



# Pete's Periódico

## *Lives and Livelihoods*

by Sen. Pete Flores, Senate District 19

May 12, 2020

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Texas is (almost) open again. Under the leadership of Governor Greg Abbott, business across the state can open doors, furloughed or laid-off Texans can earn a paycheck again, and we can take small steps back to “normal” life. As usual, Texas will lead the nation and show how we can protect lives and rebuild livelihoods.

Governor Greg Abbott has announced a multiple-phase plan to Open Texas, pairing nationally recognized medical experts with public and private-sector business leaders in the recently announced Strike Force to Open Texas for advice and expertise. The goal is to move methodically: staggering reopening of business and public places, allowing time for data on infections to be reported. Maintaining lives and public health is Texas’ top concern—Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is issuing minimum standard health protocols for all businesses and individuals to follow.

Texas cannot afford to wait much longer. By the end of the first week of May, 1.8 million Texans filed for unemployment. The odds are every Texan still employed has a loved one or close friend who is not. I’ve heard stories from struggling business owners across Senate District 19, worried their doors may need to close for good if they cannot return to normal operations soon.

Per the Governor and his Strike Force, all retail stores, restaurants, movie theaters, and malls are permitted to reopen starting the beginning of this month. These services must limit their capacity to 25% of their listed occupancy. Within shopping malls, the food-court dining areas, play areas, and interactive displays and settings must remain closed.

All museums and libraries may open under the same 25% occupancy limitation, but interactive areas of museums must remain closed. State libraries and museums are able to open; local public museums and libraries may reopen only if permitted by the local government. Single-person offices may reopen as well.

The next phase of Open Texas began Friday, May 8, allowing barber shops, hair salons, nail salons, and cosmetology stores to reopen. As with other phases, these stores should practice social distancing and other measures—customers should make appointments to avoid a rush of people, for instance. The next phase, planned to begin May 18, will allow gyms, manufactures, and office-based employers to reopen. For more information on the Governor’s plan, please visit: [gov.texas.gov/opentexas](http://gov.texas.gov/opentexas).

These openings are supported by public health expertise, data, and gained knowledge of the virus over the past few weeks. Based on data from the Texas Department of State Health Services, 76% of confirmed COVID-19 fatalities in Texas were individuals 65 years of age or older. Across America, less than 3% of fatalities are individuals younger than 44 and the majority of hospitalizations patients due to coronavirus have pre-existing conditions, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Texas, the second-largest state, ranks 15th in the number of COVID-19 fatalities. One death is too many from this virus, but we can be grateful for the superb leadership at the state and local level—plus a commitment from all Texans—for potentially saving tens of thousands of lives.

Every Texan is at risk for contracting the coronavirus and a cure remains undiscovered. But there is a clear trend here: the elderly and individuals with preexisting medical conditions are at a higher risk from getting very sick, and potentially dying, from COVID-19. I urge all Texans who fit this description to take increased precautions.

As we Open Texas again, please continue observed health practices: wash hands often and longer, use hand sanitizer, avoid touching face, disinfectant surfaces often, avoid contact with people who are sick, continue to practice social distancing, avoid crowds, limit physical contact, and wear a mask when necessary. Texans will overcome this challenge as we always do.

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