

Scott Conger, Mayor
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**City of Jackson, TN State of Emergency
Corona Virus Press Conference Transcript: Monday, March 16, 2020**

Mayor Scott Conger:

Good morning. As you all are aware, the state and the country has been facing the effects of the COVID-19 virus. Today I just want to say that these measures that we're taking today are strictly precautionary. The past few weeks we've been taking precautionary measures to make sure that our facilities are sanitized and our citizens and our employees are protected, and so I'd also like today we're going to go ahead and declare a state of emergency. I will read that, that the City of Jackson has a responsibility to take all possible actions to ensure the health and the safety of our staff and our citizens in the event of infectious disease pandemics.

Whereas on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus outbreak was a pandemic, and on March 12th, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee declared a state of emergency to deploy additional resources to combat the spread of the virus, and on March 13th, President Donald Trump declared a national emergency over the coronavirus pandemic.

Whereas empirical evidence from other communities and nations indicate that the spread of the disease is most effectively slowed by social distancing and reducing interactions among dense groups of people.

Whereas the goal of this administration is to continue to provide a high performing government that will be flexible and capable of meeting the challenges of this pandemic as they come.

Now therefore, I, Scott Conger, mayor of the City of Jackson, Tennessee, by virtue of the executive and administrative authority vested in me by the charter of the City of Jackson, and laws of the state of Tennessee, do hereby declare a state of emergency and do hereby direct an order that the following communicable disease policy for COVID-19 will be available.

We have attached it. The policy will be available for all of you all.

Again, I want to say this is strictly precautionary. This will allow us not only to have access to federal funds, but will allow us to make sure that we are protecting our citizens and our customers to prevent the act of price gouging and make sure that we have the streamlined processes for an effective government to provide those high level of services for you all. You see standing behind me is two of our council members, Councilman Dodd and Councilman Brooks. Thank you all for being here today.

Councilmen:

Sure. Thank you, Mayor.

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Then we have our city response team made up of Lauren Kirk, our Director of Performance Management, Alex Reed, Chief Samuels and Chief Wisner, and Stacey Stone is our Risk Management Director. Every day we will meet to discuss how the city is responding to this pandemic and how we can make sure to prevent the spread of this disease any further. My office is also meeting daily with the county, hospital, the school system, the Chamber, Jackson Energy Authority, emergency management director, health department to discuss the protocols, not only for locally but regionally how we can prevent this.

Again, I want to say strictly precautionary. There are no positive cases in Madison County as of right now. We're doing this to take the preventative measures to ensure the safety of our citizens, to ensure the safety of our employees, and the safety of our visitors and people who come here to work and play every day. I want to say if you have any non-emergency needs, if they are city needs, then I encourage you to dial 3-1-1. If you have any other needs outside of city needs that are non-emergency, I encourage you to call 2-1-1, which is operated by United Way of West Tennessee and they can better link you to those needs. Like I say, right now there's so much that we don't know. Our goal right now is to be proactive, to take the preventative measures to prevent the spread of this pandemic.

The only thing that we do know is if we don't act early, then we can't minimize the effect. While this may seem to some as an overreaction, this is a strictly preventative measure to make sure that we are minimizing the effect on our citizens, our visitors, and our employees throughout the city of Jackson, Madison County. I'll take any questions that you may have.

Josh Robinson - WBBJ

Are you guys still going around the city cleaning, disinfecting daily, weekly, things like that?

Mayor Scott Conger:

Yeah. Our departments are cleaning daily in our public facilities. We have limited and canceled all events put on by the City of Jackson. Those will be canceled right now and postponed for the next 30 days. We have cleaning crews in our library today. This will enable our departments to sanitize on a daily basis. We did the deep clean first to allow them an opportunity to sanitize on daily basis to make that easier.

Adam Friedman – The Jackson Sun

What does the state of emergency mean for a local, like average citizen, stuff like that?

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To the average citizen it means that we're still going to provide a high level of service. Nothing for the average citizen. This is strictly for us to be able to be prepared, to have access to those federal dollars should we need them, to prevent the act of price gouging to streamline the government so that in the act of a pandemic we can react accordingly.

Adam Friedman – The Jackson Sun

Do you know how many tests have been sent to state labs and how many have come back negative?

Mayor Scott Conger:

We have 12 tests that have been sent so far. I believe five or six have come back and they've all been negative. We still have several that are still out.

Steve Beverly – West Tennessee Today:

Scott, just got some people online that just joined. If you don't mind repeating again about what you said about cancellations of events involving the city?

Mayor Scott Conger:

All city sponsored events, meaning all events that the city puts on and hosts are canceled for the next 30 days and being postponed. We're talking with our event and our venue directors so that we can see when we can reschedule those events, but for the next 30 days, in order to practice social distancing and protect our citizens, we have postponed all of those events.

Imani Williams – WNBJ:

Events that are not hosted by the city, is there any precautions that's been given to them to cancel or postpone their events?

Mayor Scott Conger:

We're making them aware of everything that we're aware of. As of right now, we're leaving that up to the lessees of our venues. As we have further discussions with the CDC, with our health department, there may come a time that we will limit those events, but right now we're leaving that decision up to those who are operating the events.

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Josh Robinson – WBBJ:

Then how long will this state of emergency last for the city?

Mayor Scott Conger:

As long as there's a national state of emergency and state state of emergency, so that we can make sure we can limit the pandemic spread, we can protect our citizens is how long it will last. Again, this is ever evolving, right? It sometimes seems it's evolving every hour. To give you a definite on how long this will last, it depends on how long the pandemic lasts.

Adam Friedman – The Jackson Sun

How is this going to affect bars and restaurants and places like that?

Mayor Scott Conger:

Again, it won't affect them right now. Those are lived up to private industry. We are not at the stage right now to limit those. The CDC has advised that we limit gatherings to less than 50 people, so I'm asking them to act accordingly and provide best business practices to make sure that our citizens are safe. We'll continue to monitor the situation and as it evolves, communicate with them. That's why we have the Chamber in our meetings every morning so that we can communicate with the business community on what we're hearing, what we know and ways that we can react and be proactive.

Adam Friedman – The Jackson Sun

Do you think it's only a matter of when, not if a positive test is found here?

Mayor Scott Conger:

Our health department and our Chief Medical Officer of West Tennessee Healthcare indicated that last week, we are a regional hub. We serve a population of nearly 500,000 people every day. Those people travel, they go to the places, and so we want to make sure that we're taking every precaution necessary to limit the effect of that.

Steve Beverly – West Tennessee Today

Scott, there's some question marks about national places in particular, about places such as gyms, if people work out, if it's something like, say, Lift Wellness Center, is that left up to West Tennessee Healthcare to make a decision on that?

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Mayor Scott Conger:

Yeah, so we are only enacting the closure of our city venues for city events. We're leaving it up to private industry, private businesses, West Tennessee Healthcare, those owner-operated venues, to make the best business practices for them and for the people who frequent them.

Adam Friedman – The Jackson Sun

Have you talked with the County about whether they're going to declare a local state of emergency as well?

Mayor Scott Conger:

We've talked to them about their plans. They're still assessing the situation on what they can do. They're involving emergency management, health department. We will have another meeting tomorrow morning at 8:30 to discuss that. We're meeting daily with those groups and then my task force is meeting daily as well.

Adam Friedman – The Jackson Sun

Is there any recommendations you make to people about social distancing and stuff like that?

Mayor Scott Conger:

Yes. If you don't have to get out, practice social distancing. If you don't have to be in large crowds, don't do that. You don't want to be overreacted, but anything we do now seems overreacted, but we want to make sure that we're being safe. This is not about the 80% of the population who may contract it and not be affected seriously by it. This is about that 20%, those that have the preexisting conditions, surgeries, autoimmune deficiencies, those who are in the elderly category. This is about protecting them. We don't want someone who won't be affected seriously by it to interact with someone who could be affected seriously by it and make it lethal for them.

Any other questions?

All right. Thank you. Again, we will communicate every day on the number of cases, the number of positives that we have across the state and across Madison County. As we know information, as we receive information, we'll be sure to share it with you all. Thank you.