

RESOURCE AND INFORMATION GUIDE

For Harris County, Texas

Prepared by the Office of Precinct One

Commissioner Rodney Ellis



GENERAL INFO

[Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China. The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It also may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

As the number of positive cases of COVID-19 in this region climbs, the Harris County Public Health's [Novel Coronavirus page](#) is the best resource for the most up-to-date information and data.

FEDERAL RESPONSE

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, or [CARES Act](#) passed in the Senate on March 25 is part of the U.S. response to the coronavirus pandemic. The House Ways and Means Committee has provided summaries for the different provisions of the act.

- [CLICK HERE](#) to learn about the Senate CARES bill tax provisions.
- [CLICK HERE](#) to learn about the Senate CARES bill unemployment provisions.
- [CLICK HERE](#) to learn about the Senate CARES bill small business provisions.
- [CLICK HERE](#) to learn about the Senate CARES bill distressed industries provisions.

It is crucial that everyone abides by the recommendations and guidelines to protect not only ourselves, but those who are at a [higher risk](#) of contracting the virus including pregnant women, older adults, and those with underlying health conditions.

In times like this, **it is paramount that we band together as a community and not further false or hateful information.** Coronavirus doesn't recognize race, nationality, or ethnicity. We must all show compassion and support for those most impacted.

COMMUNITY GUIDELINES

Starting Monday April 27, Harris County will be **requiring anyone over the age of 10 to wear a face covering while in public**. Face coverings refer to anything that covers your nose and mouth, for example, a bandana, mask, scarf, or old t-shirt. This order will be in effect for 30 days.

The CDC now recommends that everyone, even people who do not have symptoms, wear a cloth mask while in public. See the CDC's [simple tips for making your own mask](#) from household materials.

On 3/29 **Governor Abbott increased precautions for travelers**. Expanding on a previous executive order, the state is now mandating a 14-day self-quarantine for anyone driving into Texas from anywhere in Louisiana and for those flying in from Miami, Atlanta, Detroit, Chicago, California and Washington. See the [full order](#) for a complete list of places that now require self-quarantine.

Stay Home, Work Safe. Judge Hidalgo, in coordination with Mayor Turner and the City of Houston, has issued a *Stay-At-Home Order* beginning on March 24, at 11:59 pm and expiring on April 30. It is imperative that we mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our community and support our elected officials and health professionals with flattening the curve of person-to-person related infections. [See all the details of the order here.](#)

- **Essential critical infrastructure workers are exempt from the Stay Home, Work Safe Order** and the list can be found [here](#).
- **People working from home do not have to shelter in place, but may leave their residence only to perform “Essential Activities.”** Groceries stores, pharmacies, gas station, parks, and other areas will remain open.
- Governor Abbott’s [Executive Order Relating to COVID-19 Preparedness and Mitigation](#), issued March 19, 2020, **limits social gatherings to 10 people, prohibits eating and drinking at restaurants and bars while still allowing takeout, close gyms, ban people from visiting nursing homes except for critical care and temporarily close schools.** The order is effective midnight Friday March 20th through midnight April 30 and May 4 for schools.
- **Social distancing** is for everyone, not just those with risk factors (examples of high risk individuals include those who have had contact with an individual who has tested positive, have a compromised immune system, or are age 60+). Stay home if you’re sick, but also, work from home as much as is possible for your situation.
- Minimize physical contact—we should all avoid places and situations where you cannot stay 6 feet away, or at least arm’s length, from other people. [Wash your hands](#) for at least 20 seconds and avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. Wipe down frequently touched surfaces (like your phone).

Even if you do not feel symptoms, or are a younger person who is less at risk, everyone should all assume they are carriers of the virus and act accordingly to protect our neighbors. *We’re all in this together!*

RELIABLE RESOURCES

CALL CENTERS

- Ask My Nurse: 713-634-1110
- Harris County Residents: 832-927-7575
- Texas DSHS Hotline: 1-800-570-9779
- COVID19 Mental Health Support Line: 833-251-7544

INFORMATION

- [City of Houston: Mayor Sylvester Turner](#)
- [Harris County Public Health](#)
- [Harris Health](#)
- [Houston Emergency Operations Center](#)
- [Houston Health Department](#)
- [Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management](#)
- [ASL Resources](#)

TRUSTED COVID-19 RESEARCH

- [NIH LitCOVID](#)
- [WHO COVID Research](#)
- [NEJM, Lancet, Wiley, JAMA](#)
- [IDSA COVID19 Resource Center](#)
- [CORD-19 COVID19 Open Research Dataset](#)

HOW TO GET HELP

If you are an essential worker and need child care, you can [register here](#) to be matched with high-quality child care that best suits your needs. Financial assistance for child care expenses is also available.

In response to the current conditions, Harris Health System is extending its [financial assistance program](#) plans 90 days for current patients who have been approved for financial assistance.

[Evictions have been halted in Harris County](#). The Texas Supreme Court has suspended eviction hearings (with certain exceptions) until April 19.

Because of the current pandemic, [U.S. tax filing deadline](#) has been extended to July 15.

Harris County will always stand up for its residents. If you witness an instance of [price gouging](#), report it to the Harris County Attorney's Office so that we can hold them accountable. They can be contacted at ConsumerHelp@cao.hctx.net or 832-839-6941.

If your income or job has been affected by the coronavirus, WIC is here to help. Call your local [Texas WIC office](#) or start your [application online](#) today. WIC benefits include healthy food and the application only takes a few minutes.

HOW TO HELP

During these times we all must work together to get through. There are a lot of [opportunities for Houston residents to give back](#).

The Houston Food Bank is working diligently to get food to our community [but they need your help](#).

Due to this outbreak closing blood drives, The American Red Cross is experiencing a historic shortage. Click [here](#) to see how you can help out.

[Houston Animal Shelters](#) are in desperate need of fosters. Having a furry friend at home during these stressful times can be mutually beneficial.

Residents and business owners, we encourage you to print and post visual reminders that will help you, your family and customers remember basic steps that everyone can take to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Feel free to print, post and share these flyers for your homes and businesses. Using your home printer, you can easily print these on regular 8.5" x 11" paper.



FLYERS: [Did you wash your hands?](#) | [Handshake-free Zone](#) | [Keep Your Distance](#)

TESTING

The CDC has launched a [COVID-19 symptom self-checker](#). The purpose of the self-checker is to help make decisions about seeking appropriate medical care. But the system is not meant to diagnose or provide treatment options for COVID-19 or other conditions.

Harris County now has open testing sites! **In order to receive a test at one of these sites, you must complete [this self-assessment](#) to see whether further assessment or testing is necessary.** Sites will only accept people with a unique ID code obtained through the screening process.

[Here is where you can get tested](#) in Houston. This list includes private medical providers that may require insurance.

FOOD & DISTRIBUTION

FREE FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES. Brighter Bites, the YMCA and the Houston Food Bank are hosting Produce Distributions. The entire community is invited to any of the [distribution sites](#).

Houston ISD is continuing **its food distribution efforts at 25 sites** throughout the city. For updates and this week's schedule see [here](#).

The following organizations are also working to distribute food. Please see their websites for details and schedules:

[Second Servings](#)

[MESA Outreach Community Food Pantry](#)

[Catholic Charities](#)

[Mission Bells Food Pantry](#)

[Target Hunger](#)

[St. Charles Borromeo](#)

[North Channel Assistance Ministries](#)

[Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church](#)

[House of Amos Emergency Food Pantry](#)

[Mana Food Pantry](#)

[West Houston Assistance Ministries](#)

[St. Monica Catholic Church Food Pantry](#)

[The Heights Interfaith Ministries Food Pantry](#)

The City of Houston is operating a **curbside meal program** at [47 community centers](#) around the city Monday through Friday from 1-3 pm.

SHOPPING

Grocery stores will continue to operate, there is no need to rush to the store. Stores are restocking every day. Practice social distancing at the stores and be sensitive to the needs of others. Curbside pick-up and delivery are good options too, some stores are also offering those services for free during this time.

Grocery stores are hiring!

Stores will have varied hours to provide time to restock.

- HEB: 8am-8pm
- Kroger: 7am-10pm
- Walmart: 6am-11pm
- Randall's: 7am-9pm

In order to help protect our more vulnerable population, **certain stores will be opening to seniors only for part of their business days**. Please see a list below and check with your local stores for specific hours.

- Whole Foods Market will service customers over the age of 60 one hour before opening to the public.
- Food Town will open their doors from 7am-8am to allow those aged 65 and older to shop in a less crowded environment (ID required).
- Dollar General will allow seniors to shop from 8am-9am.

Shopping Malls may also be operating on limited schedules:

HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday – Saturday: 12PM - 7PM

- Baybrook
- Deerbrook
- First Colony
- Memorial City
- Willowbrook
- The Woodlands

HOURS OF OPERATION

11AM – 7PM

- Galleria
- Houston Premium Outlets
- Katy Mills

HEALTHCARE

[Texas Department of State Health Services](#): If you need help finding a doctor or accessing medical care, dial 2-1-1, then choose Option 6 or call toll-free at 877-541-7905 or visit www.211texas.org. Hours: 7:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., 7 days per week.

[If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19](#) and develop a fever and symptoms, such as cough or difficulty breathing, call your healthcare provider for medical advice.

If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, stay home except to get medical care. If you have a regular primary care physician, call and see if you can set up a virtual appointment or e-visit. If you do not have a regular primary care doctor, you can still find a clinic that is offering these no-contact visits. (See the trusted resources section of this guide)

If you develop emergency warning signs for COVID-19 get medical attention immediately. Emergency warning signs include, but are not limited to, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or inability to arouse, bluish lips or face. Call 911 if you have a medical emergency.

MENTAL HEALTH

Taking care of your emotional health during an emergency will help your long-term healing. It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief and worry during and after disease outbreaks. The CDC has put together this [resource guide](#) to help people cope with and manage their stress during this time. **The Disaster Distress Line offers free counseling 24/7, just call 1-800-985-5990.** If you or someone you know shows signs of stress for several days or weeks, get help by accessing **Harris County's COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line at 832-251-7544.**

If you are a Parent or Caregiver, here is a [guide created by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) with tips and strategies for helping your children cope during these stressful times.

Social distancing doesn't mean social isolation. Technology gives us the opportunity to stay connected even when we are physically separated. [The Neighborhood Project](#) is a service that helps facilitate conversations that people can engage with online while under quarantine and can help people feel less alone during these times.

Working from home brings new challenges. Everyday Health offers [Your Work-From-Home Survival Guide for Self-Care](#). It has tips to stay productive and healthy while working from home and coping with all the stress this situation brings.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) – It is important that we continue to take care of ourselves during this outbreak. [This resource](#) discusses feelings and thoughts that may arise during this time and has suggestions for ways to cope and support oneself during an outbreak.

Harvard Medical School advice on [coping with coronavirus anxiety](#).

The Child Mind Institute has compiled [resources on talking to children about COVID-19](#).

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) – [Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource:](#)

For people with severe mental health needs, ensuring ongoing linkages to care is essential. HHSC contracts with 37 local mental health authorities (LMHAs) and two local behavioral health authorities (LBHAs) across Texas to deliver mental health services in our communities. A list of LMHAs and LBHAs in Texas can be [found here](#).

SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

Harris County is dedicated to our hard working Small Business Owners that help make our area and economy great. **Harris County and the State of Texas are working to qualify for Small Business Administration Economic Injury Loan Disaster.** To complete an EIDL worksheet, business owners can go [here](#). This is NOT a loan application, but will help qualify Texas for inclusion in the program. For more information on what is needed to determine the eligibility and application process [click here](#).

America's Small Business Development Center Network (SBDCN) is the association that represents America's nationwide network of SBDCs. This site contains information and resources to help small businesses plan for and respond to COVID-19: [Corona Virus Information for Small Business](#)

COVID-19 has severely harmed working families who are the backbone of our economy. Small businesses account for almost half of the US workforce and we need to ensure we are providing resources for them. On April 7, Commissioners Court made a commitment **to create an economic assistance loan program** for small businesses to help our local economy and our communities recover from this pandemic.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is working with federal, state and local government officials and agencies to help manage the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. **To locate information and resources for employers seeking workers or as a jobseeker seeking employment or other support services,** [sign-up for TWC COVID-19 updates](#). To view the TWC website, go to [COVID-19 Resources Employers](#)

TRANSPORTATION

[METRO Changes:](#)

- Starting Monday, March 30, **all Park & Ride service is being suspended EXCEPT for routes serving the Texas Medical Center** which will operate on a regular weekday schedule.
- All **HOV/HOT Lanes will be closed**.

- Local Bus routes will continue to run on a Saturday schedule seven days a week, but frequency will be reduced to every 30 minutes to one hour.
- The Red Line will operate on a Sunday schedule every 12 minutes, Purple on a regular Sunday schedule every 18 minutes and Green will run bus shuttles every 20 minutes.
- The 322 Texas Medical Center shuttle from Fannin South to Hermann Park/Rice U station will operate every 10 minutes during peak morning and evening hours.
- METROLift will continue to operate with reduced capacity to allow social distancing.

[HCTRA Changes](#): By order of Commissioners Court, tolls are waived on HCTRA roadways to assist those who must travel throughout Harris County during the Stay Home, Work Safe Order. (This order does not include tolls charged on toll roads not governed by Harris County).

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

[The Marshall Project](#) is a nonprofit journalism organization that focuses on criminal justice. It has a curated collection of articles on the coronavirus and is a good resource for information.

EDUCATION

The majority of Houston-area school districts will remain closed through May 4. Colleges and universities are switching to online instruction from March 23 to the end of the semester. Please check with your specific school or district for exact dates.

On Monday, March 23, HISD launched HISD@H.O.M.E. (Home-based Online Mobile Education). Students and parents will be able to access the website on your school's main landing page or visiting the site [directly](#). We understand that some families may not have access to internet or devices so beginning the week of March 23, teacher will reach out to families to determine each student's needs regarding access.

In response to the uncertainty and extended school closures, Governor Greg Abbott has waived the STAAR Testing requirements for the 2019-2020 school year.

HOMELESSNESS

We are all better off when we are all healthy—especially the most vulnerable among us. On April 7, Commissioners Court approved **\$3 million to support Harris County's Homeless Medical Isolation and Recovery Shelter** for those who are experiencing homelessness and need treatment or shelter to stop the spread of COVID-19.

For those experiencing homelessness, the following agencies are working to assist those who are overcoming homelessness.

- Harris County Public Health
- Office of Emergency Managements
- Coalition for the Homeless/The Way Home
- Continuum of Care
- Please see the Coalition's COVID-19 response [here](#).

IMMIGRANTS

No one should be afraid to get the medical help they need. [US Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) announced that **any testing, treatment or services relating to COVID-19 will NOT be used against immigrants in their public charge evaluation.**

VETERANS

All Veterans should call first before going to any of our VA facilities, especially if you have symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Calling first helps us protect you, medical staff, and other patients. Ask your VA health care team about the option of care by phone or video instead of an in-person visit.

The [Veteran Services Office](#) is closed until further notice. Please access their website for assistance.

If you have flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath, call us at 713-794- 8985, before you visit your Houston VA or CBOC. Clinical staff are available to provide 24/7 virtual care and support, including nurse advice and triage.

COUNTY DEPARTMENT CLOSURES

Harris County Animal Shelter is accepting animal surrenders only on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Visit the [County Pets website](#) for additional information about changes to availability of services and facilities.

Courts: In compliance with the regulations and guidelines, all jury trials and jury duty will be postponed. Effective Monday, March 23, 2020 the following hours of operation shall apply to following buildings:

- Criminal Justice Center (1201 Franklin St.)
- Juvenile Justice Center (1200 Congress St.)
- Civil Courthouse (201 Caroline St.)

HOURS OF OPERATION:

Monday-Thursday: 7am-6pm

Friday-Sunday: Closed

The Harris County Law Library is closed until further notice. Due to public health concerns, in-person services will be temporarily suspended. To continue providing valuable services to patrons, the Law Library will expand virtual and remote services.

For the health and safety of staff and visitors, **Harris County Public Library** building will not be open until April 1st, or later.

Following government guidance and protocols, **Harris County Clerk's** main office and annexes will be closed to the public starting March 18. Employees will continue serving the public by email and phone, and resident can still access most services online.

Although the **Tax Office** is closed to the public, it is not closed. Property owners can still make property tax payments in person by using a Tax Office drop box, mailing a check or money order, or online by credit card.

Harris County Treasurer's Office has reduced office hours until further notice. The office will be open from 9am to 2pm in an attempt to limit employee exposure to the general public. Staff will be in the office until 4:30 pm to assist with internal transfers and wires. The office is committed to meeting its statutory requirements and customer expectations, but it is also committed to employees' well-being.

Household Hazardous Waste Facility and events at 6900 Hahl Rd at U.S. 290 and Gessner will be closed to the public. Also, all mobile events scheduled through May have been canceled.

Precinct One Community Centers are closed to the public in adherence to the guidelines on gatherings and social distancing recommendations. We will keep our residents informed on when we will reopen.

Visitors will no longer be allowed to attend [Commissioners Court](#). Residents can watch the meeting on the county's live stream.

OTHER CLOSURES

Bars/Clubs/Restaurants: In order to protect everyone, Governor Abbott has closed all bars and clubs. **Restaurants must operate as delivery/take-out/drive-thru only until April 30** or until the issue is reevaluated.

Harris Health System is closing five eligibility centers to visitors in response to COVID19.

Locations closed until further notice:

- Acres Homes Eligibility Center
- East Mount Houston Center
- Strawberry Health Center

Locations closed to public but accepting drop-offs:

- Lois J. Moore Eligibility Center
- Southeast Eligibility Center

To reduce the risk of transmission and enhance patient and employee safety, Harris Health facilities is implementing a new visitor access policy:

Visitor access to Harris Health hospitals and clinics is no longer permitted, with exceptions for:

- Parents visiting her/his baby
- Visitors helping patients with personal mobility
- Visitors of end-of-life patients
- Individuals serving as surrogate decision makers for a patient.
- All visitors will be subject to the screening process.

The **May 26 primary election runoffs** will be delayed until July in response to the growing outbreak of the new coronavirus in Texas under an [order](#) signed Friday by Gov. Greg Abbott.