



Hays County News

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Hays County Judge Issues New COVID Order

Includes Requiring Masks in Public

Hays County Courthouse, San Marcos, TX – Hays County Judge Ruben Becerra today issued a new executive order that, among other provisions, requires face coverings be worn in public.

From the steps of the Historic Hays County Courthouse, Judge Becerra announced the new Order, which closely models what several other Central Texas counties are implementing.

“With our COVID-19 case counts increasing rapidly here in Hays County, including the 210 cases today alone,” he said, “it’s important that we get back to doing those simple things that can help protect the most vulnerable in our community.”

Effective Monday, June 22, Judge Becerra’s new Order will accomplish three things:

1. Continue the local disaster declaration and public health emergency here in Hays County
2. Require all commercial entities in Hays to develop and implement a health and safety policy, and
3. Require all people 10 and older to wear a face covering when in public, when unable to keep six feet away from other people.

This Order, which is detailed below, expires July 20, 2020.

Continuation of Executive Order: This Executive Order shall continue the local disaster declaration and public health emergency for Hays County for the period specified in Order and shall incorporate and adopt the most recent executive order GA-26 issued by Governor Greg Abbott on June 3, 2020, and any subsequent orders by the Governor relating to the expanded opening of Texas in response to the COVID-19 disaster.

Health & Safety Policies: From the date of this Executive Order, all commercial entities in Hays County providing goods or services directly the public must develop and implement a health and safety policy ("Health and Safety Policy"). The policy must require, at a minimum, that all employees or visitors to the commercial entity's business

premises or other facilities wear face coverings when in an area or performing an activity which will necessarily involve close contact or proximity to co-workers or the public where six feet of separation is not feasible.

The Health and Safety Policy required to be developed and implemented by this Executive Order may also include the implementation of other mitigating measures designed to control and reduce the transmission of COVID-19 such as temperature checks or health screenings. Commercial entities must post the Health and Safety Policy required by this Executive Order in a conspicuous location sufficient to provide notice to employees and visitors of all health and safety requirements. Failure to develop and implement the Health and Safety Policy required by this Executive Order within five (5) calendar days following the Effective Date may result in a fine not to exceed \$1,000 for each violation.

Wearing Face Coverings: All people 10 years or older shall wear a face covering over their nose and mouth when in a public place within Hays County where it is difficult to keep six feet away from other people or working in areas that involve close proximity with other coworkers. The CDC advises face coverings for people 2 years or older. Face coverings may include homemade masks, scarfs, bandanas, or a handkerchief. Hays County residents should continue to maintain physical distancing of at least six feet while outside their home. Hays County employees are also required to wear face coverings under the same circumstances as the general public.

Face coverings do not need to be worn in the following circumstances:

- When exercising outside or engaging in physical activity outside
- While driving alone or with passengers who are part of the same household as the driver
- When doing so poses a greater mental or physical health, safety, or security risk
- While pumping gas or operating outdoor equipment
- While in a building or activity that requires security surveillance or screening, for example, banks
- When consuming food or drink

Please note: Face coverings are not a replacement for social distancing, frequent handwashing, and self-isolation when sick. All people should follow Centers for Disease Control recommendations for how to wear and take off a mask. Residents should employ the following habits while in public:

- Washing hands before you leave home and when you return,
- Staying at least six feet away from others,
- Avoiding touching nose or face,
- Not using disposable masks more than three times, and
- Washing reusable cloth masks regularly to prevent the spread of the virus.

Consistent with Executive Order GA-26 issued by Governor Greg Abbott, no civil or criminal penalty will be imposed on individuals for failure to wear a face covering.

Emergency Operations Director Alex Villalobos said during the conference that Hays County has also helped local families by providing 3,000 families with food through two mass distributions. In addition, in conjunction with the Texas Division of Emergency Management and the Texas Army National Guard, the County has offered free COVID-19 testing for several thousand residents.

Judge Becerra reiterated that it's important for residents and businesses to work together.

"I feel it is necessary to issue an order to slow the aggressive spread of this relentless virus," he said. "This is not a fight we can give up on, the pandemic is far from over."

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