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Marion County Issues COVID-19 Response Plan; 93 Cases in Caddo Parrish Upshur, Cass, Morris Counties Now Have Single Cases Gregg Co. Shelters-In-Place

JEFFERSON - Citing the COVID-19 virus pandemic, Marion County commissioners and Jefferson aldermen renewed on Monday the March 19 declaration by County Judge Leward LaFleur and Jefferson Mayor pro tem Victor Perot that city and county are in a "state of disaster."

The move activates the county Emergency Management Plan and makes local businesses, governments and individuals eligible for federal and state disaster relief funds.

LaFleur urged residents to stay positive.

"I do not want you to live in fear," LaFleur said in a statement released last week. "I hope and pray that we as citizens can do what needs to be done to slow this virus down so as to not overextend our health care system in East Texas."

The judge reminded the public that the threat from COVID-19 is real, if still unseen.

"I tell you it's no longer if but when we will have a confirmed case of COVID-19," LaFleur said.

LaFleur asked residents to do their part in slowing the spread of the virus.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott also ordered all restaurants and bars across the state to stop serving customers in their facilities by midnight Friday.

Many Jefferson restaurants now offer curbside pickup or delivery.

Marion County also declared disasters after the 2011 fires and the 2016 floods.

County Issues COVID-19 Response Plan

Marion County revealed Phase 1 of its three-step plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic Tuesday.

"Marion County, City of Jefferson, and area agencies are working together in a collaborative task force to address our community response to the coronavirus (COVID-19)," the document declared.

The response was signed by Emergency Management Coordinator and Pct. 1 Constable David Capps, Marion County Judge Leward LaFleur and Jefferson Mayor Pro tem Victor Perot.

Phase 1, dated March 19, gives guidelines for individuals and families as well as for schools and childcare.

The "guidelines are voluntary but highly encouraged based on current data," according to page 2.

The plan reminds residents to not go to work if they feel sick, practice good hygiene such as washing their hands frequently and monitor local information available in their communities about the disease.

The document also addresses social distancing.

"Avoid social gatherings of large groups. On March 16, the President recommended avoiding more than 10 people for the next 15 days. On March 15, the CDC recommended avoiding gatherings of more than 50 people for the next eight weeks," the document states.

On March 19, Gov. Greg Abbott ordered "every person in Texas shall avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people."

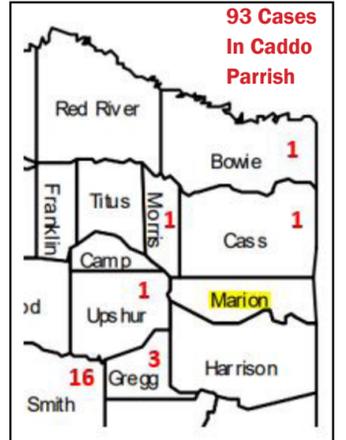
The response plan issued today does not reference the Governor's order although it does state: "We are committed to following Governor Abbott's directive" and "It should be noted that any current state or federal health directives supersede any less restrictive guidelines listed herein."

The plan also addresses assisted living facilities and adult day care programs, workplaces and community and faith-based organizations.

Workplaces are asked to voluntarily conduct "regular health checks on arrival each day (e.g., temperature and respiratory symptom screening) of staff and visitors entering buildings."

A complete copy of the document can be found on jimplecute1848.com.

More on COUNTY PLAN, see page 2



Cass, Morris, and Upshur are counties adjoining Marion County each with single confirmed cases of COVID-19. Marion and Harrison County have zero confirmed cases. Caddo Parrish confirms 93 cases.

Disaster Declared

Marion County commissioners unanimously renewed without discussion at a special meeting called Monday the county disaster declaration issued last week by County Judge Leward LaFleur.

JISD Students Begin Receiving Meals This Week; Teams Assessing Distance Learning Requirements

By BOB PALMER Jefferson ISD school vehicles brought breakfast and lunch to students and any children in the household under the age of 18 beginning Monday.

"The buses will deliver food to students at their regular pickup locations (if they typically ride the bus to school) approximately two hours after the normal school bus runs or schedule," Food Service Director Stephanie Holman stated in a post on the district's Facebook page.

The buses are set to run Monday through Friday each week while schools are closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Breakfast and lunch will be delivered together each morning.

In addition, the district will have "Grab and Go" for students who do not ride the bus.

"For 'Grab and Go,' parents can pick up breakfast and lunch between 8:15 am and 9:30 am at Jefferson Elementary School and Jefferson High School each day," Holman said.

Elementary Campus pickup location is on Harrison Street. There will be a van in front of the school near the flagpole.

JHS has two pickup locations: parent pickup area and bus run area.

JISD Superintendent Rob Barnwell told the Jimplecute that the district has made progress to meet the crisis since Trustees ordered classes closed last week.

"I'd say we're doing well, but this will continue to be a work in progress though," Barnwell said.

A survey has been developed that administrators are sharing with "everyone" to help determine who has internet service, the approximate service they have (high speed, limited, etc.) whether or not they have devices, and other things.

Barnwell said efforts to reach students whose homes do not have internet began Monday.

"Our teachers will be contacting their students by phone and email," Barnwell said. "We are gathering information from them regarding their internet capabilities, the tech devices they have and what they need, along with updated contact info and anything else that needs to be communicated. We'll know more over the next few days."

With teachers returning, at least virtually, from Spring Break, Barnwell expects more progress to be made this week on the education front.

"We have our tech department and curriculum folks working on setting up the software programs to assist our teachers with the delivery of instruction," Barnwell said.

An online tutorial on how to use the Acellus software for online classes is available on the JISD website and Facebook page.



A line of JISD vehicles Monday morning picks up food to deliver to students on bus routes Monday. Anyone who does not ride a bus picked up breakfast and lunch from the high school or elementary school. Photo courtesy of Sissy Mauldin.

County, City Offices Close Except By Appointment

From Staff Reports JEFFERSON - Marion County Judge Leward LaFleur announced Friday that county offices will remain closed except by appointment for at least two weeks.

"This will be in effect until April 3," LaFleur said. "We will still be here in the offices and will be working by appointment only. Please call the county office number and get an appointment for the department you wish to see."

LaFleur noted elected officials may vary their policy, so residents need to call the specific office in which they wish to do business.

Only the person taking care of business will be allowed to enter.

"Please no children," LaFleur said.

Citing Gov. Greg Abbott's call to limit gatherings to less than 10 people, LaFleur ordered all entertainment facilities including game rooms in the county closed.

LaFleur pointed out Abbott's order did not include churches, but urged citizens to observe CDC guidelines for social distancing and handwashing.

The City of Jefferson announced it has suspended in-person water bill payments. No disconnects will be done during the emergency, but customers will still owe the bill.

Hospital District Health Care Program May Be Last Resort for Marion County Poor Facing COVID-19

By BOB PALMER JEFFERSON - If you are poor, if you have no insurance, if you are not on any government program like Medicaid and you get COVID-19, what do you do?

Jane Laster, administrative assistant for the Marion County Hospital District has the answer.

Go to the emergency room.

The Marion County Hospital District's Indigent Health Care Program pays medical bills for those who can't.

"If you go into the emergency room and are diagnosed with COVID-19, and you are a Marion County resident and you can not pay, you don't have insurance, we can grandfather you into the Indigent Care program up to 95 days later," Laster said.

The national Center for Disease Control does ask people to call before showing up at the ER to allow for proper preparations.

Laster wanted those seeking help to do one thing.

"They can come in after they are well," Laster said.

Although the program currently serves only 35 clients, Laster believes the system is designed to handle a major increase in those in need during the pandemic.

MCHD has already taken several steps to limit their staff's exposure to the virus.

Although clients normally must receive pre-approval for medical procedures or medicine, MCHD has notified them that they do not have to come to the office on Walcot to make arrangements.

"Due to the Centers for Disease Control recommendations and in an attempt to help stem the spread of the Covid-19/Coronavirus during this Pandemic," the letter stated, modified pre-approval will

More on HOSPITAL DISTRICT, see page 3



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