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Trump: It's my decision when to reopen U.S. economy



Inside C2

Southern DAILY

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Some U.S. states eye economic reopening; New Yorkers told to wear masks



A trader wears a face mask on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) following traders testing positive for Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in New York, U.S., March 19, 2020. REUTERS/Lucas Jackson TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY

(Reuters) - As some U.S. states look to start reopening their coronavirus-battered economies amid protests from supporters of President Donald Trump anxious to get back to work, hardest hit New York state began mandating the wearing of masks or face coverings in public to contain the pathogen's spread.

A relative or friend looks on after a man who has tested positive for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is loaded in an ambulance in Chelsea, Massachusetts, U.S., April 17, 2020. REUTERS/Brian Snyder
Saturday ends another week in which millions of Americans went without paychecks. More than 20 million have filed for unemployment benefits in the past few weeks alone as closures of businesses and schools and severe travel restrictions to try to curb the highly contagious virus have hammered the U.S. economy.

In a bit of welcome news on the employment front, Walmart Inc said on Friday that it would hire 50,000 more workers at its stores, clubs and distribution centers to meet a surge in demand for groceries and household essentials from consumers forced to stay home during the outbreak.

One business deemed essential to keeping Americans fed that has been hit hard by the epidemic is meat processing plants. Facilities in South Dakota, Georgia, Iowa and else-

where have reported hundreds of infections among employees forced to work in close proximity, prompting some plants run by Tyson Foods and Smithfield Foods to shift production or shut and sparking calls by unions for safer working conditions.

GRAPHIC: Tracking the novel coronavirus in the U.S. - here Even with huge companies such as Walmart and Amazon.com Inc hiring, some Americans who live in parts of states with lower infection rates have been made restless by the restrictions, leading to protests this week by flag-waving Trump supporters in the capitols of Minnesota, Michigan and Virginia.

The demonstrations, which featured large crowds of people neither practicing social distancing nor wearing protective face coverings, angered governors who have been trying to bring coronavirus outbreaks in their states under control.

Also angering those governors, all Democrats, were a series of Twitter posts on Friday by the Republican president - "LIBERATE MICHIGAN!" "LIBERATE MINNESOTA!" and "LIBERATE VIRGINIA!" - that appeared to be egging on the protests.

Several states, including Ohio, Michigan, Texas and Florida, have said they aim to reopen parts of their economies, perhaps by May 1 or even sooner.

But health experts have cautioned that to avoid a second wave of infections as people return to work, extensive testing must be available to track infections, as well as contact tracing and antibody testing to learn who had been previously infected and might have some immunity.

Vice President Mike Pence said on Friday that the United States had the capacity to do a sufficient amount of testing for states to move into a phase one of reopening. However, governors and health officials in the states say there is nowhere near enough test kits and equipment available to do that kind of widespread testing.

Andrew Cuomo, governor of hardest hit New York, said federal funding was necessary for that magnitude of testing, and accused Trump of passing off responsibility to the states while not providing much needed financial help. "He's passing the buck without passing the bucks," Cuomo quipped.

While rates of hospitalizations and need for intensive care beds have slowed in New York, the daily death toll continues to be gut-wrenching with over 600 fatalities a day.

To help slow the spread of the virus, Cuomo implemented statewide mandatory wearing of masks for anyone out in public and unable to practice social distancing. The rules, which cover all those using public transport or for-hire vehicles, came into effect on Friday night.



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China mandates coronavirus tests for key public workers leaving Wuhan

SHANGHAI (Reuters) - China ordered on Saturday that anyone in Wuhan working in certain service-related jobs must take a coronavirus test if they want to leave the city.

FILE PHOTO: A man wearing a face mask and a plastic raincoat is seen at a railway station of Wuhan on the first day of inbound train services resumed following the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Wuhan of Hubei province, the epicentre of China's coronavirus outbreak, March 28, 2020. REUTERS/Aly Song
The order comes after the central city, where the coronavirus emerged late last year, lifted a 70-day lockdown that all but ended the epidemic there.

People in Wuhan work in nursing, education, security and other sectors with high exposure to the public must take a nucleic acid test before leaving, the National Health Commission said in an order.

The government of Hubei province, of which Wuhan is capital, will pay for the tests, the commission said.

Since the city relaxed its lockdown restrictions people who arrived in there before Chinese New Year, when the virus was peaking in China, are allowed to go back to their homes.

People working in other sectors aiming to leave Wuhan are encouraged to take voluntary tests before going.

Within seven days of arrival at their destinations, people who can present test results showing they do not carry the virus, as well as a clean bill of health on a health app, can go back to work.

Everyone else will have to spend 14 days in quarantine before returning to work.



FILE PHOTO: A man wearing a face mask and a plastic raincoat is seen at a railway station of Wuhan on the first day of inbound train services resumed following the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Wuhan of Hubei province, the epicentre of China's coronavirus outbreak, March 28, 2020. REUTERS/Aly

Authorities have worked with the China's tech giants to devise a colour-based health code system, retrieved via mobile app, that uses geolocation data and self-reported information to indicate one's health status.

Wuhan will speed up its efforts to investigate asymptomatic coronavirus cases and confirm the presence of antibodies in people, which might suggest immunity, the commission said.

Wuhan, which accounts for 60% of infections in China and 84% of the death toll as of Saturday, has been testing inhabitants aggressively throughout the virus' breakout and many companies had already been asking workers from the city to undergo tests before resuming work.

Wuhan revised up its death toll from the coronavirus by 1,290 on Friday, taking the city's toll to 3,869, because of incorrect reporting, delays and omissions,

especially in the chaotic early stages of the outbreak, authorities said.

China national death toll is 4,632 from 82,719 cases.

Stay safe!

BUSINESS

Wash your hands!

Texas Becomes First State To Announce Dates Easing COVID-19 Restrictions



Texas Gov. Abbott announced big changes Friday, including a plan to allow retailers to reopen safely and the closure of all Texas schools for the remainder of the school year.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

AUSTIN, Texas (KTRK) -- As Texas continues to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, weeks of stay-at-home orders and closed businesses will slowly come to an end in the state, according to an order issued Friday by Gov. Greg Abbott. Despite the order calling for a gradual return to normal, Abbott extended the closure order for all Texas schools and colleges for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

The state's stay home order is scheduled to expire April 30. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued three executive orders Friday that outline how to reopen the state amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The announcement from the governor has been long awaited, with Abbott adding that the state and its decisions must be guided by data and doctors.

He started Friday's briefing with hope, noting that, "We are now beginning to see glimmers that the worst of COVID-19 may soon be behind us," and that Texas has the second-most recoveries of all the states.

Still, many business owners and unem-

ployed workers have been eager to hear what will be required to get on with their lives.

According to the governor, more than 1 million Texans have filed for unemployment. When asked about unemployment benefits and states running out of money, the governor said money is still available.

"Then on top of that, we know that Congress is considering an additional program. They could be coming out as soon as May that will provide even more funding to states as needs arise," the governor said.

"Opening Texas must occur in stages," he continued. "First will be openings announced today that will pose minimal or no threats with COVID-19."

Abbott said the first order will focus on establishing the Strike Force to Open Texas, which will consist of medical experts, including Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Commissioner John Hellerstedt, MD, as Chief Medical Officer of the group.

These are some of the industry leaders the governor has assigned to the force:

Lt. Gov Dan Patrick - consulting member
Kendra Scott - Founder and CEO,

Jim "Mattress Mack" McIngvale - Owner, Gallery Furniture

Ross Perot Jr. - Chairman, The Perot Group

Tilman Fertitta - Chairman, CEO, and sole owner, Landry's, Inc.

Nancy Kinder - President & CEO, Kinder Foundation

James Huffines - Strike Force chair

The second executive order focuses on the retail sector and what the governor says will be the safe and strategic reopening of select services and activities in Texas.

TIMELINE: Here are the dates when things can reopen in Texas

AUSTIN, Texas (KTRK) -- As Texas continues to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, weeks of stay-at-home orders and closed businesses will slowly come to an end in the state, according to an order issued Friday by Gov. Greg Abbott.

Here are the key dates the governor announced

April 20 Texas state parks will open with a number of restrictions for guests. Visitors will have to wear face coverings or masks and maintain at least six feet of distance from people who are not members of the same household. Park visitors won't be allowed in groups of five or more.

April 22 Restrictions on surgeries will be loosened. The change will allow doctors to treat patients without having to get state approval, the governor said.

April 24 Texas retail businesses that have been closed may re-open and offer 'to-go' options for customers. **April 27** Additional openings and more restrictions are scheduled to be loosened by Gov. Abbott.



Despite the order calling for a gradual return to normal, Abbott extended the closure order for all Texas schools and colleges for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

The state's stay home order is scheduled to expire April 30.

Abbott said all retailers in Texas should be allowed to operate with to-go strategies, beginning next Friday, April 24.

Under this to-go model, reopened businesses will be required to deliver items to customers' cars, homes or other locations to minimize contact. Under this order, the governor made a major announcement about schools, saying that all classrooms will remain closed for the rest of the school year. Teachers will be allowed to go into the classroom for video instruction or to clean out classrooms. This includes public and private schools and universities.

The third executive order focuses on nurses, doctors and staff, as well as hospital capacity and personal protective equipment, or PPE, as they relate to the COVID-19 response.

Effective April 21 at 11:59 p.m. through May 8 at 11:59 p.m., all licensed health care professionals and licensed health care facilities must continue to postpone surgeries and procedures that are not medically necessary to diagnose or correct a serious medical condition or save a patient's life.

Exceptions can now include: Any procedure that would not deplete the hospital capacity or the PPE needed to cope with COVID-19

State Parks

When it comes to state parks, Abbott said those will reopen on Monday, April 20. But certain guidelines must be met. Visitors will be required to wear masks and maintain social distancing. Groups larger than five cannot gather.

Still, Abbott addressed concerns that some employees may feel uneasy about returning to work, even as they are phased in.

Abbott said any employees who may be concerned about going back to work should not be coerced, but should feel

safe in the workplace. He added employers have a responsibility to make sure safe practices are maintained. When it comes to state parks, Abbott said those will reopen on Monday, April 20. But certain guidelines must be met. Visitors will be required to wear masks and maintain social distancing. Groups larger than five cannot gather.

Still, Abbott addressed concerns that some employees may feel uneasy about returning to work, even as they are phased in.

Additional openings will be announced on April 27, and the third phase will be announced in May, based on input from medical advisers.

The governor stressed the phases will require "comprehensive testing and assurances of hospital readiness for COVID-19 patients. They will focus on containing the risk of resurgence of COVID-19 and protecting our most vulnerable Texans." The opening of more venues such as restaurants and movie theaters will also be considered.

"Together, we can bend the curve. Together, we can overcome this pandemic. We can get folks back to work. We can adopt safe strategies that prevent the spread of COVID-19 and step by step, we will open, Texas," Abbott said.

The governor's announcement comes on the heels of a three phase federal plan to get back to work introduced by President Trump on Thursday.

It starts with limited numbers of employees returning to the office and the rest working from home, while at-risk groups continue to shelter-in-place.

The next phase allows churches, schools, gyms and restaurants to re-open with social distancing still in place.

Then finally, the third phase allows all venues to open back up with limited distancing.

Health officials worry returning too soon could set off a second wave of infections. (Courtesy KTRK)

Editor's Choice



Ambulance attendants transport a resident from Centre d'hebergement Yvon-Brunet, a seniors' long-term care centre, amid the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Montreal, Quebec, Canada April 18, 2020. REUTERS/Christinne Muschi



People shout at police officers during a demonstration of conspiracy theorists as other demonstrators protest against the lockdown imposed to slow the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Berlin, Germany, April 18, 2020. REUTERS/Christian Mang



A health worker, controls the temperature of a woman in a sanitary barrier during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Sao Sebastiao, Sao Paulo state, Brazil, April 18, 2020. REUTERS/Roosevelt Cassio



A man wearing a protective face mask walks during the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates April 18, 2020. REUTERS/Ahmed Jadallah REFILE - CLARIFYING CAPTION.



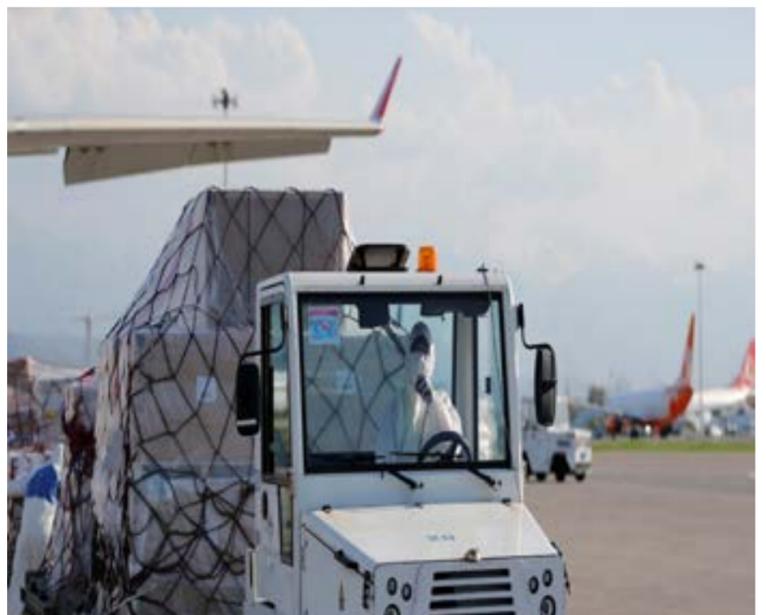
Two guards working at a construction site keep distance during a lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates April 18, 2020. REUTERS/Ahmed Jadallah



Police officers detain a person during a demonstration of conspiracy theorists as other demonstrators protest against the lockdown imposed to slow the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Berlin, Germany, April 18, 2020. REUTERS/Christian Mang



A banner in support of the NHS at a home in Hemel Hempstead, as the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues. Hemel Hempstead, Britain, April 18, 2020. REUTERS/Paul Childs



A worker drives a vehicle while unloading a shipment of medical supplies from Turkey intended to combat the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), at Almaty International Airport

Week After Week, TMC-Affiliated Hospitals Have Seen A 7% Drop In Current COVID-19 Hospitalizations, From 747 On April 7 Down To 699

Texas Medical Center Reports Drop In Hospitalized COVID-19 Patients



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

HOUSTON -- Though the total number of COVID-19 patients hospitalized has reached over 1,500 across nine counties in the Greater Houston area in hospitals across Texas Medical Center's member institutions, current hospitalizations have dropped, according to data released April 16. Week after week, TMC-affiliated hospitals have seen a 7% drop in current COVID-19 hospitalizations, from 747 on April 7 down to 699, Texas Medical Center data shows. Of the medical center's Intensive Care Unit base capacity of 1,450 beds, 927 are occupied, 311 of those by COVID-19 patients. The Texas Medical Center estimates 80% to 90% of COVID-19 patients in ICU require a ventilator. Data from the daily updates is compiled by Texas Medical Center from the

Greater Houston area in hospitals across TMC's member institutions spanning St. Luke's, Harris Health System, Houston Methodist, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Memorial Hermann, and Texas Children's Hospital in the following counties: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery, and Waller.

Related
CORONAVIRUS TEXAS
St. Luke's Uses New Treatment On Montgomery Co. COVID-19 Patient
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, Texas (KTRK) -- Montgomery County's first coronavirus case, who was initially identified only as a Patton Village police officer, has been released from the hospital. Chris Hernandez was released from St. Luke's Health - The Woodlands Hospi-

tal on Wednesday after more than a month. He was admitted to the hospital on March 8 with severe flu-like symptoms.



Chris Hernandez was released from St. Luke's Health - The Woodlands Hospital on Wednesday after more than a month. He was admitted to the hospital on March 8 with severe flu-like symptoms. Hernandez's case was linked to a presumptive case reported by Galveston County.

City of Houston and Harris County officials cited Hernandez's case as the primary reason that RodeoHouston closed for the remainder of its season.

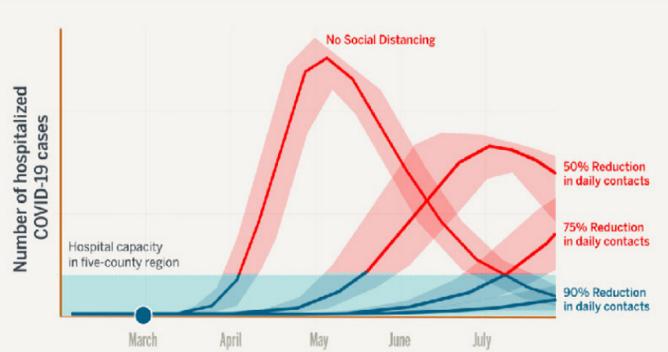
"I can't express how grateful I am for every single one of you," said Hernandez to his hospital staff. "You guys saved my life. I know God had everybody in the right place and I came to the right facility and he empowered you guys to make all the right choices."

Hospital officials said Hernandez was put on a ventilator due to his condition and was treated with a therapy known as extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO).

ECMO works by helping oxygenate blood outside the body so blood doesn't need to transfer through damaged or filled lungs. This was the first COVID-19 case in Texas treated with ECMO.

Luke's is using a new treatment for coronavirus patients, and Patton Village Police Officer Chris Hernandez was the first patient to test the treatment.

COVID-19 HOSPITALIZATIONS



Hernandez was notably the first person diagnosed with COVID-19 in Montgomery County after attending the Rodeo Cookoff in March.

Preliminary results from a UT Austin model suggest, without strict limits on daily contacts, COVID-19 may overwhelm Austin-area hospitals.

St. Luke's treated Hernandez with an "ecmo" machine that oxygenates the blood by pumping it out of the body, through an artificial lung, then back in the body.

Doctors say "ecmo" helps relieve strain on damaged organs. The treatment is typically used for severe lung damage from infection, shock after a massive heart attack and other conditions.

The best news? The treatment worked and Hernandez is back home after more than five weeks in the hospital.

Hernandez says his symptoms were manageable for several days, but then worsened and he went to the hospital. (Courtesy abc13.com)



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