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Press Release

Hillsboro, TX – The number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Hill County remained at 18 overnight, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) report. Of those, DSHS shows 6 recoveries, 11 active cases, and 1 deceased. Statewide numbers report 34,422 cases in Texas with 1,822 patients hospitalized, 948 fatalities. An estimated 17,622 individuals are listed as recovered from the virus while 15,672 are still believed to be active cases.

“Every day we don’t add a new case of COVID-19 in Hill County is a good day,” said Hill County Judge Justin Lewis. “We continue to work with communities, businesses and individuals who have been adversely affected by this dangerous illness. We must recognize this is a marathon and not a sprint and the impact will be felt for a long time,” continued Lewis. “To continue making forward progress, we must commit to following the sanitation and social distancing guidelines to protect one another as we reintegrate into our daily activities,” stated Lewis. “For many, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, but for others, they can’t see it yet. We have to help them get there.”

Yesterday in a press conference, Texas Governor Greg Abbott made several clarifications and modifications to the executive orders he issued last week. One of the highlights of the announcements was May 8th being set as the day hair salons, barber shops and other selected self-care businesses can open under some limitations including maintaining social distancing distances between work stations. Stylists are limited to one customer at a time and customers are encouraged to wait in their vehicles instead of inside the facilities. The full text of the addendum to the executive order outlines all the regulations businesses must follow to be able to reopen at this time.

In addition, May 18th was set as the date gyms and physical fitness businesses can reopen for limited operations at a 25% occupancy rate for indoor settings. Showers and locker rooms must remain closed until further notice and patrons are required to wear gloves covering their entire hand and fingers, and they must always maintain six feet of separation among themselves. Non-essential manufacturers may also reopen on May 18th with no more than 25% of their workforce in the building at any one time. Other businesses allowed to reopen on May 18th are office buildings. If five or fewer people work in the building, all employees may return to work. For larger operations, no more than 25% of the workforce may return.

Other announcements included the creation of Surge Response Teams for the State of Texas. These teams will be mobilized to areas where infection rates spike as activities resume. They are designed to find reasons for the increase in infection rates, provide modifications to eliminate problem areas, and resources to manage an outbreak quickly. Weddings were added to the list of events including funerals, memorials, burials and church services which are allowable activities as long as the seating requirements set forth by the Governor’s office are followed.

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The previous orders provided guidelines for the use of parks. The new announcements clarified those parameters should also be followed at beaches, rivers and lakes. Wearing face masks is recommended and no gatherings of more than five people, unless they are all from the same household, are allowed in any of these locations. Restaurants are still limited to a 25% occupancy rate for indoor seating areas, but they are not held to that same standard for outdoor seating, as long as social distancing guidelines and other requirements for indoor seating arrangements can be upheld in outdoor venues.

“New guidelines for conducting business means we’re making progress, but it also means business owners and consumers must take time to educate themselves to protect their livelihoods, family and friends,” said Lewis. “Various groups across Hill County are working hard to understand the requirements, provide resources to help our businesses open their doors again, and deliver information to our residents to make educated decisions about how they obtain the goods and services they need and want,” finished Lewis.

Consumers and business owners seeking information on the guidelines to follow as some operations reopen can reference Governor Abbott’s report, *Texans Helping Texans: The Governor’s Report to Open Texas* at: <https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/opentexas/OpenTexas-Report.pdf>.

Residents should continue to take all precautions available to protect their households. If individuals or businesses need assistance during this time, please visit the website, www.raisinghilltx.com, for a listing of available resources in our area.

Information on the spread of the Coronavirus across Texas is available at the DSHS dashboard website, <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>. To monitor updates from Hill County, the most current information will be provided on the Hill County Emergency Management Facebook Page and *KHBR 1560 AM Radio* and the *Hillsboro Reporter*.