



April 1, 2020

Dear Residents of Rusk County,

As County Judge, I have been in constant contact with local city, county and state authorities as we monitor the spread of COVID-19 through our communities. Throughout this time, I have been reluctant to mandate county-wide orders due to the impact it will inevitably have on many of our smaller businesses and individuals who keep our economy healthy. But as the number of local cases increases, and best estimates are they will continue to do so, I want you to know that the health and safety of our residents are our top priorities.

Yesterday, Gov. Gregg Abbott used his strongest language yet in detailing how Texans across the state will fight COVID-19. As County Judge I am in full support of the Governor's executive order which strictly limits in-person contact with people not in the same household. His order ([GA-14](#)) does not prohibit people from accessing essential services or engaging in essential daily activities. The Governor defines essential services and activities as those outlined by the [U.S Department of Homeland Security and the Texas Department of Emergency Management](#) which are available online.

Personal activities may be limited, but life must go on. Rusk County residents can continue to go to the grocery store or gas station, work from home, visit parks, hunt and fish, and engage in physical activity like jogging or bicycling, so long as the necessary precautions are maintained to reduce the transmission of COVID- 19. Rusk County residents should continue to follow the President's and CDC's hygiene guidelines with extra care. Schools will remain closed through the month of April, but students are still engaged in online and distance learning opportunities. Restaurant dining rooms remain closed, but don't hesitate to take advantage of the carry-out and drive-thru options that many of our local restaurants are offering. Doctors offices and clinics remain open but most medical facilities are strictly screening incoming patients and almost all visitation has been restricted including at hospitals and nursing homes.

These are certainly unusual times. Working together is the only way to protect our most vulnerable residents in Rusk County and keep our healthcare facilities from being overwhelmed. We all have the responsibility to protect and serve one another, and I am confident that Rusk County residents have the commitment, determination and compassion to be successful in this fight.

County Judge Joel Hale