

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding New Order Directing Individuals to Shelter at Home

Updated March 16, 2020

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding New Order Directing Individuals to Shelter at Home Except to Provide or Receive Essential or Engage in Essential Activities**

The order effective 12:00 am, March 17, 2020 order limits activity, travel and business functions to only the most essential needs. The guidance comes after 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 April 7.

Scientific evidence shows social distancing is one of the most effective approaches to slow the transmission of communicable disease. The order restricts travel to essential activities, activities necessary for the health and safety for individuals and their families. Essential businesses allowed to operate during the recommended action include health care operations; businesses that provide food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals; fresh and non-perishable food retailers (including convenience stores); pharmacies; child care facilities; gas stations; banks; laundry businesses and services necessary for maintaining the safety, sanitation and essential operation of a residence.

****Note that these FAQs will continued to be updated. Please check back for updates and clarifications: <http://sccphd.org/coronavirus>**

What does this Order do?

This Order requires that most people stay home starting as soon as possible, but no later than 12:01 a.m. on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, 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 pets, go on a walk, and just get outside, so long as you do not congregate in a group and maintain at least six 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).

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 designated exceptions listed in the Order (discussed more below). Some reasons you would leave your home are to get food, to get a prescription, to see a doctor, to go to work if your work is essential as defined in this Order, to take your child(ren) to and from childcare that is authorized under this Order, and to help people you care for get the things they need to live and be healthy and safe.

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

Sheltering in place is a more rigorous form of social distancing. There are some differences. Sheltering at home means:

- stay home
- only go out for “essential activities,” to work for an “essential business,” or for “essential travel” as those terms are defined in the Order, and as discussed further below
- stay 6 feet or more away from others
- no gatherings

The other principles of social distancing and mitigative hygiene will continue to apply whenever feasible. These include washing hands, using hand sanitizer, disinfecting surfaces, not going out if sick, and staying at least six feet away from others.

When does the Order go into effect?

The Order goes into effect immediately after midnight, starting at 12:01 am, Tuesday, March 17, 2020. Although this is soon, please do not panic. The Order allows for all essential activities such as shopping, taking care of children, and getting medications to continue.

How long does the Order last?

The Order is currently set to last for three (3) weeks – until 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, April 7, 2020. The duration can be either shortened or extended by the County Health Officer or the State Public Health Officer. We want to be sure the Order is in place for only as long as necessary, and the Health Officer will be closely monitoring the situation every day in order to determine what adjustments make sense.

Can the Order be changed?

Yes. It was important to get this Order in place quickly given the spread of the virus in the Bay Area. However, it can and will be updated as conditions warrant. Please be sure to check the County website at <http://www.sccphd.org/coronavirus> regularly to learn about updates. We will also be sure to work with the media to share important updates and information.

Where is the Order in effect?

This Order (or a similar order) is in effect across the six most populous counties of the Bay Area, including in Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Contra Costa, and Alameda Counties and the City of Berkeley.

Who issued the Order?

This Order was issued by Health Officers of Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Contra Costa, and Alameda Counties and the City of Berkeley. Those county health professionals have the authority under state law to issue Orders to protect the health and welfare of everyone in their respective jurisdictions.

Is this mandatory or is it just guidance?

Yes, it is mandatory. This Order is a legal Order issued under the authority of California law. You are required to comply, and it is a crime (a misdemeanor) not to follow the Order (although the intent is not for anyone to get into trouble). Also, it is critical for everyone to follow the Order to prevent the spread

of COVID-19 and protect themselves, their loved ones, friends, neighbors and the whole community. All persons, businesses, and other entities are required to comply if they do not fall within the exemptions that are specified in the Order.

Why is this Order in place?

This Order is in place to address the ongoing spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 in the Bay Area. 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 very bad. 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 are immunosuppressed (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 six most populous counties of the Bay Area and the City of Berkeley 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.

Why is the County Public Health Officer issuing an order that shuts down so many businesses in my community?

The Public Health Officers of the six largest counties in the Bay Area have been closely monitoring the rapidly accelerating situation with COVID-19 and it is clear that if we do not take very strong and aggressive action to slow down the spread of the disease, our hospitals and particularly our intensive care units will be overwhelmed with patients. We are taking this action to save the lives of people in our community, especially those who are particularly susceptible to severe illness from COVID-19, and are at heightened risk of severe illness or death if infected. The Order also protects everyone's ability to seek emergency health care when needed by preventing health care facilities from being more overwhelmed than they already are.

Am I allowed to leave my home while this Order is in effect?

The intent of this Order is to ensure that people remain in their residences and minimize social interactions outside of their immediate family unit. However, you may leave your residence for reasons specified in the Order. These reasons include ensuring the health and safety of yourself and your family, engaging in outdoor activity that does not involve close contact with other people, obtaining services and supplies for yourself and your family, and to perform employment functions that are permissible under the Order.

Can I leave home to visit friends or family members if there is no urgent need?

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, the Order identifies businesses that deliver goods or services directly to residences as “essential businesses” that may continue to operate.

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

Yes, but only for essential travel. 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,” as those terms are defined in the Order. Also, being in close quarters in a vehicle that has been shared with many others should be avoided if possible. However, there may be circumstances when this mode of transportation is needed. In that instance do your best to take social distancing precautions, being sure to cover your mouth and nose if you cough or sneeze, use hand sanitizer or wash your hands before and after rides, etc.

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,” as those terms are defined in the Order.

When using public transport, you should maintain at least six (6) feet distance from one another, which is appropriately two to three steps away, including if you are on the bus or on trains. This is why it’s important to only take public transportation for essential activities – you want to help everyone be able to practice 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 the drug store deliver your prescription medicine to your home.

How will I get food and medicines I need if I must “shelter in place” in my home?

The Order specifically allows people to leave their home to buy food, purchase medicine, and purchase other necessary items. It also encourages businesses selling those items to remain open, and allows employees of those businesses to keep working.

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

You can still get your health needs addressed. You should 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 these if possible. If it can wait, then wait. Check with your provider of routine care 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 whenever you need them, as 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 do. 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, please 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 the COVID-19 virus. 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 sure that you protect them and you 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?

Generally, no. There are limited exceptions specified in the Order. For most other situations, other existing Orders of the Health Officer addressing this emergency prohibit non-necessary visitation to these kinds of facilities. If you need to know more, please contact the facility you want to visit by phone before you visit to inquire about the status of visits. This is difficult, but it is necessary in order to protect hospital staff and other patients.

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 permitted to pick up any of your needs. You can also order food and other supplies, and have it delivered to your home.

Will all business offices and stores be required to close? What are "Essential Businesses"?

No, "Essential Businesses" may stay open and their employees may leave home to go to work. The Order includes the following list of essential businesses:

- 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 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;
- iii. Food cultivation, including farming, livestock, and fishing;
- 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, auto-repair, and related facilities;
- vii. Banks and related financial institutions;
- viii. Hardware stores;
- ix. Plumbers, electricians, exterminators, and other service providers who provide services that are necessary to maintaining the safety, sanitation, and essential operation of residences, Essential Activities, and 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. 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.

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” on site 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:

- i. The minimum necessary activities to maintain the value of the business’s inventory, ensure security, 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.

Your employees can also work from home if their jobs are ones that can be performed remotely.

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 permitted 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 permitted to go to work and your employer is not permitted to require you to attend except to complete Minimum Basic Operations, as that term is defined in the Order. You may work from home if your work permits.

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, which many schools are doing.

I work for Apple, Google, or another large technology company that provides products and services that the public needs to access critical services. Is my company being completely shut down?

No. However, most employees of such companies will need to work from home. Anyone who must work onsite to maintain “Essential Infrastructure” for the community or to maintain “Minimum Necessary Operations” as described in the Order may continue to work in the workplace so long as they are maintaining social distancing.

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

No. The Order specifically excludes all healthcare related functions, including not just hospitals, clinics, and healthcare providers, but also all of the companies that supply them with goods and services.

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 many, many other critical services.

Am I allowed to leave the areas covered by this Order in 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.

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.

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.

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. But places of worship can offer remote access to services, such as by emails, video streaming, or teleconference.

Can I leave home to exercise?

If you will be both outdoors and not in close contact with other people, yes. Otherwise, no. Fitness and exercise gyms are not permitted 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 should maintain social distance (i.e. be more than six feet away from persons who are not part of your household) when on walks and in parks to avoid spread of the virus.

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.

Can I go to the store (grocery store, market, corner store, food bank, etc.) to buy food and other things?

Yes. This also includes medical supplies at a pharmacy, essential home maintenance supplies at a hardware store, or office supplies for your home business or work.

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 six feet minimum distance between patrons, including by providing ample space while shopping and waiting in line.

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.

I operate a food facility-- what practices should I follow to keep my patrons safe?

Follow the best practices for allowable food facility operations included in the Department of Environmental Health's "Notice to Food Facilities--Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)": https://www.sccgov.org/sites/deh/Documents/2020-03-13_COVID-19_Notice.pdf. Consult the Public Health Department's website for additional up to date information.

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

Yes. You can shop for anything that is related to health care, office supplies, and hardware supplies, and other necessary items. But you should minimize unnecessary trips.

Can big box stores that sell groceries and essentials stay open?

Yes.

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

Yes.

Can I go to the bank?

Yes, you can go to the bank. But you should minimize unnecessary trips.

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

Yes.

What are the social distancing guidelines I still need to follow?

The best way to reduce their risk of getting sick, as with seasonal colds or the flu, still applies to prevent COVID-19:

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as frequently as possible.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Covering coughs or sneezes (into the sleeve or elbow, not hands)
- Avoid groups (stay at least six feet away from others)
- Reduce the time you are around others outside the home, even when at least six feet away.

When practicing social distancing, how far should I stay away from others if I must be away from my home?

At least six feet, which is appropriately two to three steps away, including if you are on the bus or train.

What if I'm in a line and there isn't six 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.

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

Yes. "Essential Infrastructure" includes, but is not limited to, public works construction, construction of housing (in particular affordable housing or housing for individuals experiencing homelessness), 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).

I work in healthcare operations—can I leave home to go to work?

Yes. 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, but does not include fitness and exercise gyms and similar facilities.

Can I go to a bar/nightclub/theater?

No. Entertainment venues like these are not permitted to be open during this Order.

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

Yes, but only to pick up food. You cannot dine in or eat or drink at the facility. Patrons will not be permitted to dine or congregate in restaurants, bars, and similar establishments.

Is my favorite restaurant, café, coffee or tea shop, ice cream shop, or other foodservice location open?

Restaurants and other facilities that prepare and serve food to the public are encouraged to stay open, but only to provide delivery and carry out. Patrons will not be permitted to dine or congregate in restaurants, bars, and similar establishments.

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

Restaurants, cafes, food trucks, and similar establishments may 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 goods or meals to students or other members of the public are encouraged to continue providing these services. However, food provided by these establishments to the public may not be eaten on the premises but must instead be delivered or taken away for consumption.

Can I go to the gym or health club?

No. Gyms and health clubs are not permitted to operate under this Order.

Can I walk my dog/pet?

Yes. Be sure that you distance yourself at least six feet from owners.

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.

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.

Can I keep working from home?

Yes.

What if I want to go to work at a physical location in the County and I'm not sick?

Unless your work is exempted in the Order, you cannot go to work at a physical location in the County. You may work from home for any business if your employer allows it.

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

This is a legally enforceable order issued under California law. It is a crime to violate this Order, and you may be punished by a fine or imprisonment for doing so.

Can I operate a business that can or does sell things that can be delivered to people's homes; can I continue doing that and shift more of my business to a delivery model?

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

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.

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.