



City of Los Banos

At the Crossroads of California

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated March 24, 2020

GENERAL INFORMATION REGARDING NEW ORDER DIRECTING INDIVIDUALS TO STAY AT HOME

The Order effective immediately limits activity, travel, and business functions to only the most essential needs. This order and guidance comes after California Governor Gavin Newsom's Executive Order N-33-20 and Order of the State Public Health Officer both issued on March 19, 2020 in addition to substantial input from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and best practices from other health officials around the world. This order is in effect until it is rescinded, superseded or amended in writing by the Health Officer. Note that these FAQs will continue to be updated. Please check back for updates and clarifications.

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ORDER

What does this Order do?

This Order requires that most people stay home starting as soon as possible effective immediately, unless they are engaged in certain "Essential Activities" which are discussed more below. For most people, this means you and those you live with should remain at home. You are allowed to leave your home for specified reasons to make sure you have the necessities of life (discussed more below) such as getting food and medical supplies. You are also allowed to go outside to take care of a pet or for exercise so long as you do not congregate in a group and maintain at least 6 feet of distance between you and other people. If you are sick you should self-isolate, including, to the extent you can, from others you live with (more on that below).

When does this Order go into effect?

The Order went into effect on March 20, 2020.

How long does the Order last?

The Order is currently set to last until it is rescinded, superseded or amended. How long the restrictions take place will depend on what the County Health Officer decides is necessary to protect public health.

Can the Order be changed?

Yes. The Health Officer may make changes to the Order as more information emerges about the public health situation and issue new orders and directive as conditions warrant. Check the County website at <http://www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus> regularly for updates. The County is working with the media to share important updates and information.

Where is the Order in effect?

This Order is in effect across all of Merced County, including unincorporated areas.

Who issued the Order?

This Order was issued by the Merced County Public Health Officer after conferring with the Merced County Public Health officials. The Health Officer has the authority under state law to issue Orders to protect the health and welfare of everyone in their jurisdictions.

Will the police arrest you if you are seen outside?

No! The stay in place order does not change California laws.

I run an Essential Business, as defined by the Order. Do I need to get an official letter of authorization from the County to operate?

No. If your business is in the list of Essential Businesses provided in the Order, then you may operate it. You do not need to obtain any specific authorization from the City to do so.

I work for an Essential Business, as defined by the Order. Do I need to have a letter from my employer or other documentation to travel?

No. You do not need to carry official documentation demonstrating that you are exempt under the Order. But be prepared to explain if requested by law enforcement why your travel is authorized under the Order.

QUESTIONS ABOUT SHELTERING IN PLACE

What does it mean to “shelter in place?”

The term “shelter in place” means to stay in your home and not leave unless necessary for one of the exceptions listed in the Order (discussed more below).

What is the difference between “sheltering in place” and “social distancing”?

Sheltering in place is a more rigorous form of social distancing.

Sheltering in place means you:

- Must stay at home
- Can only leave your home for “essential activities,” to work for an “essential business,” or for “essential travel,” which are defined in the Order (see FAQs for details)
- Cannot host or attend any gatherings

You should also maintain 6 foot distance from other people as much as possible, wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds each time (or use hand sanitizer), frequently disinfect high-touch surfaces, and stay home if you are sick.

Can I leave home to visit friends or family members if there is no urgent need or I am not performing an essential activity?

No. For your safety as well as their safety, we need to help each other fight the spread of COVID-19 by staying at home.

Can I still get my mail and deliveries?

Yes. You will still be able to get mail and other deliveries at your home.

Can I still order the things I need online and have them delivered to my residence?

Yes. Businesses that deliver goods or services directly to residences are “essential businesses” that may continue to operate.

Can I go out to do laundry or have my laundry done?

Yes. Maintain social distancing.

Can I get my prescriptions or other health care needs? Can I leave home to go to the pharmacy to get my prescription filled?

Yes. Drug stores and other medical supply stores are allowed to operate. When possible you should have prescription medicines and health care supplies delivered to your home.

What if I need to get healthcare from my medical provider?

You can still get your health needs addressed. Contact your health care provider to see if they are providing regular services. Some services, especially elective procedures, may be postponed or canceled. If you are feeling sick, please first call your doctor, a nurse hotline, or an urgent care center. Do not go to the emergency room of a hospital unless you are having an actual emergency.

Can I still seek non-essential medical care like eye exams, teeth cleaning, elective procedures, etc.?

Generally, you should postpone non-essential medical and dental care if possible. If it can wait, then wait. Check with your provider for specific guidance. They may cancel services. You should not expose yourself or others by pursuing health care or maintenance care that can wait a few weeks.

Should I stock up on food, necessities like toilet paper, and on medicines?

No. You will continue to be able to purchase these items. Stores selling necessary items like grocery stores, pharmacies, and hardware stores will remain open. Please continue to buy normal quantities of these items on the same schedule you normally follow. This will ensure that there is enough for everyone.

What should I do if I'm sick? If I or a family member need immediate medical attention, can I leave home to go to the doctor or hospital?

If you are feeling sick, first call your doctor, a nurse hotline, or an urgent care center before going to the hospital. Do not go to the emergency room of a hospital unless you are having an actual emergency. But you can and should seek medical advice if you or a family member is sick. If it is not an emergency, please contact your primary care provider to determine next steps. Also, you can check online resources to help you assess symptoms if you are worried about whether you or a loved one has COVID-19. You should check <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> for more information. Call 911 or go to an emergency room if you are experiencing a medical emergency.

Can I leave home to care for my elderly parents or friends who require assistance to care for themselves? Or a friend or family member who has disabilities?

Yes. Be extremely cautious when providing care to vulnerable people and ensure that you protect them and yourself by following social distancing guidelines such as washing hands before and after, using hand sanitizer, maintaining at least 6 feet of distance when possible, and coughing or sneezing into a tissue.

Can I visit loved ones in the hospital, nursing home, skilled nursing facility, or other residential care facility?

You may visit a hospital or other healthcare facility only for the purpose of obtaining health care services and supplies. Non-essential visitations are not permitted. Do not visit a nursing home, skilled nursing facility, or residential care facility other than for the purpose of securing care. People over 60 years of age are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

What if I can't get out of the home? How can I get supplies and food?

Please contact friends, family, or others you know who can provide support. They are allowed to pick up any of your needs. You can also order food and other supplies, and have them delivered to your home. Bethel Community Church is offering food delivery service for seniors. For questions, please call (209) 827-0797 for more information.

Can I leave home to go to my church, synagogue, or mosque?

No. For your safety as well as the safety of your fellow worshippers, we need to help each other fight the spread of COVID-19 by staying at home. Places of worship may offer remote access to services, such as by emails, video streaming, or teleconference.

The Order prohibits non-essential travel on foot or bike -- does that mean that I can't go on a walk or take a bike ride?

No. The Order allows you to go outside for exercise so long as you maintain social distancing (more than 6 feet from persons who are not part of your household). This includes activities like walks or hikes or bike rides or going to a park.

Can I leave home to exercise?

If you will be outdoors and not in close contact with other people, yes. Otherwise, no. Fitness centers, exercise gyms, recreational centers, golf courses, and public pools are not allowed to operate.

I become anxious when cooped up in my house. Am I allowed to go to a park or on a hike? Can I travel to a County park or open space?

Yes. Spending time outside improves mood and well-being, and is particularly beneficial to children. You can go for walks, go to the park, and engage in other similar activities, but you should maintain social distance (more than 6 feet away from persons who are not part of your household) to avoid spread of the virus.

Can I go shopping for things other than food/groceries?

Yes. You can shop for anything that is related to health care, hardware supplies, supplies needed to telecommute, and supplies essential to safety and sanitation. But you should minimize unnecessary trips.

Can I go to a bar/nightclub/theater?

No. Entertainment venues are not allowed to operate.

Can I go to a restaurant, café, coffee shop, ice cream shop, or other foodservice location?

Yes, but only to pick up food. You cannot dine, eat, or drink in or around the facility.

Can I walk my dog/pet?

Yes. Be sure that you distance yourself at least six feet from others who are not part of your household.

Can I go to a vet or pet hospital if my pet is sick?

Yes. Please call first to determine if the vet has any restrictions in place.

I don't cook—how can I purchase meals?

Restaurants, cafes, food trucks, and similar establishments are encouraged to remain open to supply meals to the public via delivery and carryout. You can also purchase prepared foods at grocery stores, supermarkets, certified farmers' markets, convenience stores, and other such food retailers.

How can I access free or reduced price meals for myself or my family?

Schools, soup kitchens, food banks, and other entities that provide free or reduced priced food or meals to the public are encouraged to continue providing these services. You must pick up and take away the food or have it brought to you. Do not eat on the premises.

Can I take my kids to the park and can we use playgrounds?

The Order allows you to engage in outdoor activities, provided that you maintain adequate social distancing. While we encourage use of parks, we strongly discourage the use of playgrounds because they include high-touch surfaces, and because it is typically not possible to maintain social distancing at playgrounds.

Can I carry out a court-ordered visit with my kids?

Yes. The Order exempts travel by court order or law enforcement.

QUESTIONS ABOUT BUSINESSES, EMPLOYMENT, AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Will all business offices and stores be required to close?

No. “Essential businesses” may keep their facilities open (and are encouraged to keep them open) to continue providing essential services and products to the public. Employees may leave home to go to these jobs.

Non-essential businesses may keep facilities open only to maintain minimum basic operations, such as maintaining the value of an inventory, keeping the site secure, or ensuring that employees are able to work remotely. The Order does not prohibit any employees from working from home.

What are “Essential Businesses”?

The Order provides the following list of “Essential Businesses”:

1. Healthcare Operations and Essential Infrastructure;
2. 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 supplies, 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;
3. Agriculture, food, and beverage cultivation, processing, 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;
4. Businesses that provide food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals;

5. Newspapers, television, radio, and other media services;
6. Gas stations and auto-supply, auto-repair, and related facilities;
7. Banks and related financial institutions;
8. Hardware stores;
9. 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;
10. Businesses providing mailing and shipping services, including post office boxes;
11. 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;
12. Laundromats, drycleaners, and laundry service providers;
13. 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 allow the food to be eaten at the site where it is provided, or at any other gathering site;
14. Businesses that supply products needed for people to work from home;
15. Businesses that supply other essential businesses with the support or supplies necessary to operate;
16. Businesses that ship or deliver groceries, food, goods or services directly to residences;
17. Airlines, taxis, and other private transportation providers providing transportation services necessary for Essential Activities and other purposes expressly authorized in this Order;
18. Home-based care for seniors, adults, or children;
19. Residential facilities and shelters for seniors, adults, and children;
20. Professional services, such as legal or accounting services, when necessary to assist in compliance with legally mandated activities;
21. Construction, including housing construction.

22. Childcare facilities providing services that enable employees exempted in this Order to work as allowed. To the extent possible, childcare facilities must operate under the following mandatory conditions:

- a. 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).
- b. Children shall not change from one group to another.
- c. 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.
- d. Childcare providers shall remain solely with one group of children.

I operate a farm, am I allowed to continue my operation and have employees report to work?

Yes, cultivation, processing and production of agriculture and farming is considered an Essential Business.

What if my business is not considered an Essential Business? Does this Order require that I shut down my business facility?

You and your employees are allowed to perform “Minimum Basic Operations” at your work place, so long as employees maintain a distance of six feet from one another to the greatest extent feasible. “Minimum Basic Operations” include maintaining the value of inventory, ensuring security, and ensuring that employees can work remotely. Other than to maintain “Minimum Basic Operations,” employees can only work remotely from their residences.

I currently receive benefits through Merced County’s Human Services Agency. Will this order interrupt my benefits?

No, the Human Services Agency is considered an Essential Governmental Function and will continue to operate.

Does this Order require that schools shut down?

This Order requires that all schools stop holding classes at physical locations within the County. However, schools may provide distance learning to their students. Employees of schools may go to work for the purpose of providing distance learning to their students. Schools can also continue to offer students free and reduced-price lunches for takeaway or delivery, which many schools are doing.

Will this order prevent companies working on vaccines and testing for COVID-19 from continuing to do that work?

No. The Order exempts any business that is performing work related to the delivery of health care.

I am in the business of manufacturing food that I supply to grocery stores and other food retailers. Am I required to shut down?

No. All suppliers of essential businesses are allowed (and encouraged) to continue operating. This includes businesses that supply food goods and prepared meals to grocery stores and other food retailers.

Does the Order require that businesses stop work that is necessary to our health care system?

No. The Order exempts any business that is performing work related to the delivery of health care.

Can my company continue construction on a health care facility?

Yes, the Order exempts any business that is performing work related to the delivery of health care.

My business principally manufactures, supplies, or repairs cell phones. Can it operate?

Yes. If your business is primarily engaged in supply or repair of cell phones or other telecommunications devices, then it is essential and may continue to operate under the Order.

Are non-profit organizations allowed to continue operating?

If they provide essential services as described in the Order, then yes they can and should continue providing those services. This would include non-profits operating food pantries, providing housing for homeless residents, and providing other critical services.

What if some of the work my business does at its facility is essential and some is non-essential?

Your business can continue to operate its facility to carry out its essential business functions. You must maximize remote work and comply with social distancing requirements at the facility. The facility cannot continue to carry out non-essential business functions.

I operate a “big box store” that sells some clothing in addition to groceries, electronics, and hardware. Do I need to shut down the part of my store that sells non-essential supplies?

No. You may keep your entire store open if it primarily sells essential goods and supplies like food and telecommunication supplies.

What if I have a cafeteria at my worksite. Can it continue to operate to serve workers who are carrying out work exempted in the Order?

The cafeteria can operate like other food facilities. It can serve food to the remaining employees, so long as the employees take the food away and do not eat it in the cafeteria. The cafeteria should follow the social distancing requirements in the Order.

Is the local government shutting down?

No, essential government functions will continue, including first responders, emergency management personnel, emergency dispatchers, and law enforcement. Other government functions or offices may be subject to reduced schedules or may be closed as part of the effort to fight the spread of COVID-19.

I work for the government—Can I continue to go to work?

Government employees can continue to go to work if they are designated as essential employees by their employer. Each government entity is responsible for determining which of its workers are essential workers.

What do I do if my employer requires me to go to work?

Many businesses are not allowed to operate under this Order. Essential Businesses, as defined in the Order, are allowed (and encouraged) to continue operating. If your work is not an Essential Business, you are not allowed to go to work and your employer is not allowed to require you to attend except to sustain Minimum Basic Operations, as that term is defined in the Order. You may work from home if your work allows.

I work in a hospital or medical clinic, but I'm not sure I'm essential. Should I continue to work? What if I'm over 60?

ALL employees of hospitals, clinics, and other organizations that provide healthcare, provide services to healthcare organizations, provide needed supplies to healthcare organizations, or otherwise maintain healthcare operations of all kinds may continue working.

Both the County's Order and the Governor's recent guidance allows essential workers over 60 to continue working, even though others in that age group are being directed to stay home.

What do I do about my kids? I have to work.

If you work for an Essential Business, as described in the Order, you can and should continue to work. Certain employers, schools, and community organizations will be providing childcare for employees of essential businesses. You may also employ a nanny or babysitter to provide home-based care for your kids.

Can bike repair shops continue to operate?

Yes, bike repair shops are treated as an Essential Business (the same as auto repair shops) because they are necessary to facilitate essential travel.

Can my company continue to provide janitorial services?

Yes, janitorial services are allowed as necessary to health and sanitation.

Can grocery stores, farmers markets, and other food retailers remain open?

Yes. Grocery stores, certified farmers' markets, farm and produce stands, supermarkets, food banks, convenience stores, and similar food retail establishments are encouraged to remain open to provide food and pet supplies to the public. When visiting these establishments, please help retailers maintain at least 6 feet minimum distance between patrons, including by providing ample space while shopping and waiting in line.

Can warehouses and distribution centers that supply businesses that ship and deliver stay open?

Yes.

I work for an essential infrastructure organization—can I leave home to go to work?

Yes. You can go to work to maintain and operate essential infrastructure, including public works construction, commercial and residential 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).

What construction is allowed to continue?

The Order only exempts construction of housing, commercial, public works, and medical and health care related facilities.

Can I operate a business that sells things that can be delivered to people’s homes? Can I shift more of my business to a delivery model?

Deliveries can continue to be sent to people’s homes, and you may adjust your business model accordingly while this Order is in place.

My business provides critical services and products for the federal government that we are required to provide on a time-certain basis--can we continue to manufacture these products?

Employees and contractors of any governmental entity may continue to provide the services and products if the governmental entity determines that they are necessary to carry out an essential governmental function.

I work in a cemetery-- can I go to work?

Yes, cemeteries are essential infrastructure.

Can home service workers who clean homes continue to provide their services?

Home service workers may provide their services if necessary for health and sanitation.

If I operate a non-essential business with a retail storefront, am I allowed to re-configure my business to deliver products to people’s homes?

Yes.

I am a nanny. Will I get in trouble if I go to work?

The Order permits nannies and babysitters caring for a child in the child’s own home to continue working.

QUESTIONS ABOUT TRAVEL

Can I get a ride in my favorite ride share/on demand service or a taxi?

Yes, but these services can only be used for “essential activities,” to get to and from work to operate “essential businesses,” or to provide “essential governmental functions,” which are defined in the Order.

Keep in mind that being in close quarters in a vehicle that has been shared with many others should be avoided if possible.

Can I take public transport (bus, subway, train)?

Yes, but public transit can only be used to perform “essential activities,” to get to and from work to operate “essential businesses,” or to maintain “essential governmental functions.” When using public transport, you should maintain at least 6 feet distance from one another (2 or 3 steps away), including if you are on the bus or on trains.

Am I allowed to leave the areas covered by this Order to travel to/from a job outside the Bay Area? Does the Order allow me to leave the County?

Yes, but only to perform “essential activities,” operate “essential businesses,” or to maintain “essential governmental functions,” as those terms are defined in the Order. Otherwise, the answer is no because that puts you and others in the community at risk.

I am currently on vacation outside the County—Does the Order allow me to return home?

Yes.

If I’m outside the county travelling for vacation or business, am I allowed to come home?

The Order permits you to return home.

I’m visiting and staying in a hotel, with family/friends, or in a short-term rental. What should I do? Can I go home?

Yes, you can leave the County for the purpose of returning home.

If I am currently outside the County, can I travel into the County?

You are subject to the same restrictions for travel as individuals currently in the County. You may travel into the County to perform “essential activities,” work to operate “essential businesses,” or maintain “essential governmental functions” as those terms are defined in the Order.

OTHER QUESTIONS

What if I’m in a line and there isn’t 6 feet between me and others?

You should still try to maintain at least six feet between you and others. When that isn’t possible for short periods, do your best to keep the duration short. And be sure when in line you don’t sneeze or cough onto people. If needed, cough or sneeze into your shirt or into an elbow with clothing on, not into your hand.

What if my plumbing gets stopped up or there is another problem with necessary equipment at my home? How will I access those sorts of services? Call your plumber or building manager. This Order allows service providers like plumbers, electricians, and exterminators to keep working and providing their services to the public. To obtain supplies for a DIY solution, you can also visit your hardware store, which is allowed to stay open under this Order.

What do I do about my loved one who needs care from me? You are permitted to provide care or to help out with getting supplies for loved ones, even if they do not live in your household. But do not provide care or pick up supplies if you are sick and someone else can help them. If you are sick, please try to self-isolate or take other steps not to expose anyone else to your illness.

What happens if I don't comply with this Order?

This is a legally enforceable order issued under California law.

Why is this Order in place?

This Order is in place to address the ongoing spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. At this point in the global pandemic, the virus has a foothold in all the jurisdictions that issued this Order. There is substantial community transmission of the virus, which is easily spread between people. One big challenge in controlling the transmission of the virus is that many people who have it don't have symptoms or have mild symptoms. But they can easily spread the virus even if they don't feel ill. And the virus lasts a long time on many surfaces (from hours to days).

Unfortunately, this virus can cause severe symptoms in some people and can also be fatal. Some who get the virus, especially those over 60 years old, those who have weak immune systems, and those with various medical conditions (see below for a full list), can end up with serious complications that include fever, pneumonia, and even in some instances death. There is no approved treatment or cure for COVID-19. That means that people who get very sick need medical intervention such as oxygen or help breathing.

Because the virus spreads so easily, without dramatic intervention like this Order, it would result in so many people needing medical attention in a hospital setting that our hospitals will be overwhelmed. We may not have enough beds or equipment to adequately care for the most seriously ill. And our health care workers and other first responders are also at risk, and if they get sick there are fewer people to provide health care and first response services. For those reasons, it is critical that we now do everything in our power to slow down the spread of the virus. Doing so will help to "flatten the curve" to slow down the spread of the virus and help our health care system not be overwhelmed. If this succeeds, it means that there will be health care available for those who get sick with COVID-19 or who need emergency medical care for accidents, heart attacks, strokes, and other serious medical conditions.

We all have to do our part now to protect everyone in the community. The best way to do that is to "socially isolate" yourself at home to avoid further spread of the virus.

Why now?

This Order is being issued now because the infection rates in the 6 most populous counties of the Bay Area suggest that the situation is critical and will worsen quickly, especially without rigorous intervention. Some jurisdictions believe their health care systems are overwhelmed or may start becoming overwhelmed in the next week. For those jurisdictions, the spread has to be slowed to the maximum extent possible. The sooner these extreme measures are taken, the more effective they are because of how the virus spreads.

QUESTIONS REGARDING ISSUES SPECIFIC TO LOS BANOS RESIDENTS

Who do I contact for information about the Coronavirus?

You may call the Merced County Public Health information line at (209) 381-1180 or visit <http://www.countyofmerced.com/3350/Coronavirus-Disease-2019>

Who do I contact for questions specific to Los Banos issues?

You can email us at eocinfo@losbanos.org or call (209) 827-2544. We will get back to you with an answer to answer your questions.

If my child's school is providing food or meals, can I leave home to go to the school to pick up the food or meals?

Yes. Los Banos Unified School District will serve to-go meals at drive-through locations to children and teen, ages 1 years old to 18 years old; at 6 school sites between 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. For more information visit <https://www.losbanosusd.org/>