



**Justin W. Lewis**

P.O. Box 457  
Hillsboro TX 76645

**HILL COUNTY JUDGE**

(254) 582-4020  
countyjudge@co.hill.tx.us

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**Press Release**

**Hillsboro, TX** – Texas Governor Greg Abbott held a press conference today and update guidelines and restrictions for business operations in many areas. In addition, the new orders allow for a limited number of visitors in nursing homes and similar facilities under strict hygiene procedures. While Hill County has experienced a sharp rise in cases in the last few weeks, the number of new cases in Texas has been slowing down which prompted these new actions by Governor Abbott.

“While any actions to reopen our businesses in a safe and effective manner are appreciated, we must heed the advice from the medical community to continue wearing masks, social distancing, and following strict sanitation guidelines,” said Hill County Judge Justin Lewis. “With cases continuing to rise in our area, if we do not adhere to these standards we run the risk of taking a step back and slowing our recovery process,” continued Lewis. “Let’s celebrate today’s victory and support our businesses as they are allowed to expand operations, but never forget as friends and neighbors we have an obligation to do all we can to protect one another and keep everything moving in the right direction”.

According to a press release from Governor Abbott’s office, today’s executive Orders expanded occupancy levels for restaurants, retail stores, office buildings, manufacturing facilities, gyms and exercise facilities and classes, museums, and libraries, and re-authorized elective surgeries for a majority of the state of Texas. The Governor also announced new guidance related to visitations at nursing homes and long-term care facilities across the state

“The expanded occupancy levels for businesses are only allowed in Trauma Service Areas (TSA) which have had at least seven consecutive days with a hospitalization rate in which patients in the hospital for COVID-19 accounted for 15% or less of the total hospitalized population. So, in order to maintain our expanded openings, we must manage our exposure and keep the spread of the virus moving as slow as possible, so we do not have to move back to lower occupancy levels,” concluded Lewis.

The press release goes on to say the following:

*The Governor announced new visitation guidance for eligible nursing homes, assisted living facilities, intermediate care facilities, home and community-based service providers, and inpatient hospice effective Thursday, September 24th. Under the new rules, residents will be allowed to designate up to two essential family caregivers who will be provided necessary training to allow them to safely go inside a facility for a scheduled visit, including in the resident’s room, to help ensure their loved one’s physical, social, and emotional needs are being met. Designated caregivers will not be required to maintain physical distancing, but only one caregiver can visit a resident at a time.*

*A long-term care facility resident (or legal representative) can designate the essential caregiver, who can be a family member, friend, or other individual. Facilities are required to train essential caregivers on the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other infection control measures. Proper PPE must be used at all times during these scheduled visits, and the caregiver must test negative for COVID-19 within the previous 14 days before the initial visit.*

*For general visitors who are not a designated essential caregiver, these updated emergency rules will allow approved facilities to schedule outdoor no contact visits, open window visits, or indoor visitation with the use of plexiglass safety barriers to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Physical contact between residents and general visitors is not permitted. Facilities also must continue to meet all additional visitation requirements outlined in the emergency rules.*

For the complete text of today's press release from the Governor and links to detailed information and guidelines on the expanded occupancies and visitation guidelines visit <https://gov.texas.gov/news/category/press-release> information on the current State of Texas response to COVID-19, please visit <https://gov.texas.gov>. In addition to checking with local news outlets on the requirements in a specific region, please review information on the guidelines to follow for business operations and recreational activities at <https://open.texas.gov/>

Information on the spread of the Coronavirus across Texas is available at the DSHS dashboard website, <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>. To monitor updates from Hill County, the most current information will be provided on the Hill County Emergency Management Facebook Page and *KHBR 1560 AM Radio* and the *Hillsboro Reporter*.