

Fayette County Judge Joe Weber Press Release

29 April 2020

To the residents of Fayette County.....yesterday Governor Abbot began the formal process of reopening Texas. Through a series of executive orders he lifted the current stay at home policy effective end of the day Thursday, 30 April 2020. He also initiated Phase I of Texas's reopening of our non-essential businesses in an effort to begin the careful and safe process of returning all of our residents to work. This statewide reopening is to begin this Friday, 1 May 2020. The key point with respect to the reopening is that businesses must limit customers within their facilities to 25% of their total occupancy. The details on this encouraging move can be found on the web at <https://gov.texas.gov/organization/opentexas>. This reopening plan contains 14 checklists with minimum recommended health protocols for both owners and occupants to follow. This document is laid out extremely well and easy to navigate for both business owners and customers in determining which protocols are applicable for specific types of businesses and organizations. I believe it will prove extremely helpful to business owners and will answer some of the questions I know they will have. The document also includes good information on resources available to businesses as well as information on what lies ahead for reopening our schools throughout the state and education in general. Our local Ag Extension Service has also put out a COVID-19 Federal Response Resource Matrix available on its website and the county's which should prove most informative and helpful. To my knowledge, the only businesses that were not on the reopening list for Phase I were massage parlors, tattoo studios, hair salons, gyms, barber shops, bowling alleys and arcades. Hopefully, these will follow in Phase II which could come as soon as the 18th of May. In light of the fact that spring in our county begins the cycle of church picnics, private organization fundraisers, Volunteer Fire Department fundraisers, traditional dance hall activities, etc. -- these events remain on hold. The recommendation and guidance to prevent large gatherings and to limit groups of people gathering in public and private to ten remains in effect. Hopefully, these events and activities that we all so much enjoy can soon be resumed as well, particularly if our county continues to keep the spread of the virus to a minimum while protecting our most vulnerable, our first responders and our healthcare providers and their capacity to treat those infected.

Confirmed COVID-19 cases in Fayette County remain at 16 with active cases now down to 5. The message here is that our local healthcare providers, EMS, Emergency Management Department, first responders and our nursing/assisted living home staffs are doing a tremendous job identifying, managing, tracking and treating our infected residents, and even better news is that we are starting to see a good number of those testing positive fully recover. However, it is with much sadness that I report we had our first death in the county last week as a result of the COVID-19 virus. I ask that we all remember this victim and his family in our thoughts and prayers.

On Friday at 9:00 a.m. mobile testing at the fairgrounds will commence with the assistance of the Texas State Guard. The goal is to test between 60-80 people. Testing will be by appointment only. To sign up for the testing visit TXCOVIDTEST.ORG or call (512) 883-2400. You will be screened to see if you have certain symptoms and if selected, given an appointment and time to be at the mobile testing site. To be tested does not require a script or directive from your local physician or the Department of State Health Services (DSHS). I encourage all residents who would like to be tested to call or sign up for the test on the website. The test is free. Testing will be conducted from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Friday only. Information on any future testing of this nature will be disseminated as we receive it. I fully anticipate additional testing within our county and associated testing support to increase over the next several weeks. Please understand that with increased testing, we can expect increased positive cases, but I firmly believe the county at this point in time will be able to manage those cases in a safe and responsible manner.

On another note and not related to the COVID, the county remains in the midst of the 2020 census. Our most current self-registration rate is 42%. This means only 42% of those who have received their census notice in the mail have either completed and returned them by mail or registered on-line or responded by phone. The current self-registration rate for TEXAS is 49%. I know we all have many other things on our minds right now, but I would ask all of our county leaders and residents to make a push to get that registration rate up as high as possible. Registering on-line takes little more than 10 minutes. The entire census and the timeline for consolidating the results have been pushed back for obvious reasons. But if we can get our rate up now, the county will be in a better position to secure the many benefits at both the federal and state level that can come to our county, as well as insuring accurate data for any future redistricting. If you can, please take the time to register.

Finally, with Texas's reopening this coming Friday, so too will the courthouse and other county offices and services begin their movement back to normal operations. Beginning Friday morning, the east-side (main) entrance of the courthouse will be unlocked for employees and people requiring services within the courthouse itself. All other courthouse entrances will remain locked. I would ask those requesting services please call ahead with their requests so each department can be best prepared to meet your needs. Each of the offices will be establishing their own health and hygiene protocols based on the size of the office and the ability to maintain the social distancing and personal protection. I strongly encourage all who enter our reopened county offices to wear a face covering, particularly if they are in an environment that prevents them from maintaining recommended social distancing. All departments will work closely with our residents to insure the protection and safety of both county employees as well as the people for whom they serve. The courthouse lobby will not be open to visitors or those merely seeking restroom facilities at this point in time. Your cooperation and understanding is appreciated.

Fayette County and all counties in Texas are being given the opportunity to get our businesses going again, to get our people back to work and to reestablish the livelihood to which we are

accustomed. The delicate balance between maintaining both our health and our life giving economy is now truly being put to the test. We can and will come through Phase I of the Governor's plan if we continue to take on personal responsibility when it comes to sanitization, social distancing, personal protection and the protection of our healthcare providers to treat and manage those who become infected. I continue to be grateful to all of our community leaders and to all of the residents for their commitment to do the right things as we all work together towards complete health and economic recovery. God bless.....and stay healthy!

Joe Weber

Fayette County Texas Judge