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For IMMEDIATE Release:

CITY of GULFPORT COVID -19 RESPONSE UPDATE

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a significant paradigm shift for our citizens, substantially impacting plans and routines. As the outbreak expands, we find ourselves adapting to changes daily. Given the exponential spread of the virus, regulations issued should be taken very seriously. If anybody thinks these recommendations are merely an option, we will all likely find ourselves in a lock-down mode, very soon. Fortunately, this disease does not have a high-mortality outcome (yet), but because of the rapid rate of spread, our hospitals and medical facilities can be quickly overrun, if we don't adapt our daily habits. The resulting domino effect can put citizens with high-mortality emergencies (i.e. heart attack, stroke) at greater risk due to the unavailability of beds. This is why it is so important to take immediate action to limit social activities.

We all need to understand that this situation will likely get worse, before it gets better. Nobody likes the inconvenience and economic impact this crisis represents, but if people don't adopt the social distancing and hygiene requirements, it will result in a prolonged crisis, and much tighter restrictions than what we are seeing now. Knee-jerk, panic-oriented mindsets do nothing but inflame this tense situation. The best platform for the public to get their information is the CDC website <https://www.cdc.gov/> - not the rumor mill of social media.

MEDICAL QUESTIONS

Many contracting the coronavirus often do not know they have it, or that they are contagious. If you think you are sick, check the CDC website for specific, up-to-date information including symptoms, testing, and how to protect yourself. Before showing up at a clinic or an emergency room, call a health professional for advice. The State of Mississippi has a Coronavirus hotline: 1-877-978-6453.

Locally, Memorial Hospital at Gulfport has a [COVID-19 HOTLINE: \(228\) 867-5000](tel:(228)867-5000). The HOTLINE will be managed by providers who are dedicated to answering COVID-19 health related questions and is available Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 8:00pm. They are available to assist with advance screening, counseling, steps to take, and locations of testing centers. A recorded message with relevant, commonly asked questions, will be available after hours. For updated information, contact: www.gulfportmemorial.com

MUNICIPAL SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

The City of Gulfport is not immune from these requirements, and will put procedures in place, accordingly. As this situation progresses, we will likely scale down the number of employees occupying city offices, encouraging those who can work from home, to do so.

All City Council meetings will be live-streamed, with access limited to employees and the public – only those with hearings/business before the Council will be allowed to attend on an individual basis.

Any municipal buildings remaining open to serve the public have wipe-down, sanitization, social distancing, and access limitations in place. Courts have also minimized their operations. We are striving to provide basic city services, and are encouraging transactions via digital or telephonic means. Where possible, we are implementing new procedures along these lines.

All planned gatherings, meetings, and sporting events taking place at Gulfport city facilities are cancelled through the end of March. Notices are being sent, advising those with functions planned in April, about the likelihood of cancellations during that time frame, as well.

Citizens can expect the availability of water, sewer, and utilities to continue, uninterrupted.

SHARED RESOURCES

We are working closely with Harrison County officials and other municipalities to ensure that we provide updated information, as it becomes available to us. Please continue to monitor the City of Gulfport's social media accounts and our website at www.gulfport-ms.gov for updates. The Harrison County link is: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/5Ex4AqYWBROhc/>

EMERGENCY SERVICES

- In the event of an emergency, calling 911 is still the surest route to a quick response.
- When officers are summoned to residences or smaller structures we ask that people involved in the matter exit the structure and meet with the officers. The officers are being instructed to practice safe distancing to reduce the opportunities of exposures.
- Requests for police services that come into our Dispatch Center will be evaluated. When practical, some of these calls will be addressed over the phone to include report taking.
- This time of the year sees natural increases in animal populations. Our Humane Society of South Mississippi is experiencing high volumes of animals and reduced amounts of adoptions. As such we are attempting to reduce the animals collected and deposited. For the time being, we will not attempt to collect feral cats. Animal collection will be conducted on a case by case basis.

SCHOOLS

Schools are closed until further notice, and all school related activities are cancelled. Efforts will be made to round out the curriculum requirements by providing distance learning.

MEALS FOR KIDS

Our local School Superintendents have taken proactive measures in providing meals to children dependent upon free lunch programs. Since bus routes are already in place, the routes will still run, once a day, delivering food to children along the bus stop routes. Cafeteria workers are preparing the meals. This service will begin next week.

MEALS FOR SENIORS

South Mississippi Planning and Development District has been the coordinator for meal services to our senior community. All meal services are continuing to operate with some adjustments currently being made. Food services provided through Congregate Meals will resume on Monday, March 23 for weekly deliveries to those who are currently enrolled. All clients with Enrolled Home Delivered Meals are continuing to receive their daily meals and will continue until further notice. If you have any questions regarding these meals or are not currently enrolled, please contact Thania Averett, Aging Department head, SMPDD Area Agency on Aging at (228) 314-1479.

BUSINESSES

This is not what anybody wants to hear – particularly those who provide employment to those in our community, but the fact is that the recommended requirements are not to be treated as “options.” They should be considered a mandate for all of us to manage. We are stressing to all concerned, that it is necessary to abide by the admonition to avoid crowds, and minimize opportunities for the spread of this disease by discouraging gatherings of more than 10 people. This applies to places of business, as well as civic and service groups in order to stem the rampant spread of COVID-19. The reality is, if people don’t manage this, we won’t have the opportunity to make our own decisions - they will be made for us. It is not, “business as usual.”

VOLUNTEERS

We are receiving inquiries from citizens wanting to volunteer. This is a classic example of the giving spirit of those in our community! We have found that it is helpful to coordinate volunteer activities in effectively delivering services to our community. The managing of outreach and the conveying of protocols is essential. Gulfport has established a point of contact for those who are seeking a means to be of assistance. The City’s Volunteer Coordinator is Veronica Weaver. She can be reached at (228) 382-2719, or vweaver@gulfport-ms.gov. Please understand that, depending on the emergency status of our community, all volunteers may not be activated.

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Understanding that many businesses are experiencing a brutal economic impact we are, once again, stressing the importance to **SHOP LOCAL!** So many goods and services can be purchased locally – on line and via delivery services. With that in mind we are encouraging the adoption of two initiatives:

- Gulfport is **GOOD TO GO!**



With the direction to limit gatherings to 10 people, or less, all restaurants are expected to shift to a delivery/take-out mode. The under-10 rule applies to staff and patron numbers, combined. With this challenge we are asking the public to patronize our restauranteurs by ordering out, and/or purchasing gift cards! For many, this can be the difference in whether or not they are able to stay in business, during this crisis.

- **FEED IT FORWARD**

In the days and weeks following Hurricane Katrina, there was a silent movement throughout our community that didn't have a label, didn't have any formal organization to it – it was simply something we all felt – thankfulness, gratitude and true human spirit. We saw the worst of Mother Nature, but the best of humanity. Neighbors checked on neighbors, strangers shared a meal and whatever we had was available to those who needed it the most, without any hesitation.

We find ourselves in a similar situation as the country collectively prepares to stop the spread of Covid-19. In preparing for the worst, and hoping for the best, this unprecedented crisis has everybody on alert. Knowing there are many who lack the daily necessities to sustain themselves in the weeks ahead, the need to check in on our most vulnerable is greater than ever. We know how to take care of each other, and have written chapter after chapter of survival and resiliency through the many challenges our community has faced. We will do so again. It all starts with each of us and our desire to “pay it forward,” so to speak – by making sure we take care of one another.



With this mindset, we ask you to take the “**Feed It Forward**” challenge! When cooking dinner for your family, make an extra plate for a neighbor or even a stranger who might not have the resources for a meal. Be sure to observe handwashing and social distancing protocols, and just imagine the impact you can have by simply *Feeding it Forward*.

STOCKING UP

In checking with government sources and retail chains, we have been assured that there is no threat to supply chains for goods and services (food, toilet paper, etc.). Stores, nationwide, have the capacity to restock, over time. Manufacturers and wholesalers have already ramped up operations to increase distribution channels. If there is any challenge, here, it is getting enough trucks on the road for delivery to our retailers. They will get here on a regular, but not daily, basis. In any case, it would be a good idea to stock up on foodstuffs and supplies, as this could be a prolonged period. With the above understanding, there is no need to panic. There never is.

Stay tuned, folks. This is the most fluid situation our country has faced in generations, and we will endeavor to provide regular updates to keep you informed. If you find it necessary to venture out, again, be sure to observe sanitation and social distancing practices. As veterans in dealing with calamity, response, and recovery, let our Coastal community set an example of calm in the face of uncertainty, and consideration during this period of concern.

Remember, just because we have to be socially distant, doesn't mean we have to be unsociable. Let's be smart. Let's stay safe.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Billy Jones", is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "J".