



Bell County Public Health District

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In accordance with CDC guidelines, the Bell County Health District is recommending the wearing of cloth masks in public as a way to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Wearing cloth coverings over the mouth and nose in public settings is an appropriate personal safety measure at this time, particularly at grocery stores, pharmacies, or other places where social distancing measures may be difficult to maintain. The recommendation is that the face coverings are simple in nature (i.e., a bandana or face covering fashioned from household items) and that children under two not wear a mask for their safety.

"I urge Bell County residents to continue to practice the social guideline recommendations that are in place. Personal hygiene measures, along with aggressive, active practicing of social distancing still remain the best defense against mitigating both the impact and the duration of the virus," Bell County Judge David Blackburn said. "This new recommendation from the CDC on wearing cloth masks in places like the grocery store or Walmart furthers those efforts."

While Bell County does not have significant community-based transmission at this time, the Health District still asks residents to observe this recommendation in an effort to be as responsive as possible to slowing the virus.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event that will require action on the part of every person in order to mitigate the spread," Dr. Amanda Robison-Chadwell, Director of Bell County Public Health District, said. "New knowledge about COVID-19 has informed this CDC recommendation, and I urge citizens to follow the recommendation"

It is important to note that the recommended cloth face coverings are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators, which are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidelines.

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Bell County Social Distancing Recommendations

1) High Risk Populations

- High Risk populations, per the CDC, are:
 - People 65 years old and older, and
 - People with underlying health conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, kidney disease and compromised immune systems.
- For High Risk populations:
 - Stay home
 - Outdoor exercise should be a solitary activity
 - Prescreen all essential visitors to your home
 - Don't visit homes or places where gatherings are occurring
 - Ask all visitors to your home to wear a mask
 - Follow social distancing guidelines
 - Don't use public transit except in an emergency
 - Don't be around people who are sick

2) Workplace and Businesses: Minimize Exposure

- Suspend nonessential employee travel.
- Review and determine who are essential and non-essential workers and allow non-essential workers to stay home.
- Ensure employees practice social distancing and do not work within six feet of one another.
- Urge essential employees to stay home when they are sick and maximize flexibility in sick leave benefits.
- Do not require a doctor's note for employees who are sick.
- Maximize telecommuting options.
- Persons who need to be at work to provide essential services of great benefits to the community must take steps in their workplace to minimize risk.

3) Schools: Safety First

- Do not have your child attend school if sick.
- If you have a child with chronic health conditions, consult the child's doctor about school attendance.
- School should equip all classrooms with hand sanitizers and tissues.
- Recommend rescheduling or cancelling events that are not essential.
- Explore remote teaching and online options to continue learning.
- Schools should develop a plan for citywide school closures, and families should prepare for further closures.

4) Transit: Cleaning and Protection

- Increase cleaning of vehicles and high touch surface areas.
- Provide hand washing/hand sanitizers and tissues in stations and on vehicles.
- Ensure social distancing practices are implemented to the full extent possible.

5) Health Care Settings: Avoid as possible, protect the vulnerable

- Long-term care facilities should have a COVID-19 plan in accordance with CDC or state guidelines.
- Long-term care facilities should restrict all visitation except for certain compassionate care situations, such as end of life situations.
- The general public should avoid going to medical settings such as hospitals, nursing homes and long-term care facilities, even if you are not ill.
- If you are ill, call your health care provider ahead of time ... you may be able to be served by phone and avoid a trip
- Do not visit emergency rooms unless it is essential.
- Follow guidance and directions of all facilities.

6) Everyone: Do your part

The best way for all Bell County residents to reduce their risk of getting sick, as with seasonal colds or the flu, still applies to prevent COVID-10:

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Try alternatives to shaking hands, like an elbow bump or wave.
- If you have recently returned from a country, state or region with ongoing COVID-19 infections, monitor your health and follow the instructions of public health officials and CDC guidance.
- Wear cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) , especially in areas of significant community-based transmission

You can also prepare for the disruption caused by an outbreak. Preparedness actions include:

- Prepare to work from home if that is possible for your job, and your employer.
- Make sure you have a supply of all essential medications for your family.
- Prepare a child care plan if you or a caregiver are sick.
- Make arrangements about how your family will manage school closures.
- Plan for how you can care for a sick family member without getting sick yourself.
- Take care of each other and check in by phone with friends, family and neighbors that are vulnerable to serious illness or death if they get COVID-19.
- Keep common spaces clean to help maintain a healthy environment for you and others. Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned regularly with disinfecting sprays, wipes or common household cleaning products.