



Justin W. Lewis

P.O. Box 457
Hillsboro TX 76645

HILL COUNTY JUDGE

(254) 582-4020
countyjudge@co.hill.tx.us

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Press Release**

Hillsboro, TX – The local number of COVID-19 cases held steady over the weekend with Hill County still having only 10 confirmed cases. The Local Health Authority and Department of State Health Services (DSHS) reports agree on that number. Statewide numbers report 19,458 cases in Texas with 1,411 patients hospitalized, 495 fatalities and an estimated 5,706 individuals recovered.

“Information released from Governor Abbott last week has many people talking about the reopening of our state,” said Hill County Judge Justin Lewis. “This tells us there is light at the end of the tunnel, but it is not yet time to let down our guard. If we relax too quickly, we will lose the ground we have gained. We must be careful and adhere to the social distancing guidelines and continue to stay home whenever possible, so we continue to keep the spread of COVID-19 at bay. This ensures we can reopen our local businesses in a safe manner without causing the rate of spread to increase and overwhelm our healthcare system,” continued Lewis. “We owe it to our frontline workers to do all we can to protect them and keep things moving in a positive direction.”

As guidelines, recommendations and directives have evolved through this process, it has created some confusion on what is mandatory and what is recommended. Currently, there are no local mandates requiring face coverings when out in public, but the latest Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations advise people to have some form of face covering on when they are out and about. State Parks reopened from 7am to 7pm beginning today, but visitors to the parks will be required to have a face covering on while at the park. Other restrictions still in place for using state parks include people who do not live in the same household being required to stay a minimum of six feet apart and group gatherings in state parks are limited to no more than five people. The parks are open for day use only, and no overnight camping is allowed. While State Parks have reopened, the Army Corp of Engineers has not yet announced a date for reopening their park facilities, however, their boat ramps are open for use.

“While face coverings are mandatory in state parks, we are requesting people to voluntarily comply and wear face coverings whenever out in any public location,” said Lewis. “It is the prudent and responsible action, and it shows you are taking responsibility for yourself and trying to help protect your neighbors,” continued Lewis. “Hill County residents have always taken care of one another, and this is one more way we can show our concern for our neighbors. I know our residents will not let us down. Working together is the fastest way to move us all through to the other side of this.”

In addition to the reopening of state parks, other restrictions are scheduled to slowly be relaxed to determine if we can resume activities without negatively impacting the spread of COVID-19. This Wednesday, April 22nd, the medical community will be allowed to begin some optional medical procedures related to immediate health concerns for patients. On Friday, all retail establishments will be allowed to open in a retail-to-go model where shoppers place their orders by phone or online in advance of arriving at the store, and then they will be able to pick up their order curbside. Customers will still not be allowed to enter the establishments for shopping.

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As these limited activities are restarting, it is important to note the Governor's stay-home except for essential activities order is still in place. Residents should continue to take all precautions available to protect their households. Group gatherings of more than 10 are still not allowed. More guidelines on reopening for other areas are expected to come from Governor Abbott's office on April 27th.

For the best information available on the spread of the Coronavirus across Texas, DSHS has a dashboard website available at <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>. People interested in monitoring updates from Hill County on the situation will find the most current information on the Hill County Emergency Management Facebook Page. The County will also provide regular updates to *KHBR 1560 AM Radio* and the *Hillsboro Reporter*.

In addition, the County has an emergency notification system. If you would like to receive phone call, text or email updates as warranted, you can register with the Hill County Emergency Notification System. Visit the Office of Emergency Management website at www.hilloem.com, scroll to the bottom of the home page and click on emergency alerts. Follow the prompts to set up your account.