



The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted many changes to daily life, and just as many questions about what's happening, why, and what will happen in the future. In the face of uncertainty, it's easy to get the wrong information. Sumter Mayor Joseph T. McElveen addresses some of the most frequently asked questions and concerns:

**Q: How long will “social” or “physical distancing” guidelines remain in place?”**

A: Our [president](#) has continued his order that we citizens observe “social” or “physical distancing” through at least the month of April. We all should recognize that the coronavirus situation is very, very serious and that it's likely to be with us for a while. It may get better with warmer weather coming, but we don't know that just yet. The main things we citizens can do right now are to avoid contact with others and frequently wash our hands.

“Let's do “stay at home” or “shelter in place” voluntarily in the Sumter Community. We shouldn't need a law or executive order to make us act to protect ourselves and the people we care about.” *Mayor McElveen*

**Q: How are Sumter's citizens dealing with the situation?**

A: I drove around Sumter this past weekend, and it looks as though most of our citizens are observing the “three-person rule” put out by [Governor McMaster](#). I am proud of how many Sumter citizens realize the importance of separation. I have received a few reports of people refusing to observe physical separation, and some continue to express that they do not believe we are in an emergency. Overall, though, things are going well according to our Chief of Police and other sources.

**Q: Why are the restrictions necessary, and will there be more of them?**

A: I am no medical expert, but I have read a lot about the virus, listened to men and women on television who have devoted their lives to learning about viruses, and talked to local doctors and other health care professionals. This I know for certain — we are in the midst of a pandemic. And as in any situation, there will be those who act contrary to their own best interests and those of others.

The coronavirus is killing people, and it's sneaky. A person can have it and never have a symptom, but will potentially infect every person with whom he comes in contact. We are going to see an increase in the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Sumter over the next few days. The apparent suddenness of the increase could be because of slow turnaround in test results — up to seven days' delay. However, local officials are not getting reports on the total number of tests. Results are reported on or after the date the they are received, not by the date of testing.

Once again I stress do not get hung up on the number of positive results. South Carolina is not yet testing that many people. I have read that up to 25% of people with the COVID-19 have NO symptoms, but yet can infect you or me if we come in contact with them.



Young or old, you do not want this virus. The symptoms sound agonizing. One survivor said that when the breathing problems start, you are sure you will die. Not one of us wants to be the cause of another person getting this virus and suffering. If we don't take the necessary precautions, that person could be someone we love. The notion that this virus infects only older people with medical conditions is just wrong. Young people have medical conditions, known and unknown, too. Listen to interviews with healthcare professionals treating COVID-19 patients.

**Q: Why hasn't the City imposed a curfew or issued a "stay at home" ordinance?**

A: Most people in Sumter are not causing problems and are staying at home. Another issue is the legality of a city declaring an emergency or ordering its citizens to do something when the Governor has declared a statewide state of emergency. It's in our best interests to comply with the [Governor's orders](#). Sumter will enforce the Governor's "three-person rule." It's best to delay in-person group gatherings of any kind right now. If you and the people you live with are driving around town to get out of the house, that's okay. If you are picking up friends to ride with you, that is not smart and not okay.

Local health care officials have told me that the virus is going to get worse and perhaps hit a peak in one to two weeks. There is a lot we don't know about what is going to happen, so we need to be smart about what we do and where we go even after the Governor's order is rescinded. City Council will rely heavily on the advice of Police Chief Roark and our city manager, Deron McCormick, as to whether we need to have a curfew or something more restrictive. I hope that doesn't become necessary.

Let me make a suggestion: Let's do "stay at home" or "shelter in place" voluntarily in the Sumter Community. We shouldn't need a law or executive order to make us act to protect ourselves and the people we care about.

**Q: What businesses are required to be closed:**

A: Governor McMaster today ordered that all non-essential businesses close in South Carolina. These executive orders typically last for a duration of 15 days. This [executive order](#) goes into effect on April 1, 2020 at 5:00 PM and includes:

*Entertainment venues and facilities* - Night clubs, bowling alleys, arcades, concert venues, theaters, auditoriums and performing arts centers, tourist attractions (museums, aquariums and planetariums), racetracks, indoor children's play areas excluding daycare facilities, adult entertainment venues, bingo halls, and venues operated by social clubs.

*Recreational and athletic facilities and activities* - Fitness and exercise centers and commercial gyms, spas and public or commercial swimming pools, group exercise facilities, spectator sports, sports that involve interaction with another person in close

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proximity and within less than 6 feet of another person, activities that require the use of shared sporting apparatus and equipment, activities on commercial or public playground equipment.

*Close contact service providers* - Barber shops, hair salons, waxing salons, threading salons, nail salons and spas, body-art facilities and tattoo services, tanning salons, massage therapy establishments and massage services.

**Q: How can local businesses help?**

A: I am so proud of how so many businesses in Sumter have acted voluntarily to protect their employees and customers. Physical separation, frequent disinfection, marking off intervals in store lines, offering drive-through and curbside pick-up services — as much as some of them are hurting financially right now, they have really stepped up in working to keep us all safe. I believe our community will continue to support them when the crisis abates. Please support businesses in Sumter as much as you safely. Many will struggle to stay afloat, and it will get worse as more time passes.

**Q: Why are the parks closed? Fresh air and sunlight are good for people, and it helps to be able to get out of the house.**

A: We tried to keep them open, but we have received many calls from people planning to bring groups of people here from other communities. This would not be a good thing at this time. We also had people running into people they knew, and they ended up gathering in groups larger than recommended. So we had to close the parks. Also, the state closed all state parks.

**Q: What city services are still running?**

A: We've worked hard to minimize disruption of services, and with the exception of curbside recycling, all city services are continuing. Curbside recycling requires workers to handle household items, so it will resume as soon as it's safe for our workers to do so.

For those who would still like to continue recycling, all recycling centers and the county landfill are open to their regular hours. There are nine (9) recycling centers across the county and one landfill ([details are listed here](#)).

Convenience pay centers, such as at the Treasurer's Office (20 North Magnolia Street) and Summary Court (190 East Canal Street) are open, so if you need to pay your taxes or a ticket, you can still do that. The Liberty Center, located at 12 W. Liberty Street, which houses [Business License](#), [Planning](#), [Building](#) and [Codes](#) offices is still open, you can call their offices directly to handle most requests via phone, but access to the facility is limited to rear entrance.



In fact, all city offices remain open at this time, please visit our website at [www.sumtersc.gov](http://www.sumtersc.gov) to look up a department or use our “[Contact Us](#)” form if you need non-emergency assistance.

**Q: Have there been any changes to medical privacy laws?**

A: HIPPA laws are still in effect; however, to help keep our first responders safe, Governor McMaster has issued an [executive order](#) allowing our 911 operators to ask about COVID-19 exposure or positive test results. We are complying with that.

**Q: I keep hearing rumors about different things that have happened or will happen. How do we know what's true and what isn't?**

A: In times like this, there are bound to be a lot of rumors. There was a rumor that the City planned to shut off water, and let me state strongly, that will NOT happen unless there is a line break that needs repair. We are constantly updating our website at [www.sumtersc.gov](http://www.sumtersc.gov), social media via Facebook and Twitter, and news media. If you aren't sure about something, that's where you need to be checking.

**Q: Do you have any other advice for our citizens?**

A: If you really want to avoid the virus, wash your hands throughout the day, stay at home as much as you can and avoid other people. Please practice physical separation. Please safely take care of neighbors and family who need help. Please contribute to our local caring agencies. Please pray for those affected by the virus and their families, for those on the front lines protecting us, and helping those who have been infected. In many instances they are risking their lives for their neighbors. If we do our part to help “flatten the curve” — reduce the number of cases — we will make it through and see a better day.

For more links to official Coronavirus resources for Sumter, CDC, SC DHEC, Businesses and more, please visit our official COVID-19 webpage at [www.sumtersc.gov](http://www.sumtersc.gov).