



Congresswoman
VERONICA ESCOBAR
Texas' 16th Congressional District

Updated March 31, 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

Congresswoman Veronica Escobar (TX-16) has heard from many El Pasoans who are concerned about the coronavirus and wants to answer some of your frequently asked questions.

You may also visit the [Texas Department of State Health Services](#) (DSHS), [County of El Paso](#), and [City of El Paso](#)'s websites to learn more about how the state, county, and city are responding.

The 2-1-1 Texas Call Center is available 24/7. Callers can dial 2-1-1 and select option six for more information. Additionally, the 915-21-COVID (915-212-6843) hotline will be operational from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID19?

A: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains the following list of symptoms for COVID19 which can appear after 2-14 days of exposure:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of Breath

Additionally, the CDC lists the following symptoms as emergency warning signs for COVID19 that require immediate medical attention.

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or inability to arouse
- Bluish lips or face

Q: Should I visit my doctor if I am experiencing COVID19 symptoms?

A: The CDC has a list of detailed recommendations [here](#). If you are experiencing symptoms, the CDC recommends you:

- Stay home except to get medical care
- Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home
- Call ahead before visiting your doctor
- Wear a facemask
- Cover your coughs and sneezes
- Avoid sharing personal household items
- Clean your hands often
- Clean all “high-touch” surfaces every day
- Monitor your symptoms

Veterans experiencing COVID-19 symptoms should call the El Paso VA at 915-564-6100 or MyVA311 before visiting a medical facility, community providers, urgent care centers, or emergency departments in the community.

Veterans can also send secure messages to their health care providers via [MyhealththeVet](#), VA’s online patient portal. VA clinicians will evaluate veterans’ symptoms and direct them to the most appropriate providers for further evaluation and treatment. This may include referral to state or local health departments for COVID-19 testing.

If you do not have a doctor, are uninsured, or undocumented, you can also receive advice by calling the city’s hotline number at (915) 212-6843 or contacting your closest community health center, which can be found [here](#).

Q: Is it wise to postpone non urgent medical appointments?

A: In order to prevent potential spread of COVID19, El Pasoans should postpone or cancel all non-essential appointments. Additionally, ask your healthcare provider if they offer telehealth options for certain checkups or treatments.

Q: How does COVID19 spread?

A: According to the CDC, the virus is currently thought to be spread from person to person. This includes:

- Between people who are in close contact of one another (within six feet)
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled in the lungs. However, research is still ongoing of this new virus and a study produced by scientists at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases also shows that these droplets can survive on surfaces for days at a time.

Q: What are steps we can take to contain the virus?

A: Currently, there is no vaccine for COVID19. The best way to prevent the spread of the virus is to prevent exposure to the disease. To achieve this goal, the federal government has recommended:

- Avoiding social gatherings of 10 or more people.
- Avoiding eating or drinking at bars, restaurants, and food courts. Instead, use drive-thru, pickup, or delivery options.
- Avoiding non-essential travel.
- Do not visit nursing homes or retirement facilities unless to provide critical care.

Additionally, in order to protect yourself from COVID19, the CDC recommends:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands

Q: How many cases does El Paso have?

A: At the moment, El Paso County has a total of 46 positive cases of COVID-19 and health officials are confirming evidence of community spread, meaning the source of infection is unknown in some of the positive cases.

This number doesn't include the six confirmed cases in Fort Bliss. On March 30, the Department of Defense (DOD) announced that out of a concern for operational security, the aggregate number of individual service member cases at individual unit, base or Combatant Commands won't be reported. DOD will continue to offer a public daily update of the full number of cases. Learn more [here](#).

Additionally, there are four confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Ciudad Juarez.

Q: When will mobile testing be up and running in El Paso?

A: The City of El Paso Department of Public Health (DPH), the Border Regional Advisory

Council (BorderRAC), and other public health partners are collecting specimens to test for COVID-19.

The drive thru COVID-19 samples are being collected for first responders, healthcare workers, seniors 65 years of age or older who have a temperature of 99.6 F or higher, and patients with a doctor's order. Only those members of the community who have met the testing criteria and obtained a doctor's order for testing will be allowed entrance. The ordering doctor will schedule an appointment for the drive-thru collection site for the patient.

Local doctors and clinics that cannot collect specimens for testing have already begun to use this system. For more information, visit the city's website [here](#).

Q: If I need to be tested, where do I go?

A: Contact your primary health care provider or your closest community health center for more information about testing. To find the closest community health center near you, [here](#). To prevent the potential spread of the virus, you should not show up to a treatment facility unannounced.

Q: I don't have insurance. What resources are available to me?

A: You can receive testing even if you are uninsured at no cost. Congress recently passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which ensured that any individual who needs to be tested can be tested. If you do not have a primary health provider, click [here](#) for a list of community health centers that may be able to provide testing.

Q: What is the "Stay Home, Work Safe" order?

A: In an ongoing effort to suppress the spread of COVID-19, the City and the County of El Paso have issued a "Stay Home, Work Safe" order for the area that went into effect at 11:59 p.m. on March 24, and will be in effect until further notice.

The order directs the public to remain at their residence except to obtain essential services or engage in essential activities and work for essential business and government services. The order will continue until further notice and those who are found violating it could face a fine of not more than \$1,000.00, or be jailed for up to 180 days.

Please note, Fort Bliss has additional guidance for the installation that is compatible with this order. Please check [here](#) for the most up to date information for the Fort Bliss community.

Q: What can I do during “Stay Home, Work Safe” order?

A: During the “Stay Home, Work Safe” order you can:

- Perform tasks essential to your health and safety, or to the health and safety of your family or household members (for example, obtaining medical supplies or medication, visiting a healthcare professional, or obtaining supplies need to work from home, go for walk or jog).
- Obtain necessary services or supplies for yourself and your family or household members, or to deliver those services or supplies to others (for example, food, pet supplies, groceries and any other household consumer products, and products necessary to maintain the safety, sanitation, and essential operation of residences).
- Go to work at an Essential Business (as defined in the Order) or work from home at a non-essential business.
- Care for a family member or pet in another household.
- Engage in outdoor activity, provided the individuals comply with social distancing requirements of six feet (for example, walking, biking, hiking, or running).

Learn more about the “Stay Safe, Work Safe” order, [here](#).

Q: What steps has the Congresswoman taken to help?

A: On March 27, Congresswoman Veronica Escobar voted for the third coronavirus response bill, the bipartisan H.R. 748, the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#). The CARES Act, which was signed into law by President Trump, secures critical provisions for El Paso workers and their families and invests \$2 trillion to help our public health systems, state and local governments, and small businesses in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

A summary of the CARES Act is available [here](#), and an overview of the major components Congresswoman Escobar fought to include for El Paso’s hard-working families is available [here](#). The CARES Act builds on top of the swift action that House Democrats have already taken to move two critical pieces of coronavirus response legislation into law.

On March 4, Congresswoman Escobar and House Democrats took a first step by passing an [\\$8.3 billion emergency response supplemental package](#), which included funding for vaccine development, support for state and local governments, and assistance for affected small businesses. This legislation was followed up by H.R. 6201, the bipartisan [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#), which the President also signed into law, which guaranteed free coronavirus testing, established paid leave, enhanced Unemployment Insurance, expanded food security initiatives, and increased federal Medicaid funding.

In anticipation of future packages, Congresswoman Escobar has spent hours talking with local stakeholders to hear what they believe should be included to help our community. These conversations have included a tele-townhall where Congresswoman Escobar was able to update thousands of El Pasoans on the unfolding crisis and took down their questions and concerns. To receive notices for future tele-town halls, sign up to Congresswoman Escobar's newsletter [here](#).

Q: What assistance is available for those with student loans?

A: The federal government has announced that all federally held student loans will automatically have their interest rates set to 0% for a period of at least 60 days. Additionally, borrowers are given the option to suspend their payments for at least two months. To learn more about this development, click [here](#).

Q: What assistance is available for taxpayers?

A. Congresswoman Escobar and her colleagues fought to double cash payments to hard-working El Paso families from \$600 to \$1,200 with an additional \$500 cash payment is available per child. The full payment will be available for individuals making up to \$75,000 (individual) and \$150,000 (married). These payments will provide individuals with the cash they need right now to survive with much of the economy currently shut down. Read more about direct payments to individuals and families [here](#).

In addition, the U.S. Department of Treasury announced that the government would delay Tax Day from April 15 until July 15. All taxpayers and businesses can use this additional time to file and make payments without interest or penalties. Find out more information from the [IRS](#).

Q: What assistance is available for small businesses?

A: Congress secured \$350 billion in forgivable loans and \$10 billion in grants to small businesses, tribal business concerns, and certain nonprofits. Loans through a new SBA 7(a) Paycheck Protection Program can be forgiven when used for payroll costs (including paid leave, health care, and other costs) to retain workers, and other expenses such as rent, mortgage interest, and utilities. Independent contractors, sole-proprietors, and other self-employed persons are eligible for these loans. Small businesses can also apply for up to \$10,000 in grants to retain workers and pay for debt obligations.

To learn more information, read the [Small Business Owner's Guide to the CARES Act](#), and visit Small Business Administration page dedicated to providing [Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus](#).

Q: Am I eligible for Unemployment Insurance?

A: More laid-off and furloughed workers than ever before (including those new to the

job market) will be eligible for Unemployment Insurance and will see an additional \$600 per week to match the average paycheck for up to 4 months of benefits. These benefits will be available immediately.

El Pasoans seeking more information about UI benefits should contact the [Texas Workforce Commission's website](#).

Q: Will the border close?

A: The Department of Homeland Security [announced](#) that non-essential travel restrictions across the US-Mexico border would be effective at 11:59pm ET on March 20, until for a period of 30 days subject to extension upon review. Commerce, trade, and workers will be able to cross, but that border crossings would be halted for tourism and recreational activities. "Essential travel" includes:

- U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents returning to the United States
- Individuals traveling for medical purposes
- Individuals traveling to attend educational institutions
- Individuals traveling to work in the United States (individuals working in the farming or agriculture industry who must travel between the U.S. and Mexico to work)
- Individuals traveling for emergency response and public health purposes (government officials or emergency responders entering the U.S. to support Federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial government efforts to respond to COVID-19 or other emergencies)
- Individuals engaged in lawful cross-border trade (truck drivers supporting the movement of cargo between the U.S. and Mexico)
- Individuals engaged in official government travel or diplomatic travel
- Members of the U.S. Armed Forces, and the spouses and children of members of the U.S. Armed Forces, returning to the United States
- Individuals engaged in military-related travel or operations.

Individuals traveling for tourism purposes (for example, sightseeing, recreation, gambling, or attending cultural events) do not fall under the definition of "essential travel" and will be restricted from crossing through ports of entry.

Q: I am concerned about lack of groceries and cleaning supplies. How can we make sure we all have enough?

A: Congresswoman Escobar has encouraged El Pasoans to only take what they need so that there are enough supplies to go around. She is also encouraging stores to place limits on the number of items any one individual can take.

Q: What is being done to keep those in detention safe, such as those in jail?

A: As a member of the Judiciary Committee, Congresswoman Escobar is concerned about the steps the Department of Justice is taking to ensure that the agency is protecting its employees and those in custody. She echoes the [concerns of Chairman Nadler](#) in providing members of Congress the protocols DOJ is taking to prevent the spread of the disease, how many individuals have been tested, how many tests are available to this population, and what steps are being implemented to reduce the prison population overall. To learn about the Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) response to COVID-19, visit [here](#). Additionally, the Attorney General recently gave the BOP leeway to release certain eligible prisoners to home confinement. In analyzing such transfers, the BOP is directed to assess the totality of the circumstances for each inmate.

Q: I'm traveling abroad. What should I do?

A: The Department of State [advises](#) U.S. citizens to avoid all international travel due to the global impact of COVID-19. In countries where commercial departure options remain available, U.S. citizens who live in the United States should arrange for immediate return to the United States, unless they are prepared to remain abroad for an indefinite period.

Congresswoman Escobar is urging the State Department to take immediate and comprehensive action, including working with other federal agencies, foreign governments, and commercial airlines to ensure that every El Pasoan abroad who wants to return home during this public health crisis can safely do so.

Travelers are strongly encouraged to enroll in the State Department's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive alerts and make it easier to locate them in an emergency.

Q: I rely on senior centers or school to get my meals. How can I get food?

A: If you are a student who relies on school-provided meals, I encourage you to go to your school district's website. Many school districts in El Paso County are still offering meal services at schools for those who need it. You can find the closest location for student meals during this outbreak using the Texas MealFinder Map, [here](#).

In the event school districts are no longer able to provide free meals, Congress created a Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) Program through the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* to allow states to provide food benefits to all children who would have otherwise received free or reduced-price meals are eligible for P-EBT if their

school is closed for five or more days due to COVID-19. We will update this information if Texas applies for this program.

In addition to the P-EBT program, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act provided \$250 million to the Senior Nutrition Program at the Administration for Community living to provide pre-packaged and home-delivered meals to low income seniors who rely on these services in their communities. Learn more about these services in El Paso County, [here](#).

Additionally, as part of a joint meal distribution initiative by City Parks and Recreation Department and El Paso County, curbside distribution of meals will continue every Tuesday, from 10 a.m. to noon, at all City Senior Centers for seniors enrolled in the El Paso County Senior Noontime Meal Program.

Q: Am I eligible for Paid Leave because of COVID19?

A: Many workers in El Paso currently have no paid leave and are being forced to choose between their paycheck, their health, and the health of the people around them. The emergency paid leave provisions passed by Congress and signed into law by the President are a critical step toward protecting families' financial security and mitigating the spread of the coronavirus. Below is information on eligibility for emergency paid sick leave and paid family leave.

Sick Leave

Eligibility

- Employees at companies with fewer than 500 employees
- Local, state, and federal government employees
- Employees who work under a multiemployer collective agreement and whose employers pay into a multiemployer plan.

Sick Leave Benefits

- Eligible full-time employees are entitled to two weeks (80 hours) of fully paid time off (up to \$511 per day) to self-quarantine, seek a diagnosis or preventive care, or receive treatment for COVID-19.
- Eligible part-time employees are entitled to fully paid time off (up to \$511 per day) for the typical number of hours that they work in a typical two-week period to self-quarantine to seek a diagnosis or preventive care, or receive treatment for COVID-19.
- Eligible full-time employees are entitled to two weeks (80 hours) paid time off at two-thirds of their regular pay (up to \$200 per day) to care for a family member

or to care for a child whose school has closed, or if their child care provider is unavailable due to COVID-19.

- Eligible part-time employees are also entitled to the typical number of hours that they work in a typical two-week period at two-thirds of their typical pay (up to \$200 per day) to care for a child whose school has closed, or if their child care provider is unavailable, due to COVID19.

Funding for Sick Leave

- Employers initially front the cost of emergency paid sick leave but will be fully reimbursed by the federal government within three months.
- The reimbursement will cover both the wages paid and the employer's contribution to employee health insurance premiums during the period of leave.
- Employers will be reimbursed through a refundable tax credit that counts against employers' payroll tax, which all employers pay regardless of non-profit/for-profit status.
- Employers will submit emergency paid sick leave expenses as part of their estimated quarterly tax payments. If employer's costs more than offset their tax liability, they will get a refund from the IRS.

Family Leave

Eligibility

- Employees at companies with fewer than 500 employees
- State and local government employees and certain federal government employees
- Employees who work under a multiemployer collective agreement and whose employers pay into a multiemployer plan

Family Leave Benefits

- Eligible full-time employees and part-time employees are entitled to 12 weeks of job-protected leave to take care for their children in the event of a school closure or their child care provider is unavailable due to COVID-19.
- The 12 weeks of job-protected leave include two weeks of unpaid leave, followed by 10 weeks of paid leave. Eligible employees may elect or be required to overlap the initial two weeks of unpaid leave with two weeks of other paid leave they have available. Eligible employees will receive a benefit from their employers that will be no less than two-thirds of the employee's usual pay.

Funding for Family Leave

- Employers initially front the cost of emergency paid sick leave but will be fully reimbursed by the federal government within three months.
- The reimbursement will cover both the wages paid and the employer's contribution to employee health insurance premiums during the period of leave.
- Employers will be reimbursed through a refundable tax credit that counts against employers' payroll tax, which all employers pay regardless of non-profit/for-profit status.
- Employers will submit emergency paid sick leave expenses as part of their estimated quarterly tax payments. If employer's costs more than offset their tax liability, they will get a refund from the IRS.

For more information about the implementation of this legislation for employees and employers, visit U.S. Department of Labor's [COVID-19 and the American Workplace](#) page.

Other Questions?

Please don't hesitate to contact the Office of Congresswoman Escobar for additional questions. Call (915) 541-1400.

Visit escobar.house.gov/services/coronavirus for more local and state resources available to you and your family