ORDER OF THE STATE HEALTH OFFICER SUSPENDING CERTAIN PUBLIC GATHERINGS DUE TO RISK OF INFECTION BY COVID-19

(APPLICABLE STATEWIDE)

WHEREAS, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has been detected in Alabama; and

WHEREAS, the appearance of COVID-19 in the State poses the potential of widespread exposure to an infectious agent that poses significant risk of substantial harm to a large number of people; and

WHEREAS, the State Board of Health has designated COVID-19 to be a disease of epidemic potential, a threat to the health and welfare of the public, or otherwise of public health importance; and

WHEREAS, on March 13, 2020, on recommendation of the State Health Officer, Kay Ivey, Governor of the State of Alabama, declared a state public health emergency exists in the State of Alabama; and

WHEREAS, on March 16, 2020, the Jefferson County Health Officer, in response to a rapidly growing number of cases of COVID-19 being detected in Jefferson County, issued an order suspending certain public gatherings in that county; and

WHEREAS, on March 17, 2020, the State Health Officer issued a similar order for counties surrounding Jefferson, including Blount, Saint Clair, Shelby, Tuscaloosa, and Walker Counties, and

WHEREAS, further social distancing measures are necessary to be implemented on a statewide basis to prevent the spread of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, *Code of Ala. 1975*, § 22-2-2(4), authorizes the State Health Officer, on behalf of the State Board of Health, to direct that conditions prejudicial to health in public places within the State be abated;

NOW THEREFORE, THESE PREMISES CONSIDERED, it is ordered that the following be implemented statewide:

1. Effective today, March 19, 2020, at 5:00 P.M., all gatherings of 25 persons or more, or gatherings of any size that cannot maintain a consistent six-foot distance between persons, are prohibited. This Order shall apply to all gatherings, events or activities that bring 25 or more persons in a single room or single space at the same time.

2. Effective today, March 19, 2020, at 5:00 P.M., all beaches shall be closed. For purposes of this section, the term "beach" means the sandy shoreline area abutting the Gulf of Mexico, whether privately or publicly owned, including beach access points.

3. Effective Friday, March 20, 2020, all Senior Citizen Center gatherings shall be closed. Senior Citizen Centers and their partners are urged to assure that their clients continue to receive needed meals via curbside pick-up or delivery.

4. Effective at the close of school or business today, March 19, 2020, the following shall be closed:

a. All schools, public and private, including but not limited to: elementary, secondary, postsecondary, technical, or specialty schools, and colleges and universities. This school closure order is not intended to prevent any employers from making continued necessary staffing decisions. Employers are authorized to advise employees to work from home or maintain flexible work schedules. If working from home is not feasible, the employee should practice social distancing, maintaining consistent six-foot distance between persons, for the duration of this order and follow public health guidelines.

b. Preschools and childcare centers.

(1) This shall not apply to childcare centers operated for the exclusive benefit of essential employees of the following categories of employers: State and Local Governments, First Responders (including EMS and Fire Services), Law Enforcement, Hospitals, Nursing Home/Long Term Care Facilities (including Assisted Living and Specialty Care Assisted Living Facilities), End Stage Renal Disease Treatment Centers, Pharmacies and Grocery Stores. For this exception to apply, the childcare center must be employer-operated and located on the premises of, or in the immediate vicinity of, one of these enumerated categories of employers, and a parent or guardian of each child shall be readily available. The childcare center must meet local and state fire and health requirements.

(2) This shall also not apply to licensed childcare centers that contract to provide services exclusively to the above-named employers, or that provide services exclusively to children of essential employees of the above-named employers.

(3) This shall also not apply to daytime special activities programs provided by local boards of education for children of essential employees of the above-named employers if those children were between the ages of 6 and 12 as of March 13, 2020.

(4) In the childcare centers and special activities programs addressed in (1), (2), and (3) above, no more than 11 children shall be allowed in any one room at the same time, and operators of these centers and programs are encouraged to use enhanced sanitation practices consistent with guidance from the CDC and the Alabama Public Department of Public Health.

5. Effective immediately, all Hospitals and Nursing Home/Long Term Care Facilities (including Assisted Living and Specialty Care Assisted Living Facilities) shall prohibit visitation of all visitors and non-essential health care personnel, except for certain compassionate care situations such as maternity and end-of-life.

6. Effective immediately, all elective dental and medical procedures shall be delayed.

7. Effective today, March 19, 2020, at 5:00 P.M., all restaurants, bars, breweries, or similar establishments shall not permit on-premises consumption of food or drink.

a. Such establishments may continue to offer food for take-out or delivery provided the social distancing protocols including maintaining a consistent six-foot distance between persons are followed.

b. Such establishments are strongly encouraged to offer online ordering and curbside pick-up of food.

c. Hospital food service areas are excluded from this order provided they have their own social distancing plan.

8. If organizers or sponsors of otherwise suspended events desire, they may submit a request for an exemption from this order, at the discretion of the State Health Officer. While the State Health Officer is under no obligation to grant such an exemption, it shall be fairly considered based on the following criteria:

a. Effective measures have been taken to identify those attending the event who may potentially be affected with COVID-19, including but not limited to personal testing for the disease or submission of current medical clearances to the organizer.

b. Effective measures have been taken to prevent the spread of infection even by those that are infected while not symptomatic, including the provision of anti-infection measures such as proper facemasks, personal sanitation measures, and other measures that may be considered proper.

Requests for an exemption must be submitted AT LEAST two weeks in advance of any scheduled event.

9. Prior to April 6, 2020, a determination shall be made whether to extend this Order.

Upon the effective dates and times set forth above, this Order supersedes all orders previously issued by the State Health Officer and Jefferson and Mobile County Health Officers, and shall remain in full force and effect until rescinded by order of the State Health Officer. The Jefferson and Mobile County Health Officers are authorized, after consultation with the State Health Officer, to implement more stringent measures as local circumstances require.

Done on this 19 day of March, 2020.

Scott Harris, M.D., M.P.H.
State Health Officer