

Update from the Mayor

Dear Saraland Neighbors,

I would first and foremost like to thank our community for working together in the face of this continued pandemic. Most of our residents have done their absolute best to abide by newly imposed state and federal rules and regulations and maintain a positive attitude while facing the stress and uncertainty that this crisis has created. Our city councilmembers and I are continuing to work together with our municipal department heads and wonderful employees to continue to provide the highest level of service we can with the restrictions we are under.

I would like to answer several frequently asked questions that have arisen in the past week, especially since the state health officer order, last amended on March 27, 2020. With the fluid situation that exists, this information is subject to change. A copy of this order is currently available on the Saraland Facebook page or can easily be found via online search engine.

1. May businesses or venues not specifically listed for closure continue their normal operations? For example, are hardware stores or home improvement stores required to close to non-employees? What about veterinary clinics? Dry cleaners? Car dealerships? Etc.

Businesses or venues not specifically listed in the order for closure may continue their normal operations, subject to the laws and regulations they must ordinarily follow as well as the other parts of the order. In short, if a business or venue is not on the list, it's not closed.

2. Must businesses or venues that may remain open limit the number of customers inside at one time?

It depends. The order's social-distancing rule, in paragraph 1, prohibits "non-work related gatherings" of 10 persons or more or non-work related gatherings of any size that cannot maintain a consistent 6-foot distance between persons. So, the question is whether the customers are "gathering." In a large, uncrowded grocery store, for example, where customers may easily walk past one another, it is unlikely that any "gathering" is taking place even if many more than 10 people are inside. On the other hand, a group of 10 people congregating in a confined space over an extended length of time would be more likely to constitute a gathering.

3. May retail stores ordered to close offer delivery or curbside services?

Yes. The order requires certain categories of retail "stores" to be "closed to non-employees." This language requires the closure of the store building to customers but would not preclude delivery or curbside services if the store complies with the order's other provisions, such as the social-distancing rules.

4. What about "big box" stores? In other words, must a retail store close if it has some characteristics of a store listed for closure but is not generally considered to fall within one of the specific listed categories?

Remember, if a store is not on the list, it's not closed. So, a "big box" store would not be closed—though it still must comply with the order's other provisions.

5. What do I do if I cannot tell whether my store or venue must close? For example, is a mattress store a "furniture" or "home-furnishings store"? Is a sewing-machine store a "craft" store? Is a drive-in theater a "theater"?

Remember, if a store is not on the list, it's not closed. But in cases that are truly difficult to answer, a store owner should contact local law enforcement for guidance. The Attorney General has cautioned law enforcement that "the unprecedented nature of this pandemic and the government's evolving response seem to demand some restraint related to criminal enforcement of this order," and local law enforcement can obtain guidance from appropriate state authorities in truly difficult cases.

6. May sporting goods stores and other retail stores that sell firearms and ammunition remain open to customers inside the store?

The order specifically lists "sporting goods stores" for closure, so a sporting goods store must close even if it sells firearms and ammunition. Gun shops, on the other hand, are not specifically listed; thus, they may remain open.

7. If playgrounds are closed, are parks still open otherwise? Is it still okay to exercise outside?

Yes, parks are still open, and it is still okay to exercise outside. Just do not gather with more than 10 people, children from different households or with any number of people if you cannot maintain a consistent 6 feet of separation.

8. Can physical therapists and chiropractors continue to provide therapy services to patients under the order?

Yes. Physical therapists and chiropractors are medical providers subject to the rule. But, like other providers of dental, medical, or surgical procedures, they may provide services that are necessary to treat an emergency medical condition, or are necessary for a patient to avoid serious harm from an underlying condition or disease, or are a necessary part of a patient's ongoing and active treatment.

9. Has Saraland instituted a curfew?

No, at this time, the city has not ordered a curfew. The course of the virus in our community and its effects on our safety over the next few weeks will govern whether this changes.

10. I heard that Amwaste, the residential garbage/trash collection vendor, has temporarily suspended recycling services and will credit Saraland residents for the suspension of this service. When will this take effect and when we receive our credit?

The city has been notified by Amwaste that due to problems created by the Covid-19 virus, they plan to temporarily suspend recycling services in Saraland and other communities. They are currently planning for this interruption of service to commence the week of April 6th and last for 45 to 60 days. This time period is subject to change. Once we ascertain how long recycling service is suspended, Amwaste will issue a credit for the recycling service which will be applied to their next quarterly invoice in June. Other Amwaste services including garbage and trash collection will currently continue.

11. I have a problem with my garbage or trash collection. What should I do?

First, please contact customer service with Amwaste at 251-227-8220. Option 1. If the vendor does not promptly address and resolve your issue, please contact my executive assistant, Paige, at 251-675-5103 and she and I will work together to correct any problems with service.

12. How can I be tested for Covid-19 coronavirus?

Testing for Covid-19 remains extremely limited in South Alabama due to a continued lack of testing materials and PPE. Patients wanting testing have to undergo rigorous screening before being tested. I have been working with other local mayors as well as state and federal officials to correct this. It is my hope that we will be able to perform testing in Saraland in the near future.

Current Test Site Status: There are two testing sites in Mobile County:

- Mobile Infirmary: 5 Mobile Infirmary Circle, Mobile, AL 36607. (251) 341-2819, appointment only
- Greater Mobile Urgent Care, West Mobile Location, 2350 Schillinger Road, Suite A Mobile, AL 36695, (251) 633-0123 then press *, appointment only

THE FOLLOWING will start testing on Monday, March 30, 8:00 to 5:00 pm

Patients will have to be screened by calling 251-435-1106.

- Diagnostic and Medical Clinic (DMC), 1700 Springhill Ave.
- Diagnostic and Medical Clinic (DMC), 831C Hilcrest Road

I hope you have found the above information useful. Please contact me or any of our city councilmembers if we can be of further service.

Dr. Howard Rubenstein

Mayor, City of Saraland