

APRIL 2, 2020

MAYOR'S UPDATE RE: COVID-19

Good afternoon, it is a beautiful day in Oxford, Mississippi and there is no place I'd rather be...even in a pandemic.

As many of you have seen, Governor Reeves issued an Executive Order yesterday mandating a statewide Shelter in Place effective at 5:00 pm on Friday, April 3rd and remaining in place until Monday, April 20th. The City of Oxford intends to comply fully with this order.

At a Special Meeting this morning at 10:00, our Board passed a third resolution that both extended and strengthened the restrictions previously in place and incorporates the Governor's most recent Order through April 20th.

The Executive Order allows restaurants to continue to offer curbside pick-up, drive-thru, and delivery options. We are thankful to the restaurants who are open providing this valuable service to our community.

The Executive Order continues to allow services identified as "Essential Businesses" to remain open including grocery stores, convenience stores, pharmacies and healthcare offices, clinics and facilities; veterinarian offices, hardware stores, laundromats and all other businesses listed in the Governor's previous Executive Orders and Supplements.

The Governor clarified that general retail and department stores are not intended to be open, except to the extent that they are part of essential critical infrastructure and supply essential services and goods.

If you are wondering what Shelter in Place means, Gov Reeves spelled it out for us in his Order:

Individuals may leave their residences only to perform the following Essential Activities:

1. To engage in activities or perform tasks necessary to their health and safety, or the health and safety of their family or household members (including pets) or the health and safety of those persons who are unable to or should not leave their home.
2. To obtain necessary food, services or supplies for themselves and members of their household needed to maintain the safety, sanitation and essential operation of the home or residence, or to deliver those services or goods to those persons who are unable to or should not leave their home.
3. To engage in individual outdoor activity and recreation.
4. To perform work providing essential products or services at Essential Businesses or Operations or to carry out activities permitted in this Executive Order.

The Executive Order does not allow for non-essential businesses to continue curbside services as was granted in our previous Resolution. This means that retail establishments that are not essential cannot continue curbside service for the next two weeks. Our attorney's interpretation is that we can allow non-essential retail to offer delivery service. The rationale being that things ordered online are still allowed to be delivered so ordering locally should be allowed the same option. Non-essential retail stores cannot open to customers, even by appointment at this time.

The Executive Order Prohibits numerous indoor and outdoor activities which means the skate park, dog parks, playgrounds, tennis courts, and pools - those in apartment complexes and community pools must be closed. The gyms and community rooms at these apartments should have already been closed.

In the Resolution adopted by our Board today, essential businesses that remain open – grocery stores, Walmart, HomeDepot, Dollar Generals, pharmacies, hardware stores – will be required to implement the following to enforce appropriate social distancing:

They must have prominent signs at every entrance informing customers they must stay 6 feet away from other customers who did not accompany them to the store;

Businesses with public address systems must make regular announcements instructing customers to stay 6 feet apart

Businesses will install markers on the floor and signage measuring 6' intervals and instructing people where to stand in checkout lanes and other lines;

Employees should be specifically tasked with monitoring and enforcing social distancing throughout the building;

Cashless purchases and self-service checkout is to be encouraged where available.

We are strongly suggesting one buggy – one person. Grocery shopping is not a team sport. Please leave your children attended at home. Don't take your spouse or friend just to go along for the ride. This should not be a social gathering.

A few questions that I have received today are about different businesses and whether they are considered “essential.” Remember that even if the business is essential, the rules of social distancing and strict hygiene apply. Let's take construction and landscape companies as an example because I have had numerous questions about this today. If one person is cutting the grass that is ok. If more than 2 people are riding in a truck together that is not ok.

We need to develop this mentality: the question we need to ask ourselves is, “Am I contributing to the spread of this virus to my employees, customers, family and friends?”

We had a conference call with the Governor earlier and the Mayor of Gulfport Billy Hewes said, “We should all conduct our selves as if we have the virus and want to make sure we don't spread it to anyone.”

He also said, “This too shall pass...kinda like a kidney stone.”

In Lafayette County today, we have 16 reported cases of Covid-19. There are 1,177 total reported cases in the State and 26 deaths. The number of cases in Lafayette County is not seeing the big increases that many other counties are seeing. We implemented our restrictions about two weeks before most. It's working. And I am so very proud of the citizens of this community for being part of the solution. Please hang with us. It's not easy but it is critically necessary.

It took a while to get the testing ramped up, but each day it appears there are more tests available. Our goal is to protect as many people as possible, slow the virus, and protect our healthcare system from being overwhelmed.

Please join us. It will take all of us.

Dr. Anthony Fauci this morning on the Today Show referring to sheltering at home said:

“I know it's difficult but we are having a lot of suffering and a lot of death. This is inconvenient from an economic and personal standpoint, but we just have to do it. That is our major weapon against this virus right now. We don't have a vaccine that is deployable. This is the only thing we have. And we can get

through it if everybody really leans forward and pushes on this.”

When asked about exemptions that states are approving, he said:

“Are those exemptions appropriate when you think about what is going on?”

SHELTER IN PLACE means shelter in place. Our future depends on each of you continuing to do your part.

We are stronger together.