

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rockwall County taking proactive approach to keeping communities safe

(ROCKWALL COUNTY – March 14, 2020) Rockwall County has been actively monitoring the situation regarding an outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). This is a rapidly changing situation, and Rockwall County is taking a proactive approach to ensure that the County is prepared for any type of emergency response.

Coronavirus is now in 46 states. As of March 13, 2020, Rockwall County does not have a positive case of COVID-19. However, there is now evidence of community spread in the Houston and Dallas areas. What this means is that several confirmed cases in both cities are not associated with travel. Community spread is the reason why jurisdictions and states across the Nation have declared an emergency. Declaring an emergency triggers an array of authorities and actions by state and local governments, all designed to protect you. Rockwall County and cities within are remaining vigilant to ensure all communities in the County remain safe as the situation continues to evolve. The County is doing everything possible to provide assistance to residents and first responders. The County has purchased personal protective equipment (PPE) for the Sherriff's Department and has been working with jurisdictions to ensure they are doing the same. Rockwall County has also purchased sanitizing equipment, such as electrostatic sprayers, to assist in disinfecting all County facilities.

Some other preparedness items that the County departments have been working on over the past few weeks include:

- Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) for all departments; this will ensure that residents will continue to receive services.
- Developing policies, procedures, and orders designed to protect residents and employees.
- Identifying resources that may be used during increased periods of social distancing.
- Developing communications plans with jurisdictions and residents.
- Detention Center COVID-19 specific protocols developed.
- Elder-care outreach and guidance.

Many Rockwall County departments are now involved and have been monitoring the situation through regular meetings with Rockwall County elected officials, the Rockwall County Health Authority, Dr. Gary Bonacquisti, city leaders, ISD's, emergency management meetings, conference calls with the Texas Department of State Health Services, the Governor, and news media. Information is shared and coordinated with County and city officials regularly.

The President has restricted travel from Europe to protect our Nation. The County has canceled nonessential events or meetings held inside County facilities, to protect employees and residents. As you know, Rockwall and Royse City ISD have extended their Spring Break through March 20 in order to help protect our communities' children.

The Rockwall County Health Authority encourages:

- Begin practicing social distancing by reducing face-to-face contacts when possible.
- Conducting business by phone or online.
- Avoiding crowded public places (including extracurricular activities).
- Canceling nonessential travel.

Other measures you can take to avoid spreading the virus include:

- Wash hands often for 20 seconds and encourage others to do the same.
- If no soap and water is available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue away.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Disinfect surfaces, buttons, handles, knobs, and other places touched often.
- Practice social distancing.

Symptoms of COVID-19 may show up 2-14 days after exposure and may include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. **If You Feel Sick:**

- **General Population:** If you are in generally good health and have a mild illness, stay home and take care of yourself like you would for the flu. If symptoms worsen, call your doctor.
- **At-Risk Populations:** If you are 65 years or older and/or have other medical problems like heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, or cancer – and have fever or symptoms – call your doctor. If you have shortness of breath, go to the emergency room. **But call first so the hospital can take precautions to prevent community spread.**
- **Stay home:** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to isolate at home during their illness. You should restrict activities outside your home, except for getting medical care.
- **Avoid public areas:** Do not go to work, school, or public areas.
- **Avoid public transportation:** Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.
- **Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available.
- **Wear a facemask** if you are sick when you are around others.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.**
- **Clean your hands often.**
- **Do not share:** You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home.
- **Clean all “high-touch” surfaces everyday surfaces (counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables).**

- Monitor your symptoms and seek medical attention if your illness is worsening (e.g., difficulty breathing).
- Alert health department: Ask your healthcare provider to call the local or state health department. Persons who are placed under active monitoring or facilitated self-monitoring should follow instructions provided by their local health department or occupational health professionals, as appropriate.

Due to current testing capacity limitations in Texas, at this time, public health laboratories in Texas will use the criteria listed in this link to prioritize testing of persons at risk of COVID-19 – <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/docs/dshscriteriatoguidetestingofpui.pdf>. This may sound terrifying. However, getting tested for COVID-19 is not extremely important if you have mild flu-like symptoms and are not included in the at-risk population. There is no cure for COVID-19, and treatment is merely to treat the symptoms. What is important is halting the spread to the at-risk population. The Governor has indicated that testing capacity will be vastly enhanced over the next few days, and President Trump noted this as well in his press conference Friday.

One of the key goals of social distancing is to slow down the spread of this highly contagious virus. By slowing down the spread, we are trying to protect individuals with increased risk of severe illness, older adults, and any age with underlying health conditions.

Every Texan plays an important part in keeping our communities as safe as possible – practice good hygiene, stay home if you are sick, and stay informed. This is not the time to panic, but the time to prepare.

Get prepared by:

- Ahead of any pandemic, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security says families should check their prescription drug supplies, store two weeks supply of water and food, and have non-prescription drugs and health supplies on hand, including pain relievers, cough and cold medicines, and fluids with electrolytes.
- Sign up to receive Rockwall County employee emergency notifications by texting “Rockwall” to 888777.
- Follow Rockwall County Office of Emergency Management on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/rcemo>

Texas Health Coronavirus Hotline is available 24/7. Call 682-236-7601 to speak to a nurse, or residents can contact the DSHS-COVID-19 Call Center email: 1-877-570-9779, Hours 7am-6pm Monday-Friday.