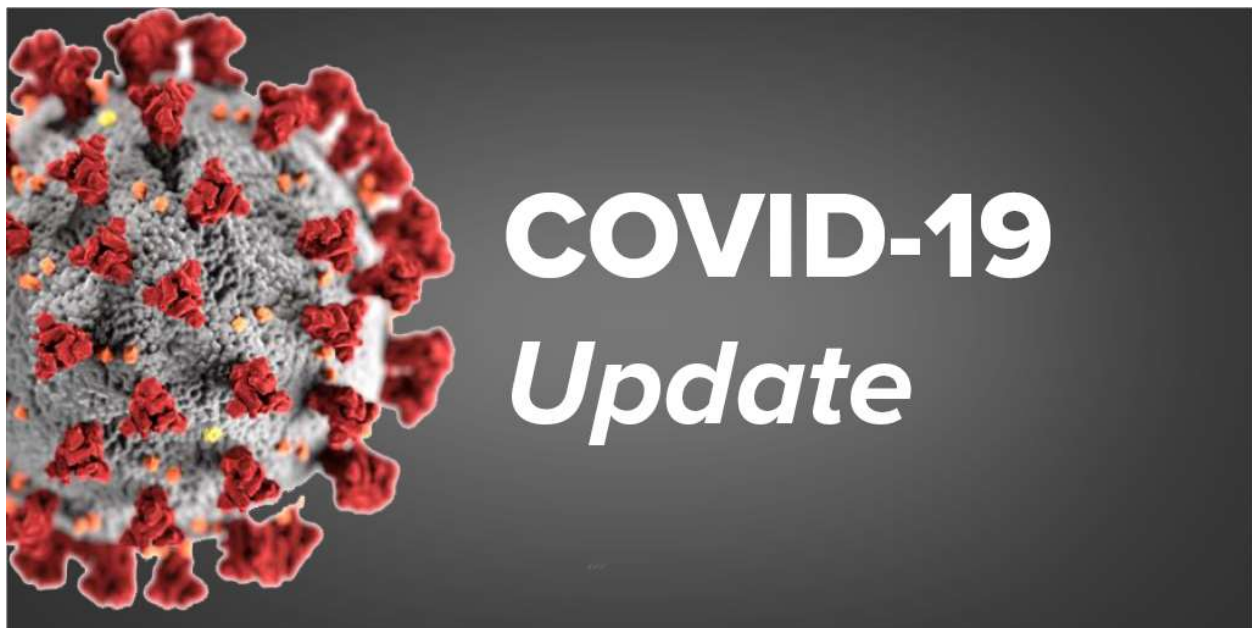




# CITY OF AUSTIN

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Release Date: Mar. 17, 2020



*Community gatherings of 10 people or more are prohibited due to “the substantial risks to the public”*

Austin-Travis County is closing bars and suspending dine-in service at restaurants for six weeks under new Orders aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19.

Under the new Orders, food establishments are ordered to close common dining areas open to the public and encouraged to provide take-away, delivery or drive-thru, to limit exposure between individuals. Meanwhile, bars are ordered to close common bar spaces open to the public and are prohibited from allowing consumption on premises.

Community gatherings of 10 people or more in a single room or other confined indoor or

outdoor space are prohibited, due to “the substantial risks to the public”. However, a number of “critical facilities” are exempt from the Orders. They include but are not limited to government buildings providing essential services, schools or colleges, grocery stores and pharmacies, transit and transit facilities, the airport and airport operations, and hospitals and medical facilities. In these places “social distancing” and frequent cleaning is strongly encouraged.

At the same time, parts of the community’s “critical infrastructure” are ordered to continue operating. They include Austin Bergstrom International Airport and CapMetro operations, communications, emergency services, energy, and water and wastewater systems. These services are also encouraged to implement screening precautions to protect employees.

The new Orders, which will run from 12:00 p.m. Tuesday, March 17, until May 1, 2020 unless changed, were adopted by Austin Mayor Steve Adler and Travis County Judge Sarah Eckhardt as the reported number of local cases of COVID-19 rose to 10. Austin Public Health (APH) epidemiologists and nurses are currently conducting contact tracing on hundreds of people believed to have come into contact with the people tested positive in the local area. All of the cases so far are related to travel outside Austin-Travis County.

**Read the City of Austin's Order [HERE](#).**

“Our acts, individually and collectively, will determine how fast and how hard the virus hits our city,” said Mayor Steve Adler. “We know today’s Order will create huge hardships for many and we resolve to do all we can to address the economic impact this virus is having. But public health must remain our first priority and the experts tell us these are steps we must take. As we have done before, we’ll do this together and help each other.”

“We must be proactive and unified in meeting this challenge,” said Travis County Judge Sarah Eckhardt. “COVID-19 uses us as its vehicle to circulate through our community. So, we are ordering our community to stop circulating. In this time when we can’t hold hands, we are finding other ways to stay connected and support one another.”

“Our City and County are at a critical point in time where we can take certain steps to prevent a community spread,” said Dr. Mark Escott, Interim Health Authority for Austin-Travis County. “As we look at other cities and states that are experiencing the spread of the virus at a faster pace, it is evident that we need to increase our measures to keep our residents safe and healthy. In the medical field, we know from decades of past outbreaks that social distancing is one of the most effective ways to prevent spread is to limit exposure between people. But we are also advocating for solidarity. Over the coming weeks our personal hygiene choices will be the main factor to keeping our community safe.”

The new Austin-Travis County Orders are consistent with CDC recommendations to

follow a community-wide approach using social distancing to reduce illness and death. They will be enforced by peace officers, City of Austin Code Department inspectors, and the Office of the Austin Fire Marshall. A violation is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000 or jail of up to 180 days.

The COVID-19 virus, which has already killed more than 7,000 people globally, spreads through person-to-person contact, especially in group settings. In recent days the numbers of people testing positive across the U.S. has continued to rise and on March 15 the Centers on Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended that organizers cancel or postpone events of 50 people or more to limit people's interactions. On March 16 the White House issued strict new guidelines, entitled "[15 Days to Slow the Spread](#)," which urged people to "avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people" and to "avoid eating or drinking at bars, restaurants and food courts".

Austin-Travis County Health Authority has produced a series of recommendations for vulnerable populations, workplaces and businesses, schools, and grocery stores and pharmacies.

There is no need for our community to hoard groceries or supplies as shelves have been and will continue to be restocked. The community is urged to buy what you need and leave some for your neighbors. Grocery stores and pharmacies are urged to:

- Increase the use and capability of drive-thru, curbside, or delivery services.
- Limit or restrict the number of customers permitted in a store at one time.
- Minimize the number of employees working within arm's length of one another.
- Provide hand washing capabilities, hand sanitizers, and tissues.
- Frequently clean high-touch surface areas like countertops, doorknobs, and handrails.
- Ensure appropriate social distancing of lines.

As the new Orders are implemented, City of Austin departments will be communicating about the range of services they provide to help people in the service, events, music and other industries who are likely to be impacted most by the new restrictions.