"Safer at Home" Statewide Public Health Order Frequently Asked Questions about Beaches

1. I've heard that the beaches are re-opening. Does that mean the beaches will return to normal?

No. Under the new rules, the beaches will be open only to gatherings of fewer than 10 persons, and anyone using the beaches must maintain a consistent six-foot distance between himself or herself and all persons from a different household. The term "beach" means the sandy shoreline area abutting the Gulf of Mexico, whether privately or publicly owned, including beach access points.

2. What counts as a "gathering"? How do I make sure that I am not accidentally violating this new rule?

To participate in a "gathering" is to come together to form a group; it implies that people are congregating with one another for some period of time. So, you cannot violate the rule merely by walking by a gathering or group. By the same token, you would be violating the rule if you go to the beach when it is so full and densely populated that the people there really form a single, large group. If everyone complies with this rule, there will be distinct groups, clearly defined and separated from one another. And within each distinct group, of course, the members will be at least six feet apart from people outside of their household.

3. I would like to take my young children to the beach. Am I required to maintain six feet of separation from them?

No. The six-foot rule does not apply to members of the same household. But members of the same household still must not gather in groups of 10 or more people.

4. Can we use the pool at our condominium or hotel?

Under the new Safer at Home order, pools are no longer closed. Having said that, individuals and establishments (like condominiums and hotels) are still required to avoid gatherings of 10 or more people, and they must always maintain six feet of separation between persons from different households. This will result in greatly diminished pool access. Establishments may wish to implement their own policies to allocate pool access among parties.

5. What about charter fishing boats? Will they be able to take customers fishing?

Charter boat business will be treated just like other businesses: They must avoid gatherings of 10 or more clients and keep clients six feet apart. They must also regularly disinfect frequently used items and surfaces.

6. I am a college senior and would like to rent a house with a group of 20 friends or so to celebrate graduation. Can we rent a large beach house together?

No. The new Safer at Home order prohibits non-work related gatherings of 10 persons or more—and non-work related gatherings of any size that cannot maintain a consistent six-foot distance between persons from different households. In addition, a rental business must take reasonable steps to avoid these kinds of gatherings; they should therefore decline to facilitate the rental under the current order.

7. What are the consequences for violating these rules?

Violations of the state health order are misdemeanors, subject to a $500 penalty. But if there are largescale failures to comply, or if this new rule leads to increased COVID-19 transmission, the State may be forced to close the beaches again.

8. When does this new rule go into effect?

Thursday, April 30, 2020, at 5:00 p.m.

9. When will beaches return to normal operation?

The new rule is part of the State's gradual approach to re-opening. If the State makes progress in reducing the spread of COVID-19, then additional steps will be taken to loosen restrictions. If the State makes insufficient progress in reducing the spread of COVID-19, then the State may be forced to close the beaches again in the future.