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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
April 8, 2020

**New Health Order Imposes Stricter Directives to Ensure Community Health and Safety**

MERCED COUNTY, CA – In response to the rapidly increasing COVID-19 cases and deaths, Merced County Health Officer, Dr. Kenneth Bird, modified and strengthened the current Stay-at-Home Health Order today.

This Order supersedes the prior Stay-at-Home Order issued on March 20, 2020, directing all individuals to stay at home. The new Order clarifies, strengthens, and extends certain terms of the prior Stay-at-Home Order to increase social distancing and reduce person-to-person contact to further slow transmissions and deaths related to COVID-19.

“Merced County has one of the lowest ratios of hospital beds and advanced health care equipment to population in the state. It is absolutely essential that mitigation activities such as social distancing, staying at home, and severe reduction of gatherings be in place in order to prevent our health care resources and health care personnel from being overwhelmed. It is even more critical that each of us comply with these efforts to the fullest extent possible in order to avoid unnecessary deaths from both COVID-19 and non COVID-19 related causes.” Says Dr. Bird.

The Order:

- Directs all individuals living in the County to continue to stay at home unless they are providing or receiving essential services;
- Directs all businesses and governmental agencies to cease non-essential operations at physical locations in the County;
- Prohibits all non-essential gatherings of any number of individuals (including church and funeral services);
- Orders cessation of all non-essential travel; and
- Restricts access to certain recreation areas (including parks and golf courses).

Failure to comply with the Order is a misdemeanor punishable by fine, county jail sentencing, or both.

“People are dying in our community—please take all health directives seriously,” said Merced County Sheriff-Coroner Vern Warnke. “If you heed the directives of Public Health officials, then my deputies won’t be forced to take enforcement actions. Risking a criminal record because of mere disregard to health and safety is reckless, careless, and simply not worth it. This pandemic will end sooner if we all do our part.”

This new Order is imperative in flattening the curve of COVID-19 transmissions and related deaths in Merced County.

For general information pertaining to COVID-19, visit the Merced County Department of Public Health’s website at [www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus](http://www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus) or call the informational line at 209-381-1180 (English, Spanish, Hmong).

To schedule a phone interview, please contact the Public Health Communication Office from Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. at 209-381-1187.

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ORDER OF THE HEALTH OFFICER  
OF THE COUNTY OF MERCED DIRECTING ALL INDIVIDUALS LIVING  
IN THE COUNTY TO CONTINUE TO STAY AT HOME OR AT THEIR PLACE OF  
RESIDENCE EXCEPT THAT THEY MAY LEAVE TO PROVIDE OR  
RECEIVE CERTAIN ESSENTIAL SERVICES OR ENGAGE IN CERTAIN  
ESSENTIAL ACTIVITIES AND WORK FOR ESSENTIAL BUSINESSES  
AND GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES; DIRECTING ALL BUSINESSES AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES TO CEASE NON-ESSENTIAL  
OPERATIONS AT PHYSICAL LOCATIONS IN THE COUNTY;  
PROHIBITING ALL NON-ESSENTIAL GATHERINGS OF ANY NUMBER  
OF INDIVIDUALS; ORDERING CESSATION OF ALL NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL; AND  
RESTRICTING ACCESS TO CERTAIN RECREATION AREAS

**DATE OF ORDER: April 8, 2020**

**Please read this Order carefully. Violation of or failure to comply with this Order is a misdemeanor punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both. [California Health and Safety Code, Section 120295, *et seq.*; Government Code, Section 8665; Penal Code, Section 148(a)(1)]**

UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF CALIFORNIA HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE SECTIONS 101040, 101085, AND 120175, THE HEALTH OFFICER OF THE COUNTY OF MERCED (“HEALTH OFFICER”) ORDERS:

1. This Order supersedes the March 20, 2020, Order of the Health Officer directing all individuals to stay at home (“Prior Stay at Home Order”). This Order clarifies, strengthens, and extends certain terms of the Prior Stay at Home Order to increase social distancing and reduce person-to-person contact in order to further slow transmission of Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (“COVID-19”). As of the effective date and time of this Order set forth in Section 15 below, all individuals, businesses, entities, and government agencies in the County of Merced (the “County”) are required to follow the provisions of this Order.
2. The intent of this Order is to ensure that the maximum number of people self-isolate in their places of residence to the maximum extent feasible, while enabling essential services to continue, to slow the spread of COVID-19 to the maximum extent possible. When people need to leave their places of residence, whether to obtain or perform vital services, or to otherwise facilitate authorized activities necessary for continuity of social and commercial life, they should at all times reasonably possible comply with Social Distancing Requirements as defined in Section 12 below. All provisions of this Order should be interpreted to effectuate this intent. Failure to comply with any of the provisions of this Order constitutes an imminent threat to public health.

3. In accordance with the Order of the State Public Health Officer and the California Governor's Executive Order N-33-20 both issued on March 19, 2020, all individuals currently living within the County are ordered to shelter at their place of residence. To the extent individuals are using shared or outdoor spaces, they must at all times as reasonably possible maintain social distancing of at least six feet from any other person when they are outside their residence. All persons may leave their residences only for Essential Activities, Essential Governmental Functions, or to operate Essential Businesses, all as defined in Section 12. Individuals experiencing homelessness are exempt from this Section, but are strongly urged to obtain shelter, and governmental and other entities are strongly urged to make such shelter available as soon as possible and to the maximum extent practicable (and to utilize Social Distancing Requirements in their operation).
4. All businesses with a facility in the County, except Essential Businesses as defined below in Section 12, are required to cease all activities at facilities located within the County except Minimum Basic Operations, as defined in Section 12. For clarity, businesses may also continue operations consisting exclusively of employees or contractors performing activities at their own residences (i.e., working from home). All Essential Businesses are strongly encouraged to remain open. To the greatest extent feasible, Essential Businesses shall comply with Social Distancing Requirements as defined in Section 12 below, including, but not limited to, when any customers are standing in line.
5. All public and private gatherings of any number of people occurring outside a household or living unit are prohibited, except for the limited purposes as expressly permitted in Section 12. All bars, wineries and brew-pubs should be closed, all in-dining at restaurants should cease, with the exception of home delivery and takeout, and all gyms, bingo halls, and card rooms should close. Nothing in this Order prohibits the gathering of members of a household or living unit.
6. All agencies, jurisdictions, entities, individuals, businesses, companies, private or public, owning or operating parks or golf courses are hereby directed to cease all operations and services of parks and golf courses within the County, closing all parks and golf courses, and shall prevent all public and motorized access by use of signage and physical barrier wherever possible, except access to walking trails and bicycle paths is allowed. Parks include, but are not limited to, picnic areas, lake facilities, playgrounds, skateboard parks, and basketball courts in parks. Individuals accessing walking trails or bicycle paths shall follow Social Distancing Requirements.
  - a. Such access to walking trails or bicycle paths shall be exclusively by non-motorized means, except that disabled persons with vehicles possessing current and valid disabled person parking placards or disabled person license plates may continue to access parks by motorized means but only to the minimum extent necessary to engage in Essential Activities at walking trails or bicycle paths.

- b. Such park facilities may be repurposed during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide essential services coordinated with or by the County as approved by the Health Officer.
- 7. All travel, including, but not limited to, travel on foot, bicycle, scooter, motorcycle, automobile, or public transit, except Essential Travel and Essential Activities as defined below in Section 12, is prohibited. People must use public transit only for purposes of performing Essential Activities or to travel to and from work to operate Essential Businesses or maintain Essential Governmental Functions. People riding on public transit must comply with Social Distancing Requirements as defined in Section 12 below, to the greatest extent feasible. This Order allows travel into or out of the County to perform Essential Activities, operate Essential Businesses, or maintain Essential Governmental Functions.
- 8. This Order is issued based on evidence of increasing occurrence of COVID-19 throughout the state, scientific evidence and best practices regarding the most effective approaches to slow the transmission of communicable diseases generally and COVID19 specifically, and evidence that the age, condition, and health of a significant portion of the population of the County places it at risk for serious health complications, including death, from COVID-19. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in the general public, which is now a pandemic according to the World Health Organization, there is a public health emergency throughout the County. Making the problem worse, some individuals who contract the COVID-19 virus have no symptoms or have mild symptoms, which means they may not be aware they carry the virus. Because even people without symptoms can transmit the disease, and because evidence shows the disease is easily spread, gatherings can result in the transmission of the virus. The scientific evidence shows that at this stage of the emergency, it is essential to slow virus transmission as much as possible to protect the most vulnerable and to prevent the health care system from being overwhelmed. One proven way to slow the transmission is to limit interactions among people to the greatest extent practicable. By reducing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, this Order helps preserve critical and limited healthcare capacity in the County.
- 9. This Order also is issued in light of a significant and increasing number of suspected cases of community transmission and likely further significant increases in transmission. Widespread testing for COVID-19 is not yet available but is expected to increase in the coming days. This Order is necessary to slow the rate of spread and the Health Officer will re-evaluate it as further data becomes available.
- 10. This Order is issued in accordance with, and incorporates by reference, the following:
  - a) The Proclamation of the State of Emergency issued by Governor Gavin Newsom on March 4, 2020.
  - b) Executive Order N-25-20 issued by Governor Gavin Newsom on March 12, 2020.

- c) Proclamation on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak issued by the President of the United States on March 13, 2020.
- d) Order of the Merced County Health Officer on March 13, 2020.
- e) Executive Order N-33-20 issued by Governor Gavin Newsom on March 19, 2020.
- f) Order of the State Public Health Officer issued on March 19, 2020.

11. This Order comes after the release of substantial guidance from the County Health Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the California Department of Public Health, and other public health officials throughout the United States and around the world, including a variety of prior orders to combat the spread and harms of COVID-19. The Health Officer will continue to assess the quickly evolving situation and may modify or extend this Order, or issue additional Orders, related to COVID-19.

12. Definitions and Exemptions.

- a. For purposes of this Order, individuals may leave their residence only to perform any of the following “Essential Activities.” But people at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and people who are sick are urged to stay in their residence to the extent possible except as necessary to seek medical care.
  - i. To engage in activities or perform tasks essential to their health and safety, or to the health and safety of their family or household members (including, but not limited to, pets), such as, by way of example only and without limitation, obtaining medical supplies or medication, visiting a health care professional, or obtaining supplies they need to work from home.
  - ii. To obtain necessary services or supplies for themselves and their family or household members, or to deliver those services or supplies to others, such as, by way of example only and without limitation, canned food, dry goods, fresh fruits and vegetables, pet supply, fresh meats, fish, and poultry, and any other household consumer products, and products necessary to maintain the safety, sanitation, and essential operation of residence.
  - iii. To engage in outdoor activity, provided the individuals comply with Social Distancing Requirements as defined in this Section and all requirements of this Order.
  - iv. To perform work providing essential products and services at an Essential Business or to otherwise carry out activities

specifically permitted in this Order, including Minimum Basic Operations.

- v. To care for a family member or pet in another household.
  
- b. For purposes of this Order, individuals may leave their residence to work for or obtain services at any “Healthcare Operations” including hospitals, clinics, dentists, pharmacies, pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, other healthcare facilities, healthcare suppliers, home healthcare services providers, mental health providers, or any related and/or ancillary healthcare services. “Healthcare Operations” also includes veterinary care and all healthcare services provided to animals. This exemption shall be construed broadly to avoid any impacts to the delivery of healthcare, broadly defined. “Healthcare Operations” does not include fitness and exercise gyms and similar facilities.
  
- c. For purposes of this Order, individuals may leave their residence to provide any services or perform any work necessary to the operations and maintenance of “Essential Infrastructure,” including, but not limited to, public works construction, residential and commercial construction, airport operations, water, sewer, gas, electrical, oil refining, roads and highways, public transportation, solid waste collection and removal, internet, and telecommunications systems (including the provision of essential global, national, and local infrastructure for computing services, business infrastructure, communications, and web-based services), provided that they carry out those services or that work in compliance with Social Distancing Requirements as defined this Section, to the extent possible.
  
- d. For purposes of this Order, all first responders, emergency management personnel, emergency dispatchers, court personnel, and law enforcement personnel, and others who need to perform essential services are categorically exempt from this Order. Further, nothing in this Order shall prohibit any individual from performing or accessing “Essential Governmental Functions,” as determined by the governmental entity performing those functions. Each governmental entity shall identify and designate appropriate employees or contractors to continue providing and carrying out any Essential Governmental Functions. All Essential Governmental Functions shall be performed in compliance with Social Distancing Requirements as defined in this Section, to the extent possible.

- e. For the purposes of this Order, covered businesses include any for-profit, nonprofit, or educational entities, regardless of the nature of the service, the function they perform, or its corporate or entity structure.
  
- f. For the purposes of this Order, “Essential Businesses” means:
  - i. Healthcare Operations and Essential Infrastructure;
  - ii. Grocery stores, certified farmers’ markets, farm and produce stands, supermarkets, food banks, convenience stores, and other establishments engaged in the retail sale of canned food, dry goods, fresh fruits and vegetables, pet supply, fresh meats, fish, and poultry, and any other household consumer products (such as cleaning and personal care products). This includes stores that sell groceries and also sell other non- grocery products, and products necessary to maintaining the safety, sanitation, and essential operation of residences;
  - iii. Agriculture, food, and beverage cultivation, processing, testing and distribution, including but not limited to, farming, ranching, fishing, dairies, creameries, wineries and breweries in order to preserve inventory and production (not for retail business), as well as business activities that support production and processing by providing essential agricultural supplies and services, including but not limited to, transportation, manufacturing, chemicals, equipment, and services such as cooling, storing, packing, and distribution of such products for wholesale or retail sale;
  - iv. Businesses that provide food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals;
  - v. Newspapers, television, radio, and other media services;
  - vi. Gas stations and auto-supply, sales and auto-repair, and related facilities;
  - vii. Banks and related financial institutions;
  - viii. Hardware stores;
  - ix. Plumbers, electricians, exterminators, custodial/janitorial workers, handyman services, funeral home workers and morticians, moving services, HVAC installers, carpenters, vegetations services, tree maintenance, landscapers, gardeners, property managers, private security personnel and other service providers who provide services to maintain the safety, sanitation, and essential operation to properties and other Essential Businesses.
  - x. Businesses providing mailing and shipping services, including post office boxes;

- xi. Educational institutions—including public and private K-12 schools, colleges, and universities—for purposes of facilitating distance learning or performing essential functions, provided that social distancing of six feet per person is maintained to the greatest extent possible;
- xii. Laundromats, drycleaners, and laundry service providers;
- xiii. Restaurants and other facilities that prepare and serve food, but only for delivery or carry out. Schools and other entities that typically provide free food services to students or members of the public may continue to do so under this Order on the condition that the food is provided to students or members of the public on a pick-up and take-away basis only. Schools and other entities that provide food services under this exemption shall not permit the food to be eaten at the site where it is provided, or at any other gathering site;
- xiv. Businesses that supply products needed for people to work from home;
- xv. Businesses that supply other essential businesses with the support or supplies necessary to operate;
- xvi. Businesses that ship or deliver groceries, food, goods or services directly to residences;
- xvii. Airlines, taxis, and other private transportation providers providing transportation services necessary for Essential Activities and other purposes expressly authorized in this Order;
- xviii. Home-based care for seniors, adults, or children;
- xix. Residential facilities and shelters for seniors, adults, and children;
- xx. Professional services, such as legal or accounting services, when necessary to assist in compliance with legally mandated activities;
- xxi. Delivery services that provide transport of essential products, such as water, food and household products;
- xxii. Childcare facilities providing services that enable employees exempted in this Order to work as permitted. To the extent possible, childcare facilities must operate under the following mandatory conditions:
  1. Childcare must be carried out in stable groups of 12 or fewer (“stable” means that the same 12 or fewer children are in the same group each day).
  2. Children shall not change from one group to another.
  3. If more than one group of children is cared for at one facility, each group shall be in a separate room.

Groups shall not mix with each other.

4. Childcare providers shall remain solely with one group of children.

g. For the purposes of this Order, “Minimum Basic Operations” include the following, provided that employees comply with Social Distancing Requirements as defined this Section, to the extent possible, while carrying out such operations:

- i. The minimum necessary activities to maintain the value of the business’s inventory, ensure security, process payroll and employee benefits, or for related functions.
- ii. The minimum necessary activities to facilitate employees of the business being able to continue to work remotely from their residences.

h. For the purposes of this Order, “Essential Travel” includes travel for any of the following purposes. Individuals engaged in any Essential Travel must comply with all Social Distancing Requirements as defined in this Section below.

- i. Any travel related to the provision of or access to Essential Activities, Essential Governmental Functions, Essential Businesses, or Minimum Basic Operations.
- ii. Travel to care for elderly, minors, dependents, persons with disabilities, or other vulnerable persons.
- iii. Travel to or from educational institutions for purposes of receiving materials for distance learning, for receiving meals, and any other related services.
- iv. Travel to return to a place of residence from outside the jurisdiction.
- v. Travel required by law enforcement or court order.
- vi. Travel required for non-residents to return to their place of residence outside the County.

i. For purposes of this Order, residences include hotels, motels, shared rental units and similar facilities.

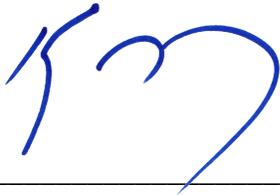
j. For purposes of this Order, “Social Distancing Requirements” includes maintaining at least six-foot social distancing from other individuals, washing hands with soap and water for at least twenty seconds as frequently as possible or using hand sanitizer, covering coughs or sneezes (into the sleeve or elbow, not hands), regularly cleaning high-touch surfaces, and not shaking hands.

13. Pursuant to Government Code Sections 26602 and 41601 and Health and Safety Code Sections 101029 and 131080, the Health Officer requests that the Sheriff and all chiefs of police in the County ensure compliance with and enforce this Order. The

violation of any provision of this Order constitutes an imminent threat to public health.

14. In accordance with California Health and Safety Code section 131080, the Health Officer will follow the guidance of the California Department of Public Health and may modify or extend this Order, or issue additional Orders.
15. This Order shall become effective immediately and will continue until it is rescinded, superseded, or amended in writing by the Health Officer.
16. Copies of this Order shall promptly be: (1) made available at the County Administration Building at 2222 M Street, Merced, California 95340; (2) posted on the County Public Health Department's website ([countyofmerced.com](http://countyofmerced.com)); and (3) provided to any member of the public requesting a copy of this Order.
17. If any provision of this Order to the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held to be invalid, the remainder of the Order, including the application of such part or provision to other persons or circumstances, shall not be affected and shall continue in full force and effect. To this end, the provisions of this Order are severable.

**IT IS SO ORDERED:**



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Kenneth Bird, MD, MPH  
Merced County Health Officer

Dated: April 8, 2020