

# Austin Top News – May 14, 2020

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A new color coded chart for COVID-19 was created by the city of Austin. Mayor Steve Adler says it has recommendations for public behavior that are broken down into five stages; stage one being the least serious scenario.

“In stage five, we’re in a really precarious place and we have to take more drastic kinds of behaviors,” Adler says.

The various recommendations range from just basic hygiene at stage one to a call for a full shutdown of non-essential workers and businesses by stage five. Right now we are in stage three.



*Photo by Roschetzky Photography*

88 people are hospitalized in Travis County, currently for coronavirus complications. Austin Public Health says one new death has been confirmed. That total is now 72. 782 of the 2,288 confirmed cases have recovered from their illness.

Local nonprofit **Central Texas Interfaith** has called on the Austin City Council to allocate \$40 million toward the monthly housing cost of up to 68,000 people. The group says Travis County’s approval of \$10 million this week is good but far from enough. 89% of renters did make their rent payment for April in Austin.

Austin’s new \$1.2 million rental assistance programs should start paying out by tomorrow. The city’s Rosie Truelove says more than 10,000 Austin renters applied for the assistance program, but they can only help so many with their current budget.

“We expect serving 1000+ households with this initial round of rental assistance,” says Truelove. “We’ll be getting a lot of data that will help us understand and determine the scope of the unmet need that we have.”

There is interest from Austin City Council members to throw more financial support behind these kinds of assistance programs. They are looking to help the rest of those who didn’t have their rent payment taken care of this round.

27 more people have been found with coronavirus in Williamson County. 424 cases have been confirmed there. 13 are currently hospitalized and 231 recovered. Four of the patients in the hospital are on a ventilator.

If you'd like to get a COVID-19 test in Williamson County, you can now do so whether or not you've got any symptoms. At no charge to you, Family Emergency Room is offering testing in Cedar Park and Round Rock by appointment only. You must be a resident of Williamson County and fill out a form on the counties website first.

Bar owners are starting to make some noise as they call on the governor to let them start reopening in Texas. The Texas Restaurant Association has sent a series of guidelines to the governor to help move the process along. CEO Emily Knight says that after two months the bar industry is on the brink of collapse.

"That's a very long period of time in a business that typically has two weeks of cash on hand at any point," Knight says.

\$42 million in liquor taxes have been lost and Knight says that money could go a long way in helping reignite the economy.

A lot of employers are starting to feel there's a benefit to having their employees work from home, Travis County leaders are starting to feel the same. This week, they've talked about a plan to keep 3/4 of the public workforce at home. Commissioner Bridget Shea says it's something that is worth a serious consideration.

"[We are] really learning a powerful lesson from what we have been experiencing, which is the largest real time experiment in the value of telecommuting," says Shea.

Round Rock based Dell recently announced employees can work from home as long as they want, even after the pandemic has passed.

Hays County has 70 active cases of coronavirus, including three more confirmed as of yesterday. 144 of the 217 cases have recovered and two have died. The Hays County hospital system is still not dealing with a shortage of space. Only four patients are hospitalized right now for COVID-19

The National Weather Service has confirmed that an EF-0 tornado touched down this week. It was two miles west of the Smithville airport, but it wasn't particularly powerful. EF-0 is the weakest classification; it means winds were between 65-85 miles per hour. The storm caused some property damage, but no reports of any injuries.