



Fort Bend County Community Guidelines for COVID- 19 March 16, 2020

Since the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak began, Fort Bend County has prepared for and responded to its spread as strongly as possible in order to protect the health of our residents. However, minimizing the spread of COVID-19 is something that government officials cannot do alone. That is why we are asking the public, businesses, faith institutions, and residents of all ages to help us carry out even stronger preventative measures to protect our frontline emergency and medical personnel and those at higher risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19. This situation requires all of us, including the young and healthy, to become more disciplined and vigilant. We understand that these additional guidelines will impact day-to-day life, but COVID-19 is not the common cold. Each of us must make personal sacrifices if our community is going to remain healthy and intact.

In coordination with The White House, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and local partners, Fort Bend County has decided to issue additional guidelines effective midnight tonight, March 16. These guidelines will remain in place through April 1, 2020, or until otherwise noted. We will continue to expand testing and epidemiological investigations and will likewise reevaluate and update the Community Guidelines as new information becomes available.

Guidance for people at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness

People at higher risk of severe illness should stay home and away from large groups of people as much as possible, including public places and gatherings of more than 10 people where there will be close contact with others. Gatherings of seniors or other people at higher risk of severe illness should be canceled or postponed until health authorities have sufficient evidence it is safe to convene. Those at higher risk include:

- People 60 and older.
- People with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
- People with underlying health conditions (e.g. cancer, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, lung disease, mellitus, etc.)
- People who have weakened immune systems (HIV/AIDs, autoimmune disorders, etc.)
- Pregnant women.
- Caregivers of children with underlying health conditions should consult with their child's healthcare providers about whether their children should quarantine.
- Individuals that are at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness should take actions to reduce their risk of becoming ill.
- Ensure enough supplies for you and your family.
- Take everyday precautions to keep space between themselves and others.
- When in public, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash hands often.
- Avoid crowds as much as possible.
- Avoid cruise travel and non-essential air travel.
- During a COVID-19 outbreak in your community, stay home as much as possible to further reduce the risk of being exposed.
- Have supplies on hand:
- Contact your healthcare provider to ask about obtaining extra necessary medications to have on hand in case there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community and you need to stay home for a prolonged period of time.
- If you cannot get extra medications, consider using mail-order for medications.
- Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms. Most healthier young people will be able to recover from COVID-19 at home.
- Ensure your healthcare provider is aware of your symptoms if they arise
- Have enough household items and groceries on hand so that you will be prepared to stay at home for a period of time.

Caregivers of children with underlying health conditions should consult with healthcare providers about whether their children should stay home.

Anyone who has questions about whether their condition puts them at increased risk for COVID-19 should consult with their healthcare provider. **Those without a healthcare provider should contact the Memorial Hermann Nurse Health line at: 832-658-6766.**

Guidance for workplaces and businesses

Based on what is currently known about the virus, spread from person-to-person can occur from a distance of up to 10 feet, or about the length of a small car. Employers should take steps to make it more feasible for their employees to work in ways that minimize close contact with others.

Employers can protect their staff and consumers by:

- Maximizing telecommuting options for as many employees as possible.
- Urging employees to stay home when they are sick and maximizing flexibility in sick leave benefits.
- Staggering start and end times to reduce large numbers of people working in the same space at once.
- Frequently cleaning and disinfecting common touch points such as doorknobs, tabletops, countertops, phones, keyboards, etc.
- Prioritizing protective actions for employees who are at higher risk of severe illness.

Bars and Clubs:

- Suspend service at bars and clubs.
- Reduce hours and capacity to decrease the number of people in a space at one time and increase the amount of time available for staff to clean and disinfect tables, chairs, bathrooms, etc.

Restaurants:

- Limit service to delivery, take-out, and pick-up options, instead of sit-down dining
- Decrease to 50% seating capacity to allow for social distancing
- Avoid going to restaurant establishments in groups greater than 6.
- Utilize electronic payment methods instead of handling cash or coins.

Event and community gathering considerations

As instructed by the White House and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we strongly discourage any gatherings over 10 people from taking place and for organizers to cancel or postpone any such gatherings. Additionally, we strongly encourage organizers of all gatherings to consider whether they can be postponed or if additional precautions can be taken to prevent unnecessary risk.

If you cannot avoid bringing a group of 10 or more people together, we recommend the following guidelines:

- Anyone who is sick should not attend.
- Those who are at higher risk for COVID-19 should not attend.
- Increase the frequency of sanitizing common touchpoints.
- Try to find ways to give people more physical space so that they are not in close contact as much as possible.
- Ensure an adequate supply of hand soap, disinfectants, tissues, and paper towels.
- Encourage attendees to follow increased hygiene, such as:
 - Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
 - If soap and water are not available, attendees should use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
 - Avoid close contact with other people
 - Avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth
 - Covering their cough or sneeze with a tissue - if available - or into their elbow

Guidance for senior living and assisted living

Senior living facilities, assisted living facilities, group homes, and other facilities with populations at higher risk for COVID-19 should limit interactions with the general public.

- Implement social distancing measures:
 - Reduce large gatherings (e.g., group social events)
 - Alter schedules to reduce mixing
 - Limit programs with external staff
 - Consider having residents stay in facility and limit exposure to the general community
 - Limit visitors
- Implement temperature and respiratory symptom screening of attendees, staff, and visitors.
- Implement short-term closures as needed (e.g., if cases are identified among staff, residents or clients who live elsewhere) for cleaning and contact tracing.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and common areas daily.

Guidance for Schools

As of this writing, the public school districts in Fort Bend County have closed. Private schools and daycare should take all necessary precautions to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

- Implement social distancing measures:
 - Reduce the frequency of large gatherings (e.g., assemblies), and limit the number of attendees per gathering.
 - Alter schedules to reduce mixing (e.g., stagger recess, entry/dismissal times)
 - Limit inter-school interactions
 - Consider distance learning and/or e-learning in some settings

- Implement regular health checks (e.g., temperature and respiratory symptom screening) of students, staff, and visitors (if feasible).
- Short-term dismissals for school and extracurricular activities as needed (e.g., if cases are identified among staff/students) for cleaning and contact tracing.
- Implement distance learning options, especially for students at increased risk of severe illness
- Prioritize protective actions for students, staff, and visitors who are at higher risk of severe illness.

Some children have underlying health conditions, such as weakened immune systems, that put them at higher risk for COVID-19. Caregivers of children with underlying health conditions should consult with healthcare providers about whether their children should stay home. Those without a healthcare provider should contact Memorial Hermann Nurse Health line at: **832-658-6766**.

Guidance for faith-based organizations

Faith-based organizations and communities should take significant steps to make it more feasible for their members to worship in ways that minimize close contact with groups of 10 or more people. Practical steps that faith-based organizations can take include:

- Implement social distancing measures: Reduce activities (e.g., group congregation, religious services), especially for organizations with individuals at increased risk of severe illness.
- Offer video/audio of events as opposed to in person meetings
- Determine ways to continue providing support services to individuals at increased risk of severe disease (services, meals, checking in) while limiting group settings and exposures.
- Discontinue large gatherings (e.g., events with more than 10 people)
- For organizations that serve high-risk populations (e.g. elderly), cancel gatherings and encourage them to stay home. .

FBC HHS recognizes that during difficult times people often turn to faith services for additional emotional support. Recognizing this need, FBC HHS encourages faith-based organizations to assist in ensuring credible, reliable information is provided to help protect the community at large.

For people who are sick

- Stay home when you are sick.
- Do not go out in public when you are sick.
- If you are ill in any way, call your doctor's office first before going in.
- Do not go to the emergency room unless you are experiencing a medical emergency. Emergency rooms need to be able to serve those with the most critical needs.
- If you have symptoms like cough, fever, or other respiratory problems, stay home and self-isolate until you have contacted a healthcare professional.
Those without a healthcare provider should contact the Memorial Hermann Nurse Health line at: 832-658-6766.

For the general public

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizer when you cannot wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue and throw the tissue away. If you don't have a tissue, use the elbow of your sleeve. Don't use your hands to cover coughs and sneezes.
- Even if you are not ill, avoid visiting hospitals, long-term care facilities or nursing homes to the extent possible. If you do need to visit one of these facilities, limit your time there and keep six feet away from patients.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, especially if you are at higher risk for coronavirus.
- Get plenty of rest, drink plenty of fluids, eat healthy foods, and manage your stress to keep your immunity strong.
- Clean household surfaces with standard cleaners.
- Stay informed. Information is changing frequently. Visit Fort Bend County Health & Human Services COVID-19 website at <https://www.fbchealth.org/ncov/> for updates.

Mental health resources

The outbreak of COVID-19 may be stressful for people throughout the community. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Accordingly, we suggest the following recommendations:

- People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment plans, stay connected with their healthcare provider, and monitor for any new symptoms.
- Call your healthcare provider if stress reactions interfere with your daily activities.
- Call the Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 if you are experiencing emotional distress related to COVID-19.

Fort Bend County Hotlines:

- General Public Line: 281-633-7795
- Physician and Community Partner Line: 281-344-6118