

## **Statement from Carson County in regards to Reopening**

As I am sure you are aware, on Monday, April 27, Governor Greg Abbott announced his plan to reopen Texas. Monday's press conference, and release of Executive Order GA-18, signaled the first big step towards a return to normal. GA-18 sets out "Phase 1" of the Governor's plan by permitting certain businesses, which had previously been ordered to cease normal operation, the option to begin reopening.

Beginning Friday, May 1, restaurants and retail stores across the state may open at a limited-capacity status. This means these businesses may open to the public and operate at 25% capacity of the total listed occupancy for that restaurant or retail establishment. The Governor's plan also made specific provision for rural counties such as ours to increase capacity in restaurants and retail businesses to 50%, providing certain standards have been met.

Both Carson County and the county officials have worked to ensure Carson County qualifies for this increase in capacity. This is an important step for our local business owners and for the people of our County. The Governor's plan is a safe way for us to begin to allow pockets of our local economy to recover, while still keeping the public safe. Business owners now have the option, based on what they are comfortable with, to open up to the public at either 50% or 25% of their normal capacity starting May 1<sup>st</sup>.

More information about case reporting across the state and data on the numbers of tests being administered may be found at <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/default.aspx>, by accessing the COVID-19 case dashboard.

We urge everyone to familiarize themselves with Minimum Standard Health Protocols issued in the Governor's Report to Open Texas. As the Governor acknowledged, we have worked hard to slow and stop the spread of this virus, and that hard work has paid off. Going forward, we must keep up the strategies that have helped us make it this far and follow those practices to support a safe and measured reopening of our state and County.

The Health Protocols issued by DSHS and the Governor include:

- Maintaining 6' distance from other individuals not within the same household. If distancing is not feasible, other measures should be utilized (face covering, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, cleanliness, and sanitation);
- Self-screening before going into a public place, looking for new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible infection;
- Washing/disinfecting hands upon entering a retailer/business/public place, and again after any interaction with other persons or items in those places; and
- Minimizing or eliminating physical contact with persons not within the same household.

A complete list of the Protocols can be found at

<https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/opentexas.aspx>. The centers for Disease Control Guidelines can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

Everyone should continue to be on the lookout for signs and symptoms of the virus, which include:

- Cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chills, repeated shaking with chills
- Muscles pain, headache, sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell
- Diarrhea
- Feeling feverish or having a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.00 degrees Fahrenheit; and/or
- Known close contact with a person who is lab confirmed to have Covid-19. For more information regarding symptoms, help deciding whether you should be tested and to learn where you can go to be tested, visit [www.texas.gov/covid19](http://www.texas.gov/covid19). That website also gives citizens the ability to search an interactive map which shows the nearest testing location's hours and directions.

Governor Abbott's reopening plan also included provisions to significantly increase the number of COVID-19 tests administered daily to ensure an accurate accounting is being made of positive cases. We echo the sentiments of the Governor by reminding the public that priority should be given to testing those who are symptomatic and to those who are high-risk (such as nursing home residents and healthcare/front-line workers).

We have procedures in place and will activate them when a resident of Carson County becomes Covid-19 positive. The public should rest assured that while we certainly never want to be in the position to activate all these plans, we have prepared for and will respond to safely meet the needs of our citizens.

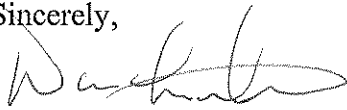
According to GA-18, stricter restrictions may be re-applied should monitoring and testing reveal a resurgence in spread of the virus. The Governor's new Order still explicitly prohibits the reopening of the following businesses at this time: bars, gyms, public swimming pools, bowling alleys, and video arcades, tattoo studios, piercing studios, and cosmetology salons. Similarly, people are still prohibited from social visits to nursing homes, state supported living centers, assisted living facilities, or long-term care facilities.

As stated above, this process of safely reopening the cities and county is **not** mandatory. Businesses are **free** to remain closed or **limit** their capacity to any number they feel is safe as long as that number **does not** exceed 50% of their capacity. **IF** we work together to safely reopen these businesses and restaurants and there is NO spike in positive cases, additional business openings and added capacity to already open businesses could occur as early as May 18<sup>th</sup>.

As one of the Governor's advisors in Monday's press conference stated, this is not a situation where a 'flipping of the switch' to go back to life before the virus is appropriate. But this is a cautious step in the right direction and we trust that our citizens and businesses will treat it as such. This has been a trying time, and while we aren't out of the woods yet, we believe there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Again, we want to thank all the citizens of Carson County for what they have done to this point to help keep our community safe and what we know you all will continue to do. There is truly no better place to live.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Looten", with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Dan Looten  
Carson County Judge