes property loss or damage due to its ability to attach to surfaces for prolonged periods of time; and

**Whereas**, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") recommends an "All of Community" approach focused on slowing the transmission of COVID-19 through social distancing to reduce illness and death, while minimizing social and economic impacts; and



## NOW THEREFORE, I, COUNTY JUDGE FOR HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS, PURSUANT TO THE AUTHORITY VESTED BY TEXAS GOVERNMENT CODE CHAPTER 418, HEREBY FIND AND ORDER:

That the findings and recitations set out in the preamble to this ORDER are found to be true and correct and they are hereby adopted by the County Judge and made a part hereof for all purposes. This Order is in addition to any previous orders issued by the Harris County Judge and hereby incorporates all previous orders by reference, including the Order of March 19, 2020, pertaining to restaurants and bars.

**Summary.** The virus that causes 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) is easily transmitted through person-to-person contact, especially in group settings, and it is essential that the spread of the virus be slowed to protect the ability of public and private healthcare providers to handle the influx of new patients and safeguard public health and safety. Because of the risk of the rapid spread of the virus and the need to protect the most vulnerable members of the community, this Order requires all individuals anywhere in Harris County, to stay at home – except for certain Essential Activities and work to provide Essential Business and Essential Government services or perform essential infrastructure construction, including housing. This Order takes effect at 11:59 p.m. on March 24, 2020 and will continue through 11:59 p.m. on April 3, 2020, subject to the limited exceptions and under the terms and conditions more particularly set forth below.

1. Effective as of 11:59 p.m. on March 24, 2020, and continuing until 11:59 p.m. on April 3, 2020:

- a. All individuals currently living within Harris County are ordered to stay at their place of residence except for Essential Activities as defined in this order. All persons may leave their Residences only for Essential Activities, or to provide or perform Essential Governmental Functions, or to operate Essential Businesses, as defined in Section 2. For purposes of this Order, Residence includes homes, hotels, motels, shared rentals, and similar facilities. To the extent individuals are using shared or outdoor spaces, they must at all times as reasonably as possible maintain social distancing of at least six feet from any other person when they are outside their residence.
  - b. Individuals experiencing homelessness are exempt from this Order except that, to the extent individuals are using shared or outdoor spaces, they shall, to the greatest extent feasible, maintain social distancing of at least six feet from any other person. Individuals experiencing homelessness are strongly urged to obtain shelter. Governmental and other entities that can provide shelter to homeless individuals are strongly urged to make shelter available, as soon as possible and to the maximum extent practicable (and to utilize social distancing requirements in their operations).
  - c. All businesses operating within Harris County, except Essential Businesses as defined below in Section 2, are required to cease all activities at facilities located within the County. For clarity, businesses may continue operations consisting exclusively of employees or contractors performing activities at their own residences (i.e., working from home). To the greatest extent possible, all Essential Businesses shall comply with the Social Distancing Guidelines attached, including maintaining six-foot social distancing for both employees and the general public.
  - d. All public or private gatherings of any number of people occurring outside a single household or living unit are prohibited, except as otherwise provided herein. Nothing in this Order prohibits the gathering of members of a household or living unit. Nothing in this Order affects orders or agreements regarding child-related visitation or custody arrangements.
  - e. Individuals may go to public parks and open outdoor recreation areas. However, public playgrounds may increase spread of COVID-19 and, therefore, shall be closed.
  - f. Restaurants, bars, micro-breweries, micro-distilleries, wineries and other establishments that serve food, with or without drive-in or drive-through services, are prohibited from serving food for consumption on the premises and may only serve food and/or alcohol by take out, delivery, or drive-through services as allowed by law, and detailed in the Harris County Judge's Order of March 19, 2020, pertaining to restaurants and bars.
  - g. Gyms, fitness centers, swimming pools and other facilities that are used or intended to be used for any type of training, martial arts, sport or recreation shall close.
  - h. Hair and nail salons, spas, licensed massage businesses and tattoo parlors, concert halls, live performance theaters, arenas, stadiums, movie theaters, game rooms, bowling alleys, arcades, indoor and outdoor flea markets and swap meets, indoor malls, indoor shopping centers, and bingo halls shall close.
- Faith leaders may minister and counsel in individual settings, so long as social distance protocols are followed. Religious and worship services may only be provided by video and teleconference. Religious institutions must limit in-person staff to those necessary for preparing for or conducting video or teleconference services, and all individuals must follow the Social Distancing Guidelines, including the six-foot social distancing.

### 2. Definitions:

- a. For purposes of this Order, individuals may leave their residence only to perform any of the following “Essential Activities”:
  - To engage in activities or perform tasks essential to their health and safety, or to the health and safety of their family or household members (for example, obtaining medical supplies or medication, visiting a healthcare professional, or obtaining supplies needed to work from home).
  - To obtain necessary services or supplies for themselves and their family or household members, or to deliver those services or supplies to others (for example, food, pet supplies, and any other household consumer products, supplies needed to work from home, and products necessary to maintain the safety, sanitation, and essential operation of residences).
  - To engage in outdoor activity, provided the individuals comply with social distancing requirements of six feet (for example, walking, biking, hiking, running, or fishing).



b. For purposes of this Order, “**Essential Businesses**” include:

i. **Essential Critical Infrastructure.** Work necessary to the operations and maintenance of the 16 critical infrastructure sectors identified by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security National Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), provided that they carry out those services or that work in compliance with social distancing requirements of six feet to the extent possible. See **Attachment** (CISA’s Guidance on Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce). Essential Businesses providing essential infrastructure should implement screening precautions to protect employees and all activities shall be performed in compliance with social distancing guidelines.

ii. **Essential Government Functions.** All services provided by local governments and municipalities located in Harris County needed to ensure their continuing operation to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the public, including law enforcement, jail operations and other services. Further, nothing in this Order shall prohibit any individual from performing “Essential Government Functions”. All Essential Government Functions shall be performed in compliance with social distancing requirements of six feet to the extent possible.

iii. **Essential City of Houston Government Functions.** All services provided by the City of Houston that the Mayor of the City of Houston determines to be essential Government Functions. Further, nothing in this Order shall prohibit any individual from performing “Essential Government Functions”. All Essential Government Functions shall be performed in compliance with social distancing requirements of six feet to the extent possible.

iv. **Essential Healthcare Operations.** Healthcare operations, including hospitals, clinics, dentists, pharmacies, pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, other healthcare facilities, healthcare suppliers, mental health providers, substance abuse service providers, blood banks, medical research, laboratory services, or any related and/or ancillary healthcare services. Home-based and residential-based care for seniors, adults, or children are also considered healthcare operations. Healthcare operations also include veterinary care and all health and welfare services provided to animals. This exemption shall be viewed broadly to avoid any impacts to the delivery of healthcare.

v. **Essential Retail.** Food producers and service providers, including grocery stores, warehouse stores, furniture suppliers, big box stores, bodegas, liquor stores, gas stations and convenience stores, farmers’ markets that sell food products and household staples. Food cultivation, including farming, ranching, fishing, and livestock. Food production, including the production of canned goods, bottled beverages and other grocery items. Businesses that ship or deliver groceries, food, goods or services directly to residences. Restaurants and other facilities that prepare and serve food, but only for delivery, drive-thru or carry-out. Schools and other entities that typically provide free services to students or members of the public on a pick-up and take-away basis only. The restriction of delivery or carry-out does not apply to cafes and restaurants located within hospital and medical facilities. Laundromats, dry cleaners, and laundry service providers. Gas stations, auto supply, auto and bicycle repair, hardware stores, and related facilities. Businesses that supply products needed for people to work from home.

vi. **Providers of Basic Necessities to Economically Disadvantaged Populations.** Businesses that provide food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals.

vii. **Essential Services Necessary to Maintain Essential Operations of Residences or Other Essential Businesses.** Trash and recycling collection, processing and disposal, mail and shipping services, building cleaning, maintenance and security, warehouse/distribution and fulfillment, storage for essential businesses, funeral homes, crematoriums and cemeteries. Plumbers, electricians, exterminators, yard and maintenance crews, housekeepers, janitorial staff, pool cleaners and other service providers who provide services that are necessary to maintaining the safety, sanitation, and essential operations of residences and Essential Businesses. Professional services, such as legal or accounting services, when necessary to assist in compliance with legally mandated activities. Businesses that supply other Essential Businesses with support or utilities needed to operate. Caregivers and helpers who provide services to seniors and disabled individuals.

xiii. **News Media.** Newspapers, television, radio, and other media services.

ix. **Childcare and Adult Care Services.** Childcare and adult care facilities providing services that enable employees exempted in this Order to work as permitted.

xi. **Infrastructure, Development, Operation and Construction.** For example, public works construction, construction of housing or other types of construction including commercial, manufacturing, airport operations and aircraft manufacturing, maintenance or repair, water, sewer, gas, electrical, oil refining, roads and highways, public transportation, solid waste collection and removal, internet, and telecommunications systems (including the provision of essential global, national, and local infrastructure for computing services, business infrastructure, communications, and web-based services).

xii. **Transportation.** Businesses related to the operation, maintenance, construction, and manufacture of transportation services. For example, (a) vehicle manufacturers, automotive suppliers and parts departments, car dealerships, parts distributors, maintenance and repair facilities; (b) public transportation; (c) businesses supporting airport operations; (d) street and highway maintenance and construction; (e) gas stations and other fuel distribution businesses; (f) vehicles for hire, including public transportation services, Uber, Lyft, and taxicabs, that enable persons to travel to or from employers, service providers, or businesses exempted in this Order. People riding on public transit must comply with the six-foot social distancing requirements to the greatest extent feasible.

xiii. **Labor union functions.** Critical labor union functions, including the maintenance of health and welfare funds and checking on the well-being and safety of members.

xiv. **NASA and Port of Houston.** Activities of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the Port of Houston.

xv. **Airports and related operations.** Airport and airline activities, operations, maintenance and repairs, and the hotels that serve these Essential Businesses.



3. These infection control precautions apply to all Essential Businesses. (1) practice social distancing by requiring patrons, visitors, and employees to be separated by six (6) feet, to the extent feasible; (2) provide access to hand washing facilities with soap and water or hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol; (3) post a sign in a conspicuous place at the public entrance to the venue instructing members of the public not to enter if they are experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness, including fever or cough; and (4) adhere to other general communicable disease control recommendations by public health authorities.

4. Any manufacturer who retools so that a substantial part of their business is for the purpose of manufacturing and producing ventilators, personal protective equipment, or other medical supplies and equipment necessary for the COVID-19 response may apply for an "Essential Business" exemption under this Order. Any industry or business that is not an Essential Business may apply for an exemption from the requirements imposed by this Order. To be eligible for an exemption, the industry or business must complete and submit an application form, which will be made available to the public at www.ReadyHarris.org, along with evidence that the continuing operations of the business or industry are essential to promoting the general welfare of the residents of Harris County and the State of Texas during the COVID-19 response. Businesses or industries that retool or amend their operations to provide or support Essential Services during the COVID-19 response may also submit an application for exemption.

5. Grocery stores, supermarkets, warehouse stores, hospitals, and medical facilities are experiencing high levels of demand for a large number of products, requiring more deliveries from manufacturers and distribution centers to serve their customers. A number of Texas cities and local associations have implemented restrictions on delivery hours to stores to mitigate truck noise and traffic. Due to the need to deliver products as quickly and efficiently as possible during this critical timeframe, this Order hereby suspends all delivery hour restrictions for transport to or from any entity involved in the selling or distribution of food products, medicine, or medical supplies or equipment in Harris County for the next sixty (60) days.

6. If someone in a household has tested positive for COVID-19, all residents of the household are ordered to isolate at home until cleared by a public health authority or medical provider.

7. Nursing homes, retirement, and long-term care facilities are instructed by this Order to prohibit nonessential visitors from accessing their facilities unless to provide critical assistance or for end-of-life visitation.

8. This Order shall be effective until 11:59 p.m. on April 3, 2020 or until it is either rescinded, superseded, or amended pursuant to applicable law.

9. Pursuant to Appendix 9 to and Section V(A)(5)(a) Annex U of the Harris County Basic Plan adopted by Harris County Commissioners Court on October 29, 2019, and in accordance with Tex. Gov't Code § 418.173, any law enforcement agency based in Harris County is hereby authorized to enforce this order and the failure to comply with this Order is an offense under this Order and is punishable by a fine that does not exceed \$1,000.00 or confinement in jail for a term that does not exceed 180 days.

10. Harris County will post this Order on the Internet. In addition, the owner, manager, or operator of any facility that is likely to be impacted by this Order is strongly encouraged to post a copy of this Order onsite and to provide a copy to any member of the public asking for a copy. If any subsection, sentence, clause, phrase, or word of this Order or any application of it to any person, structure, gathering, or circumstance is held to be invalid or unconstitutional by a decision of a court of competent jurisdiction, then such decision will not affect the validity of the remaining portions or applications of this Order.

**IT IS SO ORDERED.**

**LINA HIDALGO**

**HARRIS COUNTY JUDGE**

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