



## **A NOTE FROM HIDALGO COUNTY JUDGE RICHARD F. CORTEZ**

The novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, is a challenge unlike anything we have ever faced. Local, State and Federal Officials have been working around the clock to develop and implement effective strategies to stop the transmission of this virus.

In developing our orders, my staff and I consulted with our County Commissioners, our Sheriff, our District Attorney, Judges, Mayors, Medical Professionals and Emergency Managers. We have made many difficult decisions; more lay ahead. I want everyone to understand that we are in this together. We must work as a community.

This is a shared burden. From big business to the public sector we all have a duty to do what we can to stop the transmission of COVID-19. The best way is to stay informed. Social media can be full of misinformation. I encourage all of you to seek out reliable sources of information. Copies of all our orders, current statistics and general recommendations can all be found at [Hidalgocounty.us](http://Hidalgocounty.us).

I understand that these orders will have an adverse impact on many businesses and their employees but our decisions have not been made lightly. Our objective is to save lives. We must work together to stop this terrible disease. I am asking all citizens to view these orders with the assumption that you must stay at home. When viewing these orders, you clearly see that your business is considered critical, then venture out and try to avoid crowds. It would be cumbersome and nearly impossible to draft orders that directly address everyone's unique situation.

Let me be clear: Our goal with these orders is to stop the transmission of COVID-19. We understand that we must still be able to carry out our most essential functions, but please be responsible before you ask what qualifies as essential.

The shelter at home order will be effective beginning Thursday March 26, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. I have authorized all law enforcement officers serving Hidalgo County to enforce this order. If you are in a public place you will be stopped and questioned by law enforcement. If you are not carrying out an essential function you may be cited and even arrested for violating this order.

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### **1. What is an essential function?**

- a. Work, traveling to and from work
- b. Medical, traveling to and from medical facilities for necessary assistance
- c. Food, traveling to or from a dining establishment or grocery store

### **2. Do employees need any specific identification?**

- a. To facilitate speedy resolution of a people traveling during this period, employees should be provided with employee ids or letters of verification from their employer as a matter of convenience.

### **3. What are essential occupations?**

- a. Healthcare/ Public Health
- b. Law Enforcement, Public Safety, First Responders
- c. Food and Agriculture
- d. Energy
- e. Water and Wastewater
- f. Transportation and Logistics
- g. Public Works
- h. Communications and Information Technology
- i. Other Community-Based Government Operations and Essential Functions
- j. Critical Manufacturing
- k. Hazardous Materials
- l. Financial Services
- m. Chemical
- n. Defense Industrial Base
- o. Additional guidance is available from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA):<https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CISA-Guidance-on-Essential-Critical-Infrastructure-Workers-1-20-508c.pdf>

### **4. What about faith based services?**

- a. They are limited to no more than 10 persons
- b. This includes funerals, baptisms, quincianeras, bar mitzvahs and weddings

### **5. What happens if I get stopped while engaging in a non-essential activity?**

- a. You may be fined up to \$1000 and sentenced up to 180 days in jail for failure to comply with an emergency order.

## **6. Can I travel out of Hidalgo County?**

- a. Travel outside of Hidalgo County is strongly discouraged.
- b. Those that do leave Hidalgo County should shelter at home for 14 days after returning.

## **7. Can family/friends visit from out of Hidalgo County?**

- a. No, visitation is strongly discouraged.
- b. Relatives returning home from school or other areas may return but non-essential visitation is discouraged.

## **8. Will certain County Departments close?**

- a. Hidalgo County departments have been asked to identify their essential functions.
- b. Functions that may be delayed: will be delayed until the disaster is over or they are deemed an essential function.

## **9. How does this affect parcel delivery services?**

- a. Parcel delivery is considered essential and businesses such as DHL, UPS and FedEx are not subject to limitation.
- b. They are expected to practice social distancing, follow recommended sanitation protocol and exercise sound judgment.

## **10. How can the community help?**

- a. There will be many opportunities to help as we face this challenge. We are all in this together; we can start by looking out for each other. Just because we are not in a high risk category does not mean we can be irresponsible and expose vulnerable populations.
- b. We can help elderly, disabled or mobility challenged neighbors.

## **11. Can retail stores close their doors but allow customers to order online?**

- a. Yes non-essential retail will be closed but they may still service their customers without in person interaction.

## **12. When will Hidalgo County reevaluate the order?**

- a. These orders are all under constant reevaluation. This is a fluid situation which changes daily.

## **13. Why take such extreme measures?**

- a. Hidalgo County's healthcare infrastructure will not be able to handle COVID-19 if we do not mitigate its spread.
- b. We owe it to our healthcare professionals to do our best to minimize their exposure and support them while they are on the frontlines against this virus.