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MAYOR'S OFFICE PRESS RELEASE

Mayor Turner Announces Changes to Operating Procedures for City of Houston Bars, Nightclubs and Restaurants

Houston Health Department Broadens COVID-19 Social Distancing Guidance for All Houstonians

March 16, 2020 -- Mayor Sylvester Turner joined Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo and local health officials Monday afternoon to announce new measures to help contain and mitigate COVID-19.

Mayor Turner and Judge Hidalgo ordered bars and nightclubs to close and food-service establishments to stop in-service dining for 15 days, effective at 8 a.m. on March 17, 2020.

The order does not affect restaurant carry-out, delivery or drive-thru services, third-party delivery services, or grocery stores. The goal is to gain compliance, but violations could result in citations.

"We are making tough decisions in the best interest of the city of Houston," Mayor Turner said. "We must take deliberative action to protect ourselves and our loved ones, and do everything possible to stop coronavirus from spreading."



Press Conference Graphic

The Houston Health Department also broadened its COVID-19 social distancing guidance for the general public. The department now recommends all Houstonians stay away from groups of 10 or more people where there will be close contact with others.

"While most healthy people will recover from COVID-19, older adults and people with weakened immune systems are at increased risk of serious health consequences," said Dr. David Persse, local health authority for the Houston Health Department. "If everyone avoids large gatherings, we will reduce the likelihood of young, healthy people giving their grandparents or immune-compromised friends a virus from which they may not recover."

Last week, Mayor Turner signed a proclamation declaring a Local State of Disaster Due to a Public Health Emergency to help contain and mitigate COVID-19 spread. As a result of the emergency order, the

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Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo closed and city-sponsored, produced, and permitted events were postponed or canceled through the end of March.

City council will meet in emergency session at 9 a.m., Tuesday, March 17 to consider extending the order indefinitely.

Mayor Turner and the Houston Health Department continue to encourage employers to allow their employees to work in ways that minimizes close contact with large groups of people. Suggestions include telecommute options, offering scheduling flexibility, and staggering start and end times.

"This is not a lock-down," Mayor Turner said. "Our goal is to flatten the curve and slow the progression of COVID-19 so that it does not overwhelm our health care system."

Most people with COVID-19 will feel like they have a bad cold or the flu. Some people will require hospitalization. People who are at most risk for severe illness are elderly or have other health conditions.

While COVID-19 is a new respiratory virus, daily precautions recommended to prevent respiratory illnesses are the same:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizer when you can't wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue and throw the tissue away. If you don't have a tissue, use the elbow of your sleeve. Don't use your hands to cover coughs and sneezes.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick and keep children home when they are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Get a flu shot. (Although the flu shot does not protect against COVID-19, it is flu season.)

Houstonians should visit [HoustonEmergency.org](https://www.houstontexas.gov/2020/03/17/houston-emergency) for updated information about local risk, routine protective actions, frequently asked questions, communication resources, rumor control, emergency preparedness tips, and more.