



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

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Governor Abbott Expands Business Openings In Texas, Announces Surge Response Teams To Combat COVID-19

Issues Guidance For Class of 2020 Graduation Ceremonies

AUSTIN - Governor Greg Abbott today held a press conference where announced that he will be issuing an Executive Order to expand openings of certain businesses and activities. The Governor also announced new guidance from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) on graduation ceremonies and the creation of Surge Response Teams to combat any COVID-19 flare ups in Texas.

"Texas is in a position to continue opening parts of our economy because of the efforts and determination of the people of Texas," said Governor Abbott. "Over the past month, Texans have worked together to contain the spread of COVID-19 by following social distancing practices and staying at home whenever possible. As we move forward, I urge all Texans to continue following these social distancing guidelines and the health standards we have provided. With every Texan doing their part, we will contain COVID-19, we will unleash our entrepreneurs, and we will make it through this challenge together."

The Governor was joined for the press conference by Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Commissioner John Hellerstedt, MD, Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) Chief Nim Kidd, Texas Health and Human Services (HHSC) Acting Executive Commissioner Phil Wilson, TEA Commissioner Mike Morath, and Adjutant General of Texas Maj. Gen. Tracey Norris.

Per the Governor's announcement, wedding venues and services required to conduct weddings may immediately open. Weddings held indoors other than at a church, congregation, or house of worship must limit occupancy to 25%. Wedding reception services may also resume, but facilities must limit their occupancy to 25% of the total listed

occupancy. These occupancy limits do not apply to the outdoor areas of a wedding reception or to outdoor wedding receptions.

Beginning May 8, cosmetology salons, hair salons, barber shops, nail salons and shops, and other establishments where licensed cosmetologists or barbers practice their trade, may open, but all such salons, shops, and establishments must ensure at least six feet of social distancing between operating work stations. Tanning salons may also reopen under the same limitation. Also starting May 8, swimming pools may open subject to certain limitations, including on their occupancy or operating levels.

Beginning May 18, office buildings may open with the greater of five or less individuals or 25% of the total office workforce. These individuals must maintain appropriate social distancing. Gyms, exercise facilities, and exercise classes may also open on May 18, but must operate at 25% occupancy. Locker rooms and shower facilities will remain closed, but restrooms may open. Non-essential manufacturing services may also open on May 18 but facilities must limit their occupancy to 25%.

These newly opened services are subject to recommended minimum standard health protocols outlined by DSHS. These protocols will be available on the [Open Texas webpage](#).

During the press conference, Chief Kidd and Commissioner Wilson provided details on the newly formed Surge Response Teams. These teams are led by TDEM and HHSC and include representatives from the the Texas Military Department, DSHS, the Texas Emergency Medical Task Force, and BCFS Health and Human Services. Surge Response Teams will serve nursing homes, prisons, packing plants, and other facilities that experience flare ups of COVID-19 by providing personal protective equipment, testing supplies, onsite staffing, and assessment assistance. These teams will also work with local officials to establish health and social distancing standards to contain these flare ups. Several Surge Response Teams have already been deployed to locations across the state. [Chief Kidd and Commissioner Wilson's presentation is available here](#).

TEA Commissioner Morath also provided new guidance on class of 2020 graduation ceremonies for Texas school districts. The TEA is providing four different pathways for schools to celebrate their graduating seniors, and each district is at liberty to determine if any of these options best serve the needs and desires of their community:

- **Completely virtual ceremonies** that take place entirely online, with the use of videoconference or other technologies.
- **Hybrid ceremonies**, which consist of a compilation of videos of students being recognized in person as they celebrate graduation in small groups.
- **Vehicle ceremonies**, in which students and their families wait in their cars while other graduates are recognized one at a time with their families alongside them.
- **Outdoor in-person ceremonies**, which are currently permitted for counties as follows:
 - Between May 15 and May 31, an outdoor ceremony may take place in a rural county that has an attestation as described in the [Governor's Report to Open Texas](#) that remains in effect 7 days prior to the ceremony.
 - An outdoor ceremony may take place in any Texas county on or after June 1.

Full details of the TEA's graduation ceremony guidance [can be found on the TEA website](#)