



OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN HENRY CUELLAR  
28<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Texas  
116<sup>th</sup> Congress

# COVID-19 HANDBOOK

Dear Friends,

We face a public health and economic crisis unlike anything we have ever experienced. In past few weeks, we have been instructed by federal, state, and local authorities to stay at home, wash our hands and practice social distancing. These measures ensure that we are not only protecting ourselves and our loved ones, but that we are protecting those who may be vulnerable in our community. I am inspired by your dutiful attention to these inconvenient restrictions and remind you that we will soon return our normal lives given your continued vigilance.

I understand that the impact of Coronavirus has not only affected our daily lives, but it has threatened paychecks, small businesses, and important community functions. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which I voted on last week, is a big step toward addressing those concerns. This wide-ranging economic rescue package provides rapid and meaningful assistance for individuals, businesses, and those responding to the pandemic on the ground.

This COVID-19 Handbook will help you better understand all the financial resources available for our community, such as critical federal funding sources to assist small businesses and local governments.

For additional information or questions on any of the enclosed programs, please see my [website](#) or contact my staff:

**Washington, DC Office**

2372 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515  
Phone: [\(202\) 225-1640](tel:(202)225-1640)

**Mission Office**

117 E. Tom Landry  
Mission, TX 78572  
Phone: [\(956\) 424-3942](tel:(956)424-3942)

**Laredo Office**

602 E. Calton Road, Suite 2  
Laredo, TX 78041  
Phone: [\(956\) 725-0639](tel:(956)725-0639)

**San Antonio Office**

615 E. Houston Street Suite 563  
San Antonio, TX 78205  
Phone: [\(210\) 271-2851](tel:(210)271-2851)

Together, we will persevere through this difficult time, and I believe, emerge a stronger and more united South Texas, as a result. God Bless you and those you love.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Henry Cuellar".

Henry Cuellar, Ph.D.  
U.S. Congressman  
28th District of Texas

# Coronavirus (COVID-19)

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## **What is COVID-19?**

Coronaviruses are a large group of viruses that are common among animals and humans. In rare cases, animal coronaviruses can be transmitted from animals to humans. This novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is a newly discovered coronavirus that has not been previously detected in animals or humans. The source of this virus is not yet known.

## **What are symptoms of COVID-19?**

Typically, human coronaviruses cause mild-to-moderate respiratory illness. Symptoms are very similar to the flu, including:

- Fever
- Dry cough
- Shortness of breath

In some cases, COVID-19 can cause more severe respiratory illness.

## **What can the public do to limit the spread of COVID-19?**

The CDC recommends the following steps to prevent the spread of all respiratory viruses:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Work or engage in schooling from home when possible.
- Practice social distancing.
- Avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people.
- Avoid discretionary travel, such as shopping or social visits.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

## **What is Congress doing?**

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which was voted on last week, is a big step toward helping save lives and protect working-families. This wide-ranging economic rescue package provides rapid and meaningful assistance for individuals, businesses, and those responding to the pandemic on the ground.

In addition to the CARES Act, Congress has passed the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act and The Families First Coronavirus Response Act. This document provides information on all three pieces of legislation and its benefit to you and the community.

# United States Departments and Coronavirus

Departments are working to ensure that essential programs continue to serve the American people. Click the images below to see how departments are operating amid the pandemic.



## UNEMPLOYMENT

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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.

Constituents seeking more information about UI benefits should contact the state unemployment insurance program [here](#).

If your employment has been affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19), apply for benefits either online at any time using [Unemployment Benefits Services](#) or by calling TWC's Tele-Center at 800-939-6631 from 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Central Time Monday through Friday.

To get the latest updates on unemployment benefits from the Texas Workforce Commission, click [here](#)

## DIRECT PAYMENTS

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Individuals making up to \$75,000 (\$150,000 for married workers) will receive payments of \$1,200 with an additional \$500 payment per minor child. The payments decrease ratably and stop altogether for single workers making more than \$99,000 (\$198,000 for married workers and \$218,000 for a family of four.)

These payments will be issued by the IRS via direct deposit and will be based on 2019 or 2018 tax return or 2019 Social Security statement.

If someone has not filed a tax return in 2018 or 2019 and does not receive Social Security benefits, the IRS recommends filing a 2018 return to receive payment. If the IRS does not have the taxpayer's bank account information, the taxpayer should look for a letter from the IRS detailing how to receive their payment.

If you receive Social Security, retirement or other social safety net benefits, you may still qualify for direct payments. These payments will not be taxable nor represent "resources" for program eligibility purposes. For more information from the IRS, click [here](#).

## STUDENT LOANS

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If you have student loan debt, Congress secured **several options** outlined below for borrowers that help provide relief through September 30, 2020. During this period, a borrower will be able to:

- Pause payments for federal student loan borrowers who have Direct Loans and Federal
- Family Education Loan (FFEL), which means these borrowers will not be required to make any
- payments toward outstanding interest or principal balance.
- Suspend interest accrual for such loans so that these balances don't accrue.
- Avoid forced collections such as garnishment of wages, tax refunds, & Social Security benefits.
- Halt negative credit reporting.
- Ensure a borrower continues to receive credit toward Public Service Loan Forgiveness,
- Income-Driven Repayment forgiveness, and loan rehabilitation.

**For additional guidance on how to apply and learn about next steps as this critical relief becomes available, please refer to the U.S. Department of Education [website](#).**

## FOOD ASSISTANCE

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Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), more commonly known as food stamps, ensures that Americans receive the food they need, especially if they are newly unemployed. Congress has invested in SNAP in the last three COVID-19 Supplemental Bills to help Americans put food on the table during this crisis. For more information on the Texas Snap program, please contact HHSC [here](#).

## FOOD BANKS

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Congress has now secured \$850 million in emergency funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) to help food banks face increased utilization and demand in countless communities across the country due to the coronavirus. Click here for your state contacts or find a local food bank near you.

To find food assistance near you, call the USDA National Hunger Hotline 1-866-3-HUNGRY/1-877-8-HAMBRE.

## HOMEOWNER & RENTERS PROTECTIONS

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**Mortgage Forbearance:** Homeowners with FHA, USDA, VA, or Section 184 or 184A mortgages (for members of federally-recognized tribes) and those with mortgages backed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac have the right to request forbearance on their payments for up to 6 months, with a possible extension for another 6 months without fees, penalties, or extra interest. **Homeowners should contact their mortgage servicing company directly.**

**Eviction Protections:** Renters residing in public or assisted housing, or in a home or apartment whose owner has a federally-backed mortgage, and who are unable to pay their rent, are protected from eviction for 4 months. Property owners are also prohibited from issuing a 30-day notice to a tenant to vacate a property until after the 4-month moratorium ends. This protection covers properties that receive federal subsidies such as public housing, Section 8 assistance, USDA rural housing programs, and federally-issued or guaranteed mortgages. **Renters whose landlord is not abiding by the moratorium should contact the relevant federal agency that administers their housing program or their local Legal Aid office.**

## ENERGY ASSISTANCE FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES

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The CARES Act includes \$900 million to help low income Americans and their families heat and cool their homes. To learn more about the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in your state, click [here](#).



## EMERGENCY PAID LEAVE

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Many workers in America 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.

- Committee on Education and Labor Fact Sheet: Who is Eligible for Leave [link](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor [Fact Sheet for Employees](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor [Fact Sheet for Employers](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor [Questions and Answers](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor poster for [federal workers](#) and one for all [other employees](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor [questions & answers](#) document about employer posting requirements, as well as [a Field Assistance Bulletin](#) describing the 30-day non-enforcement policy.
- Treasury, IRS & Department of Labor Announcement link

## PAID SICK AND FAMILY LEAVE TAX CREDIT

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Employers who provide required leave to their employees and who employ less than 500 employees are eligible for a tax credit to offset the costs of such leave. This tax relief will be provided against quarterly payroll taxes (those paid in connection the Form 941). For additional guidance, please refer to the [IRS's website](#).

## SOCIAL SECURITY

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Social Security will not suspend or decrease Social Security benefit payments or Supplemental Security Income payments due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. All Social Security field offices are closed, however they will still offer service by phone and online.

If you receive a letter, text, call or email that you believe to be suspicious, about an alleged problem with your Social Security number, account, or payments, hang up or do not respond. We encourage you to report Social Security scams using our dedicated online form, at <https://oig.ssa.gov>.

Local offices are closed to the public but are available by phone. People can find their local field office phone number by accessing the [Field Office Locator](#).

To allow available agents to provide better phone coverage, the agency is temporarily changing the National 800 Number hours starting on Tuesday, March 31, 2020. The hours will change from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. local time to 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. local time. The agency is experiencing longer than normal wait times on the 800 Number and asks the public to remain patient, use its online services at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov), or call their local office.

## VETERANS

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Congress provided robust emergency funding to ensure the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has the equipment, tests, and support services – including setting up temporary care sites, mobile treatment centers and increasing telehealth visits to allow more veterans to get care at home – necessary to provide veterans with the additional care they need. For further guidance as this funding and initiatives are implemented, please refer to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [website](#).

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Additional Resource: [VA FAQ on COVID-19](#)
- Additional Resource: [List of all VA Medical Centers](#)
- Additional Resource: Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255

## SMALL BUSINESS

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- 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.

For questions about or relating to an EIDL loan application please contact the SBA disaster assistance customer service center. Call 1-800-659-2955 (TTY: 1-800-877-8339) or e-mail [disastercustomerservice@sba.gov](mailto:disastercustomerservice@sba.gov)

For guidance on small business loans and information regarding eligibility please see [here](#).

For information on the SBA San Antonio District Office, please see [here](#).

SBA is hosting regular informational webinars on applying for disaster loans. For more information on when they webinars are being hosted, please email a member of my staff.

## FEMA PUBLIC ASSISTANCE (Local Governments)

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Public Assistance (PA) is FEMA's largest grant program providing funds to assist communities responding to and recovering from major disasters or emergencies declared by the President. The program provides funding for emergency assistance to save lives and protect property and assists with funding for permanently restoring community infrastructure affected by a federally declared incident.

Eligible applicants include states, federally recognized tribal governments (including Alaska Native villages and organizations so long as they are not privately owned), U.S. territories, local governments, and certain private non-profit (PNP) organizations.

For local official interested in Public Assistance, the Texas Department of Emergency Management will be hosting applicant briefings beginning on Wednesday, March 25, 2020, and will occur daily from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. until further notice. Meeting invitations will be sent out by TDEM staff in your area.

[FEMA's Fact Sheet on Public Assistance](#)

## **TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

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Our office is working closely with the Texas Department of Emergency Management regarding COVID-19 to ensure Texas have access to vital resources during this pandemic. The TDEM website offers information on SBA Loans, Public Assistance, Medical Volunteers, and other topics.

TDEM is also working to ensure adequate PPE for healthcare providers across the state.

To see information on TDEM work on coronavirus, please see [here](#).

## **PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**

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We recognize the hard work that our health care workers are doing on the frontline of this pandemic. It is crucial that we work to provide PPE to those on the frontline of the Pandemic.

**Personal Protective Equipment:** If a health care provider has questions or is experiencing spot shortages of personal protective equipment or other supplies, call the FDA toll-free line at **1-888-463-6332 (1-888-INFO-FDA)**, then choose option (\*). The line is available 24 hours a day to help address difficulties obtaining supplies. **Please note, however, that FDA does not control the production volume or distribution of medical devices.**

### **Additional FDA resources**

- [Guidance on Face Masks and Respirators for COVID-19](#)
- [NIOSH-Approved Disposable Filtering Facepiece Respirators for Use in Health Care Settings](#)
- [EUA for Imported, Non-NIOSH-Approved Disposable Filtering Facepiece Respirators](#)
- [Non-NIOSH Approved Respirator EUA](#)
- [FAQs on 3D Printing of Medical Devices, Accessories, Components, and Parts During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

*Are you a company seeking to Import or Manufacture Medical Products to Aid the U.S. Response to COVID-19?* Please provide our office with as many details as possible about the request (e.g., manufacturer name, address, product, and model number) and contact information for the company, either an agent in the U.S. or the company itself.



## TESTING

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We continue working with FDA, CDC, FEMA, and TDEM to ensure that TX-28 has adequate testing sites and kits. For more information on testing sites please see [here](#).

### **San Antonio Testing Site**

South Texas Medical Center  
8431 Fredericksburg Rd, San Antonio  
*Freeman Coliseum*  
3201 E. Houston St, San Antonio  
[STMC Website](#)

*COVID 19 testing is available only for individuals who have been **pre-approved by a doctor**. **ALL individuals must have an appointment.***

### **Rio Grande Valley Testing Site**

The City of Brownsville is offering drive-thru COVID-19 testing. Residents must fill out this [questionnaire](#) before going to the testing site.

Family First Medical Center in Edinburg is offering drive-thru testing.

Rio Grande City is offering drive-thru testing at the STC Starr County campus.

UTRGV in Edinburg will have drive-thru testing

UTRGV in Brownsville will have drive-thru testing

### **Laredo Testing Site**

Laredo Health Department  
5510 Thomas Ave. Laredo, TX 78041

Should you get tested? The CDC has issued [guidelines](#) on when testing is appropriate and what you should do if you are someone you know has tested positive.

We understand that local communities are working together to create testing sites that are accessible to all. If you are working on developing a testing site, please contact our office.

Working on producing COVID-19 Diagnostic Tests? In response to questions from labs, manufacturers, health care providers, and others, FDA has generated [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document for all who are involved in test development for COVID-19s.

## STRANDED ABROAD?

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My office and I are actively working on solutions for constituents stranded in different countries around the world. The Coronavirus pandemic brings several challenges when dealing with foreign countries, however, I am committed to bringing all constituents safely back home. If you or a loved one is stranded abroad, please see the information below:

An individual stranded abroad should email their name, date of birth, passport numbers, location and contact info to the public e-mail address of their closest embassy or consulate. To find the closest embassy or consulate, click [here](#).

Travelers are encouraged to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at [step.state.gov](http://step.state.gov). STEP provides updates from the State Department and helps the nearest embassy or consulate make contact with the traveler.

If you are concerned about a loved one overseas, please call:

- From the U.S. & Canada - 1-888-407-4747
- From Overseas - +1 202-501-4444

If stranded in Guatemala, El Salvador, or Peru, see information below:

#### **Guatemala:**

- [Eastern airlines](#) is planning additional flights, but still working on permissions. Citizens should vigilantly monitor their website.
- There is also the possibility of a United Charter. Interested citizens should e-mail [AmCitsGuatemala@stte.gov](mailto:AmCitsGuatemala@stte.gov) with the subject line "Charter Flight Registration: LAST NAME, FIRST NAME." The e-mail should include name, dob, passport number, any critical medical issues, and a way to contact you.
- The USG is pursuing multiple options (commercial, State charter, etc.) and we would advise U.S. citizens to pursue multiple options as well, and take whatever option where a seat on a plane is first secured.

#### **Peru:**

- **The US Embassy in Lima has created a website where American citizens in Peru can register directly and apply for upcoming departure flights. To register, click [here](#).**
- Several airlines are at different stages of obtaining permissions, which the Office of Congressman Cuellar is assisting with. Some have pre-sign ups, and some will move directly to online sales. When the flights open for sales, seats will likely go rapidly. Congressman Cuellar's Office would advise citizens to pursue *all* options until a seat is secured, so check ALL of the sites. With commercial flights, it is possible the company will announce the flights on their websites first, although we will make every effort to keep citizens informed.
  - [Latam Airlines](#) created an [online signup page](#) for travelers to express interest in flights.
  - [Avianca Airlines](#) created an [online signup page](#) for travelers to express interest in flights departing from Lima and Cusco to destinations including the United States.
  - [Eastern Airlines](#) is also a strong possibility for future flights.

#### **El Salvador**

- The U.S Embassy in El Salvador is actively working to support U.S citizens who wish to return home. The Embassy asks U.S. Citizens to complete an online form if they want to return home. To fill at the form, click [here](#).

## HOW TO HELP

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Are you a volunteer, healthcare provider, or manufacture that would like to help during this global pandemic? FEMA has provided information on how to assist:

### Volunteer

- Licensed Healthcare professionals that want to volunteer can get information on eligibility, view credential levels by clinical competency and register with the [Emergency System for Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals](#) in their state.
- Trained medical volunteers can offer their services by registering with a National VOAD member on [www.NVOAD.org](http://www.NVOAD.org). Please not begin operations without contacting NVOAD first. You will be contacted once resources are matched with unmet needs.
- [Medical Reserve Corps \(MRC\)](#) volunteers can help in different ways in their communities (call centers, drive through clinics, and more). Contact an MRC unit in your area to find out how you can help. For more information visit [mrc.hhs.gov/HomePage](http://mrc.hhs.gov/HomePage).
- Adequate supplies of blood are needed to treat patients in hospitals, but many blood drives have been cancelled. Donating blood is a safe process, and blood donation centers have the highest standards of safety and infection control. To find where you can donate blood, visit [redcross.org](http://redcross.org).

### Private Sector

- To **sell medical supplies or equipment** to the federal government, please submit a price quote under the [COVID-19 PPE and Medical Supplies Request for Quotation](#). Full details can be found in the solicitation ([Notice ID 70FA2020R00000011](#)).
  - This solicitation requires registration with the System for Award Management (SAM) in order to be considered for award, pursuant to applicable regulations and guidelines. Registration information can be found at [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov). Registration must be “ACTIVE” at the time of award.
- If you have **medical supplies or equipment to donate**, please [provide us details](#) on what you are offering.
- If you are a private company that wants to **produce a product related** to the COVID response – email [nbeoc@max.gov](mailto:nbeoc@max.gov).
- If you are a **hospital or healthcare provider in need of medical supplies**, please contact your state, local, tribal or territory department of public health and/or emergency management agency.
- If you are interested in **doing business with FEMA and supporting the response to COVID-19** with your company’s non-medical goods and/or services, please submit your inquiry to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Procurement Action Innovative Response Team (PAIR) team at [DHSIndustryLiaison@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:DHSIndustryLiaison@hq.dhs.gov).

### Donations

- Cash donations to the non-profit of your choice IS THE BEST donation.
- You can find vetted non-profit organizations supporting COVID-19 response efforts at [www.NVOAD.org](http://www.NVOAD.org).
- Don’t collect or make donations until you are sure it is needed, who will accept it and how it will get there is worked out.
- If you have **medical supplies or equipment to donate**, please [provide us details](#) on what you are offering.