



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**

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, August 12, 2020

Hidalgo County Commissioners Court approves new measures to fight COVID-19 that may result in short-term spike in numbers of newly reported cases

EDINBURG – The Hidalgo County Commissioners Court approved several measures Tuesday to supplement staffing needs by the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department in its fight against the COVID-19 virus. Eddie Olivarez, who heads the Health Department, expressed gratitude for the court's action, but warned that this is likely to result in a short-term increase in the number of reported positive cases.

"This expected jump in the number of reported cases only means that, with the help of Commissioners Court, our department will become more efficient at reporting new cases. It does not mean that the rate of infection is suddenly growing," Olivarez said.

Olivarez explained that local, state and federal protocol requires his staff to follow several specific steps when a positive case of the pandemic is reported to them. This includes inputting information about the patient; securing legal isolation orders for the patient; and fulfilling all state and federal protocol for positive cases.

"Multiply this process by hundreds of new cases each day and there is physically not enough time each day to input all of these cases," Olivarez explained. "This results in a backlog of cases that need input into our system and, ultimately, reported publicly."

To meet that growing backlog, the Health department has secured help from other county departments as well as gotten permission to hire additional temporary staff. But after five months of battling the pandemic, the structure to support the staff is reaching its limits.

Hidalgo County, for example, has access to a finite number of available email addresses -- just like any other public or private organization with its own email. A county email address is essential to allowing people to enter the Health Department's databases and ensure it fulfills all state and federal privacy laws. Commissioners Court on Tuesday approved the acquisition of additional email addresses.

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Hidalgo County is home to one of the fastest growing regions in the nation. We provide health and justice to the over 800,000 residents of our county. We strive to be accessible and responsive to our citizens by providing excellent public service through the values of leadership, transparency, fairness, collaboration, respect and fiscal responsibility. Follow our social media feed at www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/followus



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These measures were enacted to increase the efficiency of the Health Department and its reporting mechanism, and will begin to chip away at the backlog of cases that need to be input into the system. But the short-term effect is expected to be a bump in the number of new reported cases. "That's a good thing because it means we are moving toward having the most current information as possible," Olivarez said. But he cautioned that any short-term bump in the number of newly reported cases should not be interpreted as a rise in the rate that this virus is being spread.

"As we look ahead, we can see several factors that may affect the rate of infection -- Labor Day weekend and how area schools choose to open," Olivarez said. "But increasing our efficiency in reporting new cases are not among those factors."

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