

STATE of TEXAS
HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES



SARAH DAVIS
DISTRICT 134
HARRIS COUNTY

Dear Community Leaders,

Although we are in a rapidly changing situation with novel coronavirus (COVID-19), I wanted to give you an update on what the State of Texas is doing to respond.

Last Friday, Governor Greg Abbott declared a state disaster in all 254 Texas counties. This disaster declaration gives state agencies flexibility to redirect staff and state resources to areas hardest hit by COVID-19. Combined with a federal disaster declaration, the State of Texas will now activate its emergency plan and provide critical assistance to escalate its response to COVID-19 and protect the health of all Texans.

The Governor has requested an Economic Injury Disaster Declaration designation from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) in order for small businesses to access the Economic Injury Disaster Loan program. Small businesses are encouraged to visit <http://tdem.texas.gov/covid-19> for information.

The Governor has also placed the National Guard in “be prepared” status so they can be mobilized quickly on his order.

I have inquired with The Governor’s office with respect to the May 2020 runoff elections, and at this time, we have not been advised of any changes to either the date or method of the election. If/when this changes, we will provide an update.

Governor Abbott will host a televised town hall on March 19, 2020 at 7 pm. You can view this town hall on the CW Network.

The **Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS)** is the state’s lead agency for public health preparedness. DSHS continues to provide guidance to local public health officials, convening daily calls with local, state, and federal partners. DSHS has provided guidance for individual labs on processing COVID-19 specimens and has also compiled and disseminated information for public health officials, hospitals, and health care providers. More information on DSHS preparedness and response efforts is available at <https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/>.

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The **Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM)** maintains the state's official disaster plan and has gathered all state agencies to ensure a consistent, coordinated response to COVID-19. This includes contingency planning and daily calls with state agencies. Pursuant to legislation passed during the 86th Legislative Session, TDEM has also identified a list of regulations that may require waiver by the Governor to expedite the State's COVID-19 response. If you have any suggested regulations that you feel need to be waived, please e-mail me so that I can get those suggestions considered by The Governor.

The **Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)** continues to monitor COVID-19 and has provided guidance to providers, nursing homes and assisted living facilities, and childcare facilities. In addition, HHSC has launched a dedicated website for with information including office closures people receiving services through HHSC. This information is available at <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/health/coronavirus-covid-19>.

The **Texas Medical Board and Texas Board of Nursing** have the authority under the Governor's emergency declaration to temporarily credential physicians and nurses for the duration of the declaration in an effort to increase the number of healthcare providers in the state. Doctors may obtain information on expedited licensing at the [TMB](#) website. Nurses may obtain information on the [TBN](#) website.

The **Texas Education Agency (TEA)** is monitoring the COVID-19 situation, communicating daily with superintendents, and encouraging school districts to coordinate with their local public health authorities. TEA has provided guidance to school districts. More information on state guidance to schools can be found at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/safe-and-healthy-schools/coronavirus-covid-19-support-and-guidance>.

On Monday, March 16th, [Governor Abbott made the decision to cancel the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness \(STAAR\) Testing for the 2019-2020 school year](#). School districts across the state, including HISD, are currently closed for the next three weeks, and Texans should be prepared for the rest of the spring semester to be cancelled.

The **Texas Department of Insurance (TDI)** has issued guidance requesting all state-regulated health insurance companies operating in Texas waive consumer costs and prior authorization restrictions for COVID-19 testing and treatment. In addition, TDI has requested Texas health insurance companies remove these restrictions for general telehealth and telemedicine visits to allow Texans to access care,

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including mental healthcare remotely. For more information, please visit TDI's COVID-19 website at <https://www.tdi.texas.gov/news/2020/coronavirus-updates.html>.

The **Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals** has issued an emergency order that will allow Texas courts to modify usual proceedings and procedures for a 30-day period. In part, the order allows individual courts to conduct proceedings in a location other than regular venue (with notification to participants), take testimony by video or teleconferencing, and take other reasonable measures to avoid exposing participants to COVID-19. A listing of current court closures is available at <https://www.txcourts.gov/programs-services/court-security/emergency-court-preparedness/closures/>.

The **Office of the Attorney General (OAG)** is now empowered by the state disaster declaration to pursue enhanced penalties for individuals and businesses that scam or price gouge consumers. You may report suspected price gouging or scams to the OAG's Consumer Protection Hotline at 800-621-0508 or file a complaint online at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/consumer-protection>.

The **Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS)** has waived expiration dates for Driver Licenses, Commercial Driver Licenses, and other identification forms. The suspension will be in effect until 60 days after DPS provides further public notice that normal Driver License operations have resumed.

The **Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR)** has authorized temporary distance education for driver's education and training for occupational training for certain licenses. TDLR has also cancelled amateur and professional combative sports events licensed by the agency, as well as advisory board meetings. For information on occupational licensing and COVID-19, please visit <https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/covid19.htm>.

The **Texas Workforce Commission** have established dedicated websites for [employers](#) impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and [individuals](#) who are experiencing job loss. Individuals experiencing job loss due to COVID-19 are encouraged to submit applications for unemployment benefits [online](#).

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo announced Monday, March 16th, that restaurants will be limited to drive through and takeout only while all bars and nightclubs have been ordered to close completely for the next 15 days. For more on this and the rest of the county's resources, please visit: <https://publichealth.harriscountytexas.gov/Resources/2019-Novel-Coronavirus>.

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City of Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner has also placed the same restrictions as the county on bars and restaurants, along with closing many nonessential city offices and high volume services such as libraries. Additional Information can be found at: <https://houstonemergency.org/covid19>

Bellaire, West University Place, and Southside Place have all announced the cancellation of various events throughout the coming months and suspended reservations for city owned properties. Please keep up to date using the following links:

-Bellaire: <https://www.bellairetx.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2200>

-West University Place: <https://www.westutx.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=913>

-Southside Place: <http://www.ci.southside-place.tx.us/>

What Can You Do?

Listen to the Experts

We are all in this together, and we can combat the spread of COVID-19 by taking care of ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities, and by heeding the advice of experts. A lack of human contact doesn't have to mean a lack of human connection. Talk to loved ones by phone and text, and set up video conferences with friends to encourage one another. Maintain key elements of your daily routine, such as exercise. Going for a walk, jogging and hiking are healthy activities that can be done while following social distancing protocols.

When shopping for groceries or household supplies, you should aim to buy only what you need rather than stockpiling supplies. There are currently no supply shortages for basic groceries, but buying more than what is needed is straining Texas grocery stores' ability to keep shelves stocked.

The City of Houston and Harris County are discouraging gathering in groups greater than 10 people, per CDC recommendations.

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Practice Common-Sense Public Health Hygiene

Although COVID-19 is a novel virus, meaning no one has preexisting immunity. It is a respiratory virus that in certain patients can lead to pneumonia and hospitalization. As such, everyday practices like washing your hands for at least twenty seconds, covering your mouth and nose when sneezing, avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands, and staying home when sick are tried-and-true methods that will protect you and your loved ones. Experts advise that washing one's hands with soap is more effective than purell and other disinfectants, though using such sanitizers can be helpful in preventing the spread of the virus as well. In addition, disinfecting commonly touched objects and surfaces, like doorknobs, cellphones, car keys, and other items will further prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Furthermore, public health officials are recommending healthy individuals practice social distancing measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Good social distancing practices include avoiding in-person contact with individuals outside your immediate family. You can continue to exercise and shop for essential items, but you should try to maintain a six-foot distance between you and other individuals. Families should avoid taking their children to playgrounds or other areas where the disease can spread.

We are all in this together. Making these common-sense practices second nature during the COVID-19 outbreak will keep you and your loved ones safe. Helping engrain these practices with your family and neighbor will help all of us to stay healthy.

What Should You Do If You Are Sick?

Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to the flu, including coughing or shortness of breath, fever, and coughing and arise within 2-14 days of exposure. Those who are most at risk of contracting COVID-19 are those who have travelled to other countries or states where the virus has been spreading geographically. If you think you are sick or have been exposed, the best course of action is to isolate yourself and monitor your symptoms. If you develop symptoms, the steps you should take depend on whether you are generally in good health or among individuals with underlying health conditions.

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If you are generally in good health and have mild symptoms, you should isolate yourself at home and take care of yourself as with any cold or flu. Monitor your symptoms and immediately seek medical care if they worsen. If you live with your family or other individuals in the same home, it is important to minimize close contact to avoid spreading the virus.

Individuals at higher risk should monitor their symptoms and immediately call a healthcare provider if they develop a fever. High-risk individuals include people who are 65 and older, those with heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or high blood pressure.

Where Can I Obtain a Test?

Individuals who are experiencing symptoms and have travelled to a COVID-19 outbreak area within the past 14 days, or who have been exposed to an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, should contact their healthcare provider to obtain a physician's order for a COVID-19 test. Individuals without insurance or a healthcare provider should contact the Harris County Ask My Nurse triage hotline at 713-634-1110. COVID-19 testing is also available at private labs in the Houston area, including LabCorps and Quest Diagnostics, but this testing must be coordinated through a healthcare provider. Please note that individuals who meet CDC guidelines are eligible for COVID-19 testing.

As of March 18, 2020, the City of Houston and Harris County Public Health Department are working to finalize testing sites within the Greater Houston Area. Despite rumors, drive-through test sites are not yet open in the Greater Houston area. These entities will distribute additional details once they are finalized. My office will disseminate this information once we receive it

What To Do If You Are Uninsured?

Individuals who do not have health insurance can still receive a test for COVID-19 through their local health departments or at a private lab. Uninsured individuals can receive referrals to testing and healthcare providers by dialing the state hotline 2-1-1. Testing at a local health department is free of charge, while a

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private lab may charge a fee that varies from lab to lab. Harris County residents can also contact Harris Health's Ask My Nurse triage hotline at 713-634-1110.

My office stands ready to assist if you have any questions or require additional information or assistance relating to COVID-19 in Texas. Please do not hesitate to call my Capitol Office at 512-463-0389 or District Office 713-664-7095 or email sarah.davis@house.texas.gov if we can assist in any way.

Sincerely,

Representative Sarah Davis

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Davis".

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