



Hidalgo County Commissioners Court

Richard F. Cortez
County Judge

David L. Fuentes
Commissioner, Precinct 1

Eduardo "Eddie" Cantu
Commissioner, Precinct 2

Joe M. Flores
Commissioner, Precinct 3

Ellie Torres
Commissioner, Precinct 4

**OFFICE OF
COUNTY JUDGE
RICHARD F. CORTEZ**

Public Affairs Division

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NEWS ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, March 25, 2020

Hidalgo County Judge Richard F. Cortez Issues Shelter At Home Order

EDINBURG – Looking to slow the spread of COVID-19, Hidalgo County Judge Richard F. Cortez ordered all residents to stay at home unless they are conducting essential business. The order becomes effective at 11:59 p.m. Thursday, March 26.

The move comes after a total of eight Hidalgo County residents learned that they have tested positive for the highly contagious COVID-19 virus. Medical experts have advised Judge Cortez that the spread of the virus could increase exponentially without drastic action to keep people at home.

"I make this extraordinary move convinced that it is the right path for the safety of the residents of Hidalgo County," Judge Cortez said. "I know this will cause hardship but I am convinced this will save lives."

The order remains in effect until April 10, but Judge Cortez has the authority to lift the order any time.

Under the order, all people in Hidalgo County must stay at home round the clock. People may travel only for essential business such as seeking medical help or going to the grocery store. Residents are also free to travel to perform essential government functions.

In addition, all businesses, except those designated as essential, must close. A partial list of these businesses are listed at the end of this release.

People may leave their homes for only specific reasons, among them:

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, and products necessary to maintain the safety, sanitation, and essential operation of households, or to deliver those services or supplies to others.

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Shelter At Home Order
Page 2 of 5
Wednesday, March 25, 2020

To engage in outdoor activity, provided the individuals comply with Social Distancing including maintaining six-foot social distancing from each other; washing hands with soap and water at least twenty seconds often or using hand sanitizer; covering coughs or sneezes; cleaning high-touch surfaces; not shaking hands.

To perform work providing essential products and services at an Essential Business or to otherwise carry out activities specifically permitted in this Order.

To care for a family member, a child or pet in another household.

"Residents must realize that the safest place for them is in their homes," Judge Cortez said. "I realize that there are essential needs for people to leave their homes. I ask these people to exercise their discretion."

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Examples of "Essential Businesses" include but are not limited to:

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 includes 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. Healthcare operations do not include fitness and exercise gyms and similar facilities. Healthcare operations do not include elective medical, surgical, and dental procedures as established in accordance with Subsection 1(e) of this Order.

Essential Government Functions. All services provided by local governments needed to ensure the continuing operation of the government agencies to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the public. Including but not limited to: (1) First responders (2) Emergency Management personnel (3) Institutions of Higher Learning (3) School personnel to include and limited to staff identified by each School's governing authority for the purposes carrying out established meal and instructional materials distribution or pickup.

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Shelter At Home Order Page 3 of 5 Wednesday, March 25, 2020

Each governing authority shall identify and designate appropriate employees, contractors, or vendors to assist in providing and effectuating Essential Government Functions. Further, nothing in this order shall prohibit any individual from performing or accessing "Essential Government Functions." All Essential Government Functions shall be performed in compliance with Social Distancing including maintaining six-foot social distancing for both employees and the general public; washing hands with soap and water at least twenty seconds often or using hand sanitizer; covering coughs or sneezes; cleaning high-touch surfaces; not shaking hands

Essential Critical Infrastructure. Work necessary to the operations and maintenance of the 16 critical infrastructure sectors as identified by the National Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA) including public works construction, residential and commercial construction, airport operations, 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), banking and financial institutions, defense and national security-related operations, essential manufacturing operations provided that they carry out those services or that work in compliance with social distancing including maintaining six foot social distancing for both employees and the general public. This includes businesses that provide repair, maintenance, services and/or supplies to those businesses identified as critical infrastructure. Essential Businesses providing essential infrastructure should implement screening precautions to protect employees and all activity shall be performed in compliance with social distancing including maintaining six foot social distancing for both employees and the general public; washing hands with soap and water at least twenty seconds often or using hand sanitizer; covering coughs or sneezes; cleaning high-touch surfaces; not shaking hands.

Essential Retail. Food service providers, including grocery stores, warehouse stores, big-box stores, bodegas, farmers markets, farm and produce stands, food banks, liquor stores, gas stations and convenience stores, that sell food, dry goods, pet food and supplies and related products and household necessities. Agriculture, food cultivation, beverage cultivation, farming, fishing, and livestock production, including processing and distribution. Businesses that ship or deliver groceries, food, goods or services directly to residences. Restaurants and other facilities that prepare and serve food, for the purposes of drive-thru, delivery 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.

- MORE -

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Shelter At Home Order
Page 4 of 5
Wednesday, March 25, 2020

The restriction of delivery or carry out does not apply to cafes and restaurants located within hospital and medical facilities. Pawn shop, Title Loan, and Personal Loan businesses, for the purposes of providing cash loan services. Laundromats, dry cleaners, and laundry service providers. Auto-supply, auto and bicycle repair, hardware stores, and related facilities. Businesses that supply products needed for people to work from home. Professional services, such as legal or accounting services, and insurance services when necessary to assist in compliance with legally mandated activities. All activity shall be performed in compliance with social distancing including maintaining six-foot social distancing for both employees and the general public; washing hands with soap and water at least twenty seconds often or using hand sanitizer; covering coughs or sneezes; not shaking hands.

Essential Services. Businesses that provide 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. All activity shall be performed in compliance with social distancing including maintaining six foot social distancing for both employees and the general public; washing hands with soap and water at least twenty seconds often or using hand sanitizer; covering coughs or sneezes; cleaning high-touch surfaces; not shaking hands.

Essential Services Necessary to Maintain Essential Operations of Residences or Other Essential Businesses. Bus, train, or airplane travel (including persons in transit). 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, HVAC-technicians, general repair contractors, landscaping and pool maintenance service providers, home-security and other service providers, contractors or businesses who provide services that are necessary to maintaining the safety, sanitation, and essential operations of residences and Essential Businesses. Businesses that provide goods and supplies, to other essential businesses which require such goods or supplies to operate. Transportation, maintenance, repair of transportation related equipment including but not limited to vehicles. All activity shall be performed in compliance with social distancing including maintaining six foot social distancing for both employees and the general public; washing hands with soap and water least twenty seconds often or using hand sanitizer; covering coughs or sneezes; cleaning high-touch surfaces; not shaking hands.

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Shelter At Home Order
Page 5 of 5
Wednesday, March 25, 2020

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

Childcare Services. Childcare facilities providing services that enable employees exempted in this Order to work as permitted.

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