

Gov. Abbott eases Covid-19 restrictions

Texas, on Monday, began relaxing some coronavirus restrictions, including allowing restaurants to let more people inside.

Bars though still remain closed indefinitely and a mask mandate is still in place following a massive summer spread.

Gov. Greg Abbott issued Executive Orders on Thursday expanding occupancy levels for restaurants, retail stores, office buildings, manufacturing facilities, gyms and exercise facilities and classes, museums, and libraries, and re-authorizing elective surgeries for a majority of the state of Texas. The Governor also announced new guidance related to visitations at nursing homes and long-term care facilities across the state.

Under the new orders, restaurants and retail shops that until now have only been allowed to operate at half capacity were allowed to open up to 75% starting Monday in most of the state.

NURSING HOME GUIDELINES

The Governor announced new visitation guidance for eligible nursing homes, assisted living facilities, intermediate care facilities, home and community-based service providers, and inpatient hospice effective Thursday, September 24th. Under the new rules, residents will be allowed to designate up to two essential family caregivers who will be provided necessary training to allow them to safely go inside a facility for a scheduled visit, including in the resident's room, to help ensure their loved one's physical, social, and emotional needs are being met. Designated caregivers will not be required to maintain physical distancing, but only one caregiver can visit a resident at a time.

Texas Tech sets record attendance

Despite challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Texas Tech University has continued a growth trend that has made it one of the fastest-growing institutions in the United States in the last 10 years. This fall, Texas Tech has again attained a record enrollment, for the 12th consecutive year, with 40,322 students as of the 20th day of class on Monday (Sept. 21).

"The most impressive aspect of our growth is that it has been achieved alongside significant improvements in student success as reflected in record retention and graduation rates and widespread recognition of Texas Tech as a national research institution," said Lawrence Schovanec, Texas Tech president. "This significant benchmark in enrollment reflects the work of our faculty and staff, increased scholarship support, enhanced recruitment and marketing strategies, and the support and success of our alumni who contribute to the Texas Tech brand."

This fall's enrollment, which includes a record number of 7,053 graduate students.

Texas Tech's growth has been accompanied by record retention and graduation rates

A long-term care facility resident (or legal representative) can designate the essential caregiver, who can be a family member, friend, or other individual. Facilities are required to train essential caregivers on the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other infection control measures. Proper PPE must be used at all times during these scheduled visits, and the caregiver must test negative for COVID-19 within the previous 14 days before the initial visit.

For general visitors who are not a designated essential caregiver, these updated emergency rules will allow approved facilities to schedule outdoor no contact visits, open window visits, or indoor visitation with the use of plexiglass safety barriers to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Physical contact between residents and general visitors is not permitted. Facilities also must continue to meet all additional visitation requirements outlined in the emergency rules.

In addition, the Governor implemented the use of reliable, data driven hospitalization metrics used by doctors and medical experts to help guide the state's ongoing efforts to contain COVID-19 and expand occupancy for businesses and services. This metric focuses on areas with high hospital-

izations — referring to any Trauma Service Area (TSA) that has had seven consecutive days in which the number of COVID-19 hospitalized patients as a percentage of all hospitalized patients exceeds 15%, until such time as the TSA has seven consecutive days in which the number of COVID-19 hospitalized patients as a percentage of all hospitalized patients is 15% or less.

Using this metric, 19 of the 22 TSAs in Texas qualify to increase occupancy levels to 75% for restaurants, retail stores, office buildings, manufacturing facilities, gyms, exercise facilities and classes, museums, and libraries beginning September 21.

In addition, these 19 TSAs can also resume elective surgeries. Three of the 22 TSAs (S-Victoria, T-Laredo, and V-Lower Rio Grande Valley) must remain at 50% occupancy and continue postponing elective surgeries until the hospitalization metric requirements are met. These three TSAs contain the following counties: Calhoun, DeWitt, Goliad, Jackson, Lavaca, Victoria, Jim Hogg, Webb, Zapata, Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy.

"With the medical advancements we have made and the personal hygiene practices we have adopted, Texans

have shown that we can address both the health and safety concerns of COVID-19 while also taking careful, measured steps to restore the livelihoods that Texans depend on," said Governor Abbott. "Achieving both goals requires safe standards that contain COVID-19, emphasize protecting the most vulnerable, and establish clear metrics that the public can depend on. That is why today we have announced expanded occupancy standards for a variety of services. But, Texans should remember that a steady and significant decline in COVID-19 cases is not a sign to let up in our vigilance against the virus. Instead, Texans must continue to heed the guidance of medical experts by wearing a mask, social distancing, and practicing proper sanitation strategies. By maintaining health and safety standards that are proven to mitigate COVID-19, we can continue to slow the spread while opening up the Texas economy."

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and a cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death.

Final BDC meeting for two directors

DANIEL WALKER
VERNON RECORD

The Board of Directors of the Vernon Business Development Corporation held their September meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 16. The meeting was the final one for directors George Daigle and Grady Stowe, whose six-year terms expired this month. Both were thanked by staff and the other directors for their work on guiding the BDC.

Following the meeting, the directors adjourned to take a tour of the Pearson Livestock facility. The BDC gave the company an economic incentive of \$132,500 in May 2020 for the company to expand manufacturing and add five new jobs at their location at 122 Wilbarger Street. The directors were invited to tour the location to see the progress made on the expansion.

Register by Oct. 5 in order to vote

Texas Secretary of State Ruth R. Hughs, on Tuesday, invited all eligible Texans to celebrate and participate in National Voter Registration Day by ensuring they are registered to vote ahead of the October 5th voter registration deadline for the November 3rd election. With two weeks until the deadline, the Secretary issued a final call to action to voters, community leaders, and elected officials to encourage their fellow Texans to register and prepare to vote in the upcoming election.

"An active and engaged citizenry plays an essential role in ensuring the continued well-being of our democracy," said Secretary Hughs. "Ahead of the November election, I encourage all eligible Texans who have not already done so to register to vote by October 5th so that they can help shape the future of the Lone Star State."

Texans should begin by checking their registration status on the Texas Secretary of State's website on the "Am I Registered?" page.

If you have moved to a new address within the same county or have changed your name, you can update your information online.

Call 1-800-252-VOTE or visit VoteTexas.gov for more info.



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