



James L. Brown
County Executive Officer

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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March 13, 2020

MERCED COUNTY PROCLAIMS LOCAL HEALTH EMERGENCY AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC

MERCED—With COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) continuing to spread and impact California communities, the Merced County Office of Emergency Services (OES) and Merced County Department of Public Health proclaimed a local and public health emergency Friday in order to help address the outbreak.

The declaration of a local health emergency and proclamation of a local emergency will be considered for ratification by the Board of Supervisors during a special meeting next week.

As of today, there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Merced County. The purpose of these two actions is to position the County to better respond to the outbreak. Benefits of these actions include:

- Expanded access to personnel, equipment, and facilities;
- Improved medical information sharing;
- The ability to waive local provisions and regulations that could hinder response to the emergency;
- Enhanced opportunities for mutual aid;
- Access to state/federal funding/reimbursement related to disaster relief.

County Health Officer Dr. Kenneth Bird said “the inevitable spread of this illness to our community makes it imperative that every resource is in place to assure that the most vulnerable individuals are protected to the fullest extent possible. These individuals include:

- Older adults;
- Those with chronic illness (heart disease, lung disease, cancer, diabetes, or hypertension);
- Immunocompromised individuals.”

Public Health Director, Rebecca Nanyonjo-Kemp, DrPH said “keeping our communities and families safe requires a collective effort, which speaks to the foundation of public health and, moreover, speaks to the efforts the County of Merced requires from all its residents.”

Division Chief Jeremy Rahn of the Merced County Fire Department who also serves as the OES Deputy Director, said “it’s essential to be prepared during a situation like this. We want the public to be assured that we’re doing everything in our power to minimize impacts to our community. It’s important to be calm, but it’s also important to be ready for any potential future impacts.”

There are steps you can take to protect your health and the health of those around you and slow the spread of the illness which include:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands;
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- Stay away from work, school or other people if you become sick with respiratory symptoms such as fever and cough;
- Cover sneezes or coughs with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

COVID-19 symptoms include: mild to severe respiratory illness, fever, cough and difficulty breathing. If symptoms develop, individuals should stay at home to limit exposure to others. Do not go to your provider's office without calling ahead. Do not call 911 for suspected COVID-19 unless you are having a medical emergency.

Although there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Merced County at this time, Merced County Public Health and OES continue to coordinate with federal, state and local partners to further prepare us for any potential future impacts. This includes working with the California Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor COVID-19. Public Health's Department Operations Center was originally opened on January 27, 2020 for this emergency.

In coordination with OES, situational status calls are taking place daily with local government agencies, schools, and healthcare professionals in our community.

COVID-19 Information and Resources:

- www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus
- www.cdc.gov/coronavirus
- www.cdph.ca.gov/covid19
- Merced County Public Health Information Line: 209-381-1180 (English, Spanish, and Hmong)
- **Sign up for COVID-19 alerts from Merced County by visiting countyofmerced.com/coronavirus and entering your email on the right side of the page.**



OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

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PROCLAMATION OF A LOCAL EMERGENCY BY THE DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

WHEREAS, the California Emergency Services Act (Government Code section 8630, et. seq.) establishes procedures for proclaiming emergencies and for responding promptly to the needs that arise during emergencies; and,

WHEREAS, Section 8630 of the Government Code empowers the County Board of Supervisors, or an official designated by local ordinance, to proclaim the existence of a local emergency when the County is affected by or likely to be affected by a public calamity; and,

WHEREAS, Section 2.72.060 of the Merced County Code designates the director and deputy directors of emergency services as the official authorized to declare a local emergency; and,

WHEREAS, a novel coronavirus (referred to as COVID-19), causes infectious disease and was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China in December 2019; and,

WHEREAS, there are currently more than 120,000 global cases of COVID-19 and over 4,000 case fatalities, with widespread community transmission; and,

WHEREAS, as of March 12, 2020, there are 1,323 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 38 confirmed fatalities in the United States; and,

WHEREAS, as of March 12, 2020, California has 183 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and three (3) fatalities, with a minimum of 11 cases associated with community transmission, which are cases with unknown travel or contact exposure; and,

WHEREAS, while there are no known cases of COVID-19 in Merced County as of the signing of this declaration, surrounding contiguous counties are reporting cases of COVID-19; and,

WHEREAS, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the global situation of increasing COVID-19 cases as a pandemic with federal, state and local implications; and,

WHEREAS, on March 11, 2020, the President of the United States issued an executive order to restrict all air travel of foreign nationals from Europe for a 30-day duration; and,

WHEREAS, on March 4, 2020, the California Governor declared a state of emergency in response to the spread of COVID-19; and,

WHEREAS, on January 31, 2020, the United States Health and Human Services Secretary declared a public health emergency in response to COVID-19; and,

WHEREAS, on January 24, 2020, the California Department of Public Health activated its Medical and Health Coordination Center and on March 2, 2020, the Office of Emergency Services activated the State Operations Center to support and guide state and local actions to preserve public health; and,

WHEREAS, on January 23, 2020, the CDC activated its Emergency Response System to provide ongoing support for the response to COVID-19 across the country; and,

WHEREAS, this proclamation enables the County to more effectively respond to an imminent outbreak, seek and utilize mutual aid, potentially obtain reimbursement, forego standard procurement practices, and ensure that the County's public health professionals and providers have all necessary personal protective equipment to provide quality care in keeping the County safe; and,

WHEREAS, the aforesaid conditions warrant and necessitate the proclamation of the existence of a local emergency and immediate action is necessary to mitigate potential public calamity, and,

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS PROCLAIMED AS FOLLOWS:

1. A local emergency, as defined in Government Section 8558 now exists throughout the County of Merced.
2. During the existence of said local emergency the powers, functions, and duties of the County Board of Supervisors, the County Executive Officer or his designee, the Merced County Health Officer, the Merced County Health Department, Merced County Office of Emergency Services and the Emergency Organization of Merced County shall be those prescribed by State law and the ordinances, resolutions, and approved plans of the County of Merced in order to mitigate the effects of the local emergency.
3. Requests that the Governor of the State of California proclaim a State of Emergency for the County of Merced and request a federal declaration to provide assistance including, but not limited to, California Disaster Act (CDAA), Federal Individual Assistance Act, and U.S. Small Business Administration Disaster Declaration, to assist with losses and emergency repairs required by the County and affected cities and districts within the County.
4. James L. Brown, or his designee, is hereby designated as the authorized representative for public and individual assistance of the County of Merced for the purpose of receipt, processing, and coordination of all inquiries and requirements necessary to obtain available state and federal assistance.

It is further ordered that:

1. All County officers and employees take all steps requested by the Director of Public Health and by CEO, James L. Brown, to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to prevent or alleviate illness or death due to the virus; and,
2. All County officers and employees take all steps requested by the Director of Public Health and the County Office of Emergency Services to qualify the County for reimbursement from the State (CalOES) or Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and for other state and federal relief as may be available to reimburse the County for the expenses it incurs in addressing this emergency.

The local emergency shall not remain in effect for a period in excess of seven days unless it has been ratified by the Board of Supervisors.

Dated: March 13, 2020

By: 

*Mike van Loben Sels – Fire Chief
Director, Merced County Office of Emergency Services*

APPROVED AS TO LEGAL FORM:



*Forrest Hansen
Assistant County Counsel*



Rebecca Nanyonjo-Kemp, DrPH
Director

Kenneth Bird, MD, MPH
Health Officer

DECLARATION OF LOCAL HEALTH EMERGENCY
(Health and Safety Code §101080)

WHEREAS, Health and Safety Code section 101080 authorizes a local health officer to declare a local health emergency in the health officer's jurisdiction, or any part thereof, whenever the health officer reasonably determines that there is an imminent and proximate threat of the introduction of any contagious, infectious, or communicable disease;

WHEREAS, a novel coronavirus (referred to as COVID-19), causes infectious disease and was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China in December 2019;

WHEREAS, there are currently more than 120,000 global cases of COVID-19 and over 4,000 case fatalities, with widespread community transmission;

WHEREAS, as of March 12, 2020, there are 1,323 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 38 confirmed fatalities in the United States;

WHEREAS, as of March 12, 2020, California has 183 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and three (3) fatalities, with a minimum of 11 cases associated with community transmission;

WHEREAS, while there are no known cases of COVID-19 in Merced County as of the signing of this declaration, surrounding contiguous counties are reporting cases of COVID-19;

WHEREAS, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the global situation of increasing COVID-19 cases as a pandemic with federal, state and local implications;

WHEREAS, on March 11, 2020, the President of the United States issued an executive order to restrict all air travel of foreign nationals from Europe for a 30-day duration;

WHEREAS, on March 4, 2020, the California Governor declared a state of emergency in response to the spread of COVID-19;

WHEREAS, on January 31, 2020, the United States Health and Human Services Secretary declared a public health emergency in response to COVID-19;

WHEREAS, this declaration enables the County to more effectively respond to an imminent outbreak;

Vicki Jones, MPA, REHS
Environmental Health Division Director

Jessica Montoya-Juarez, MS
Assistant Public Health Director

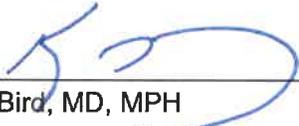
Yadira Vazquez, MBA
Assistant Public Health Director

James Clark, MICP, MHOAC
EMS Administrator

NOW, THEREFORE, pursuant to Health & Safety Code section 101080, the Merced County Interim Health Officer declares:

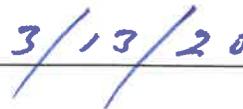
1. The imminent introduction of COVID-19 to Merced County is a threat to the public health within the meaning of Health and Safety Code § 101080.
2. A local health emergency is declared in Merced County commencing on this 13th day of March 2020.

The local health emergency shall not remain in effect after seven (7) days from the date of this declaration unless it has been ratified by the Merced County Board of Supervisors.



Kenneth Bird, MD, MPH
Merced County Health Officer

Date



3/13/20

APPROVED AS TO LEGAL FORM:



Forrest Hansen
Assistant County Counsel