

PUBLICATION

Coronavirus: Identifying Essential Activities and Businesses under Harris County Stay Home Order

Authors: Bradley E. Chambers

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A large number of Texas' biggest urban cities and counties are ordering residents to stay indoors and work from home. On March 24, Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, in a joint press conference with City of Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, issued a "Stay Home, Work Safe" Order requiring residents of Harris County (the largest county in the state) to remain in their homes in an attempt to flatten the spread of coronavirus. Specifically, residents of Harris County should stay at home, only leaving to perform Essential Activities or to provide or perform Essential Governmental Functions or to operate Essential Businesses.

According to Harris County and the City of Houston, there are four categories of **Essential Activities** allowed under the order:

- **To perform work providing essential products and services at an Essential Business or activities permitted by order.** According to the order, all non-essential businesses are to cease all activities other than allowing employees to work from home and maintaining security and maintenance of the business' property.
- **Activities essential to maintaining health and safety of you or your family.** Allowable examples include seeking emergency services, obtaining medical supplies and visiting a health care professional. Persons can also care for a family member or pet in another household.
- **Activities to obtain necessary supplies for you, your family and household.**
- **Outdoor activity, such as walking, running or biking.** These activities are allowed to continue as long as residents continue to practice social distancing – staying six feet away from others. However, public playgrounds are closed and public or private gatherings of any number of people occurring outside a living unit are prohibited.

Essential Businesses that are exempt from the order include:

- Health care operations including hospitals, clinics, dentists, pharmaceutical companies and veterinary offices.
- Government functions that provide for the health, safety, and welfare of the public.
- Businesses providing infrastructure, development, operation, and construction including construction of public works, housing, or other infrastructure to support critical needs, like gas, electricity, sewage, water, oil refining, internet, and telecommunications.
- Businesses related to transportation including gas stations, repair shops, car dealerships, manufacturers, and public transportation.
- Information technology companies providing and maintaining internet and telecommunications systems.
- Retail businesses including those that sell food, gas, household products, and supply products needed by people working from home.
- Labor union functions.
- Activities of NASA and the Port of Houston.

- Airports and related operations and hotels that serve these essential businesses.
- Businesses that provide food, shelter, and services to economically disadvantaged populations.
- Businesses providing essential services for essential operations of residences and other Essential Businesses.
- Professional services such as legal and accounting when necessary to assist in compliance with legal mandated activities or to further Essential Businesses, Essential Governmental Functions, or Critical Infrastructure.
- News media.
- Childcare and adult care services.

Any manufacturer who retools part of their business for the purpose of manufacturing and producing personal protective equipment, ventilators, or other medical supplies and equipment necessary for COVID-19 may apply for an Essential Business exemption. Further, any business not deemed an Essential Business may apply for an exemption under this Order via the Harris County website www.ReadyHarris.org.

Harris County is also taking guidance from the [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's memorandum](#) on the identification of essential critical infrastructure workers during COVID-19 response. Accordingly, the following 16 sectors are deemed essential:

- Communications
- Chemical
- Critical Manufacturing
- Commercial Facilities
- Dams
- Defense Industrial Base
- Emergency Services
- Energy
- Financial
- Food & Agriculture
- Government Facilities
- Healthcare & Public Health
- Information Technology
- Nuclear Reactors, Materials and Waste
- Transportation Systems
- Water

The Harris County Order went into effect at 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, March 24 and will be in effect until at least April 3. Violations of this Order are punishable by a fine not to exceed \$1,000 or up to 180 days in jail.

The following Texas counties and cities have also issued some form of shelter-in-place or stay-at-home orders:

March 22:

- Dallas County (Dallas) (effective 11:59 p.m. March 23)
- Hidalgo County

March 23:

- Bexar County (San Antonio) (effective from 11:59 p.m. March 24 through 11:59 p.m. April 9)
- McLennan County (Waco) (effective through April 7)

- Lubbock County
- Bell County
- Hunt County
- Cameron County (effective from 12:01 a.m., March 25 through 11:59 p.m. April 8)
- Galveston County (effective from 11:59 p.m. March 24 through April 3)
- Brazos County (effective 9:00 p.m. March 24 for two weeks)

March 24:

- Tarrant County (Fort Worth) (effective from 11:59 p.m. March 24 through April 3)
- Travis County (Austin) (effective from 11:59 p.m. March 24 through April 13)
- Collin County
- Denton County (effective March 25)
- Williamson County (effective from 11:59 p.m. March 24 through April 13)
- El Paso County
- Rockwall County (effective from 11:59 p.m. March 24 through April 1)
- Fort Bend County

If you have any questions about whether your business qualifies for an exemption under the Order, please contact [Brad Chambers](#). Also, please visit the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): What You Need to Know information page](#) on our website.