



CITY OF LAREDO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Release Date: March 18, 2020



UPDATE: Extraordinary changes are required in City operations to help contain the spread of the Coronavirus or COVID-19 within our community.

FACTS

1. What actions were taken by City Officials?

In response to concerns over the spread of COVID-19, Laredo Mayor Pete Saenz signed a local emergency disaster declaration on March 16, 2020 after consulting with Laredo health officials, but that Declaration can only last for seven days under state law. On March 17, 2020, the Laredo City Council extended the declaration for two weeks.

2. Why was a local disaster declared?

This disaster declaration gives Council powers for emergency management. A disaster is defined as the occurrence or imminent threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life or property. Under the Texas Government Code, this declaration means the City has the right to issue public orders. It also directs city employees to do things such as carry out an emergency management program and protect public safety.

3. What powers does a municipality have to protect the public health? What authority does a mayor or city council have during a declared state of disaster?

The governing body of a municipality may enforce any law that is reasonably necessary to protect the public health. Tex. Health & Safety Code §121.003. A home rule city may adopt rules to protect the health of persons in the city, including quarantine rules to protect the residents against communicable disease, Id. §122.006. Additionally, a city may activate its emergency management powers by declaring a state of local disaster under Chapter 418 of the Government Code. Each city is required to have a local emergency management plan that contains information on addressing a health risk to the city, including the outbreak of a communicable disease.

4. When does it go into effect and how long does it last?

Closures are effective at midnight on Thursday, March 19, 2020 and will continue for 2 weeks (14 days) unless amended or suspended by future Council action.

5. What business establishments must close?

- Bars, lounges and private clubs
- Fitness Centers and Gyms
- Bingos and Amusement Redemption Centers
- Reception Halls and Party Rental Places
- Malls
- Entertainment facilities such as bowling alleys, movie theaters, etc.

6. How are restaurants affected?

All restaurants must close their dining area, but are allowed to remain open to provide take-away, delivery or drive-thru.

7. What businesses are exempt?

- Grocery stores, Hardware stores
- Office space, residential buildings, and hotels, etc.
- Pharmacies, hospitals, medical facilities, and veterinary facilities
- Spaces where persons may be in transit or waiting for transit such as airports and bus terminals
- Public or private gatherings of no more than 10 people in a single enclosed space including businesses where people are present, but it is unusual for them to be within arm's length of one another for extended periods

8. For purposes of clarity, what are some examples of permissible gatherings?*

- Daycare Centers, Childcare Facilities only if no more than 10 people are in a single enclosed space including employees/staff
- Funeral homes/funerals only if no more than 10 people are in a single indoor or outdoor space including employees/staff
- Retail stores only if no more than 10 people are in a single enclosed space including customers and employees/staff
- Salons (hair, nails, spas) only if no more than 10 people are in a single enclosed space including customers and employees/staff

- Banks and Financial institutions only if no more than 10 people are in a single enclosed space including customers and employees/staff

9. How does this affect places of employment?

You may still go to work as long as 10 or more people are not present in a single space at the same time and safety protocols are in place such as hand sanitizers and temperature measuring stations to ensure employees do not become vectors of COVID-19.

10. Can I still go outside for recreational activities?

Yes. You can go outside for recreational activities; however we recommend that you practice social distancing.

11. How does this affect Board and Commission Meetings?

Board and Commission meetings will be canceled during the Declaration period.

12. Can I continue riding Public Transit?

Yes. Spacing requirements have already been instituted and buses are sanitized as needed and are required to drive with open windows to circulate fresh air.

13. Will I be evicted from my home during the Declaration period?

To the extent allowed by law, no landlord shall evict a tenant for lack of payment while this Declaration is in effect.

14. Do I have to cancel my planned party (ex. wedding, quincenera, etc.)?

Yes, if there is likelihood that more than 10 people will attend your party. All social gatherings of more than 10 people are prohibited during this Declaration period.

15. Can a reception hall or party rental place charge me for changing the date of my cancelled event?

Businesses are prohibited from charging fees for cancelled events that are scheduled to occur during the Declaration period, to the extent allowed by law.

16. Who is enforcing this?

The Order will be enforced by Laredo Police Officers and City of Laredo Code Enforcement Inspectors.

17. What are the penalties if I don't comply?

Upon conviction, violations are a Class C misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not less than \$50 and not more than \$2,000.

18. Will I still be billed for my utilities during this time?

Yes. Customers will still be billed during the next two weeks. However, no local utility shall discontinue the provision of cable, internet, water, gas, waste removal and electric utility services to a local resident for lack of payment while this Declaration is in effect, to the extent allowed by law.

19. Was this Declaration necessary?

All of City Council members agreed the measures were drastic, but necessary for the sake of public health.

20. Do I need to stock up on groceries and supplies?

No. There is no need for our community to hoard groceries or supplies as shelves have been and will continue to be restocked. The community is urged to buy what you need and leave some for your neighbors.

21. Who can I call for additional questions?

24/7 Coronavirus Hotline at 956-795-4954.