



CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN
TO REOPEN THE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF DALLAS

APRIL 27, 2020

April 27, 2020



PLAN TO REOPEN THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF DALLAS, TEXAS

Executive Summary

As we overcome a serious threat to our Church, we must determine when and how to reopen the First Baptist Church of Dallas in a rapidly changing environment characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, by exercising spiritual wisdom and discernment, applying biblical principles, and balancing scripturally mandated priorities.

In consideration of our biblical priorities, the guidelines issued by the White House and CDC (the “Federal Guidelines”), the Executive Orders issued by Governor Abbott, the Dallas County Safer-at-Home Orders issued by Judge Jenkins, and the specific circumstances FBCD is facing, we recommend applying the Federal Guidelines to Dallas County to determine when to reopen the church.

Pursuant to the Federal Guidelines, if Dallas County does not experience a rebound and consistently satisfies the Gating Criteria, Dallas County should enter Phase 3 on Sunday, May 31. According to the Federal Guidelines, during Phase 3, all vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions and large venues may operate under limited physical distancing protocols.

Therefore, FBCD could reopen its doors with few limitations on Sunday, May 31.

FBCD will continue to practice all safety and hygiene guidelines recommended by the CDC to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 or any other virus.

Prior to reopening on Sunday, May 31, we will work to balance attendance in our worship services and Sunday School hours. Specifically, we will balance worship attendance in both services at 1,500 (or 50% of capacity in the Worship Center). We will open up all seating in the Worship Center to allow for sufficient social distancing. Initially, we will also balance attendance in the choir at approximately 100 choir members in the choir loft during both services. While this will not provide six feet of separation, that level of social distancing should not be required in Phase 3.

We will likely only host worship services and provide childcare for the nursery – Pre-K when we first reopen, and resume Sunday School, Children’s and Student Ministries, and other programming three weeks later.

We should, however, be able to resume normal activities in our Children’s and Student Ministries in connection with the opening of the new Horner Family Center Expansion in June, which will allow for additional social distancing in classrooms. By balancing attendance, we will also be able to launch new adult Sunday School classes and allow for more social distancing where necessary.

By preparing a well-considered plan to reopen the church based on objective criteria, FBCD will be effectively positioned to reevaluate its plan in light of ever changing circumstances and prepared to accelerate or decelerate its reopening as necessary or appropriate.

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A. Decision Points.

As we overcome a serious threat to our Church, we must determine when and how to reopen the First Baptist Church of Dallas in a rapidly changing environment characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, by exercising spiritual wisdom and discernment, applying biblical principles, and balancing scripturally mandated priorities.

B. Relevant Considerations and Guidelines.

Biblical Considerations. The Word of God guides and directs us as we consider when and how to reopen the Church (Psalm 19:7-14; Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). While God continues working mightily through our multimedia ministry, it is imperative the Church meet together to draw near to the Lord in worship as the body of Christ (Psalm 27:4; Acts 2:46-47; 1 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 10:25). However, as leaders of the Church, we are also charged with looking after and protecting our church family whom Christ has purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). In balancing these priorities, we must exercise spiritual wisdom, a sound mind, and consider the information and guidance provided by other reliable sources and advisors (Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 15:22; 2 Timothy 1:7). These biblical considerations frame our decisions.

Federal Guidelines. The White House and CDC have proposed a phased approach to reopening the country and recommended guidelines that may be adopted or adapted by the states (the “Federal Guidelines”). As a condition precedent, the Federal Guidelines contemplate that states or regions will meet the “Gating Criteria” before moving into Phase 1 of the Plan. The Gating Criteria include a “downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period” within the state or region. The Federal Guidelines note that “state or local officials may need to tailor the application of these criteria to local circumstances (e.g., metropolitan areas that have suffered severe COVID outbreaks, rural and suburban areas where outbreaks have not occurred or have been mild).” The Federal Guidelines also state they are “implementable on [a] statewide or county-by-county basis at [the] governors’ discretion.”

On Thursday, April 23, the Surgeon General of the United States explained those states and regions that have not met the Gating Criteria are in “Phase Zero,” and should continue operating under the guidelines issued to prevent the spread of COVID-19 until they satisfy the Gating Criteria. These standing guidelines, commonly referred to as “30 Days to Stop the Spread,” recommend strict social distancing and limit gatherings to 10 people.

Phase 1. Once states and/or regions satisfy the Gating Criteria, they may move into Phase 1. In Phase 1, the Federal Guidelines provide, in pertinent part:

- All vulnerable individuals* should continue to shelter in place. Members of households with vulnerable residents should be aware that by returning to work or other environments where distancing is not practical, they could carry the virus back home. Precautions should be taken to isolate from vulnerable residents.
- All individuals, when in public (e.g., parks, outdoor recreation areas, shopping areas), should maximize physical distance from others. Social settings of more than 10 people, where appropriate distancing may not be practical, should be avoided unless precautionary measures are observed.

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- Avoid socializing in groups of more than 10 people in circumstances that do not readily allow for appropriate physical distancing (e.g., receptions, trade shows)
- Schools and organized youth activities (e.g., daycare, camp) that are currently closed should remain closed.
- Large venues (e.g., sit-down dining, movie theaters, sporting venues, places of worship) can operate under strict physical distancing protocols.

Phase 2. The Surgeon General explained each phase should last approximately two weeks if the state or region continues progressing. After two weeks in Phase 1, if states and/or regions demonstrate no evidence of a rebound and satisfy all Gating Criteria a second time (including a downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period), they may move into Phase 2. In Phase 2, the Federal Guidelines provide, in pertinent part:

- All vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place. Members of households with vulnerable residents should be aware that by returning to work or other environments where distancing is not practical, they could carry the virus back home. Precautions should be taken to isolate from vulnerable residents.
- All individuals, when in public (e.g., parks, outdoor recreation areas, shopping areas), should maximize physical distance from others. Social settings of more than 50 people, where appropriate distancing may not be practical, should be avoided unless precautionary measures are observed.
- Schools and organized youth activities (e.g., daycare, camp) can reopen.
- Large venues (e.g., sit-down dining, movie theaters, sporting venues, places of worship) can operate under moderate physical distancing protocols.

Phase 3. After two weeks in Phase 2, if states and/or regions continue to demonstrate no evidence of a rebound and satisfy all Gating Criteria a third time (including a downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period), they may move into Phase 3. In Phase 3, the Federal Guidelines provide, in pertinent part:

- All vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should practice physical distancing, minimizing exposure to social settings where distancing may not be practical, unless precautionary measures are observed.
- Large venues (e.g., sit-down dining, movie theaters, sporting venues, places of worship) can operate under limited physical distancing protocols.

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State of Texas Orders. Governor Greg Abbott has issued numerous executive orders directly pertaining to houses of worship throughout the State of Texas and has recently announced a new plan to reopen Texas in response to emerging circumstances and input from various constituencies.

- On March 31, Governor Abbott issued Executive Order No. GA-14, effective from April 2, to April 30. Pursuant to Executive Order No. GA-14, “every person in Texas shall, except where necessary to provide or obtain essential services, minimize social gatherings and minimize in-person contact with people who are not in the same household.” Governor Abbott defined “essential services” as including “religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship.” He further noted, “If religious services cannot be conducted from home or through remote services, they should be conducted consistent with the Guidelines from the President and the CDC by practicing good hygiene, environmental cleanliness, and sanitation, any by implementing social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19.” Governor Abbott noted that his order, “shall supersede any conflicting order issued by local officials in response to the COVID-19 disaster, but only to the extent that such a local order restricts essentials services allowed by this executive order or allows gatherings prohibited by this executive order.”

In a press conference regarding Executive Order No. GA-14, Governor Abbott said, “I’m unaware of a church that would want its constituents, its parishioners, to be exposed to COVID-19, and I believe there’s enough public information right now for them to be aware of the practices that are needed to make sure that their members don’t contract COVID-19.”

- On April 1, Governor Abbot and Attorney General Ken Paxton issued joint guidance explaining how to interpret and apply Executive Order No. GA-14 entitled, “Guidance for Houses of Worship During the COVID-19 Crisis.” The guidance explained, “Institutions providing these essential services can provide them under certain conditions described in Executive Order GA 14 and local orders by counties or municipalities that are consistent with GA 14. To the extent there is conflict between the Governor’s Executive Order GA 14 and local orders, GA 14 controls.” However, the guidance further stated, “Houses of worship must, whenever possible, conduct their activities from home or through remote audio or video services.”

Additionally, the guidance explained, “If a house of worship cannot conduct its service remotely due to a lack of capability (technological or financial), then it should follow the Governor’s Executive Order GA 14, that houses of worship are to conduct their activities in accordance with the White House Guidelines,” citing “30 Days to Stop the Spread,” which outlines mitigation strategies and limits gatherings to 10 people.

Importantly, the guidance issued on April 1, stated:

“Some houses of worship must avoid large gatherings.

Texas is a big state and the transmission rate of COVID-19 varies in different communities. Given this, houses of worship should work with counties and municipalities to evaluate the rate of local community spread and determine the

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appropriate level of mitigation strategies to implement. For example, more detailed guidance from the CDC currently recommends that if a community is experiencing substantial community spread of COVID-19, then the houses of worship in that community should cancel all in-person gatherings of any size. But if a community is experiencing moderate to substantial spread, then the CDC recommends a reduction of activities in coordination with local health officials, possible smaller gatherings incorporating social-distancing measures, cancelation of activities with 10 or more people when high-risk populations attend in person (including those over 65 and those with underlying medical conditions), and use of creative means to deliver other faith-based services. . . . [P]astors with smaller congregations may consider conducting multiple services of 10 people or fewer in their sanctuaries, so long as they maintain appropriate social distancing, properly sanitize the building between each service, and provide hand sanitizer.”

- On April 17, Governor Abbott issued Executive Order No. GA-16, effective April 17, through April 30, and reopening some business not deemed essential services on April 24. Executive Order No. GA-16 stated, “Religious services should be conducted in accordance with the Guidelines for Houses of Worship During the COVID-19 Crisis, as promulgated by the attorney general and the governor.”
- On April 18, the US Pastors Council (an informal group of pastors based primarily in the Houston area) submitted a list of suggested guidelines to Governor Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, and Attorney General Ken Paxton. These suggestions included encouraging everyone 65 years and older to remain home, requiring all ushers and greeters to wear facemasks and gloves, and sitting and dismissing by family unit in worship services.
- On April 21, Governor Abbott and Attorney General Paxton issued, “Revised Guidance for Houses of Worship During the COVID-19 Crisis.” These Revised Guidelines largely mirrored the initial guidelines issued on April 1, but stated, “houses of worship may consider implementing the following practices,” and incorporated the suggestions outlined by the US Pastors Council. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Revised Guidelines also reiterated, “Texas is a big state and the transmission rate of COVID-19 varies in different communities. Texans also have big hearts and should love their neighbors by evaluating the rate of local community spread to determine the appropriate level of mitigation strategies to implement.”
- On April 27, Governor Abbott presented “The Governor’s Report to Open Texas” (the “Governor’s Report”), and issued Executive Order No. GA-18, in connection therewith. The Governor’s Report and Executive Order No. GA-18 are primarily focused on reopening businesses not already included as “essential services.”

Specifically, the Governor’s Report and Executive Order No. GA-18 state that retail establishments, restaurants, movie theaters, shopping malls, museums and libraries may reopen on Friday, May 1, but they must operate at 25% of total listed occupancy until further notice. In a press conference on April 27, Governor Abbott referred to this as Phase 1, and explained he intended to progress to Phase 2 by May 15, and Phase 3 by May 29, if Texas experienced a continued decline in COVID-19 cases.

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Importantly, neither the Governor’s Report nor Executive Order No. GA-18 imposes any strict limitations on churches, including the restriction to operate at 25% of total listed occupancy. Instead, the Governor’s Report outlines recommended health protocols for churches, which include encouraging vulnerable individuals to stay home, continued social distancing, and hygienic practices. The Governor’s Report, however, refers churches to Executive Order No. GA-18 and the Revised Guidance for Houses of Worship During the COVID-19 Crisis for guidance. Executive Order No. GA-18 simply states, in pertinent part, “Religious services should be conducted in accordance with the joint guidance issued and updated by the attorney general and governor.” As noted above, the Revised Guidance for Houses of Worship During the COVID-19 Crisis state that “houses of worship may remain open,” but suggest some best practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In short, the Governor’s Report and Executive Order No. GA-18 essentially make churches wholly responsible for deciding when and how they should reopen.

Notably, Executive Order No. GA-18 also states, “Every person in Texas shall, except where necessary to provide or obtain essential services or reopened services, minimize social gatherings and minimize in-person contact with people who are not in the same household.”

Dallas County Orders. On March 12, Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins issued a Declaration of Local Disaster for Public Health Emergency. Since March 12, Judge Jenkins has issued numerous orders addressing various aspects of the Public Health Emergency and implementing strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19, most recently including a strict mandate that “All individuals currently living in Dallas County are ordered to shelter at their place of residence... All public or private gatherings of any number of people occurring outside a single household or living unit are prohibited.”

- On April 23, Judge Jenkins extended the “Safer At Home Order” for Dallas County until May 15. In light of Governor Abbott’s previous executive orders, Judge Jenkins reclassified religious and worship services as essential services, but stated, “The Office of the Dallas County Judge and the Health Authority strongly encourage religious and worship services be provided by audio, video, and teleconference whenever possible and that all individuals follow all CDC and County Social Distancing Guidelines including the six feet social distancing rule.” Additionally, the Dallas County “Safer at Home Order” provides, “to the greatest extent possible all persons over the age of two (2) shall wear some form of covering over their nose and mouth, such as a homemade mask, scarf, bandana or handkerchief, when patronizing an Essential Business. . . . To the greatest extent possible, all non-medical employees who work at an Essential Business or perform services that are exempt under this Order must wear face coverings over their noses and mouths while performing their work.”

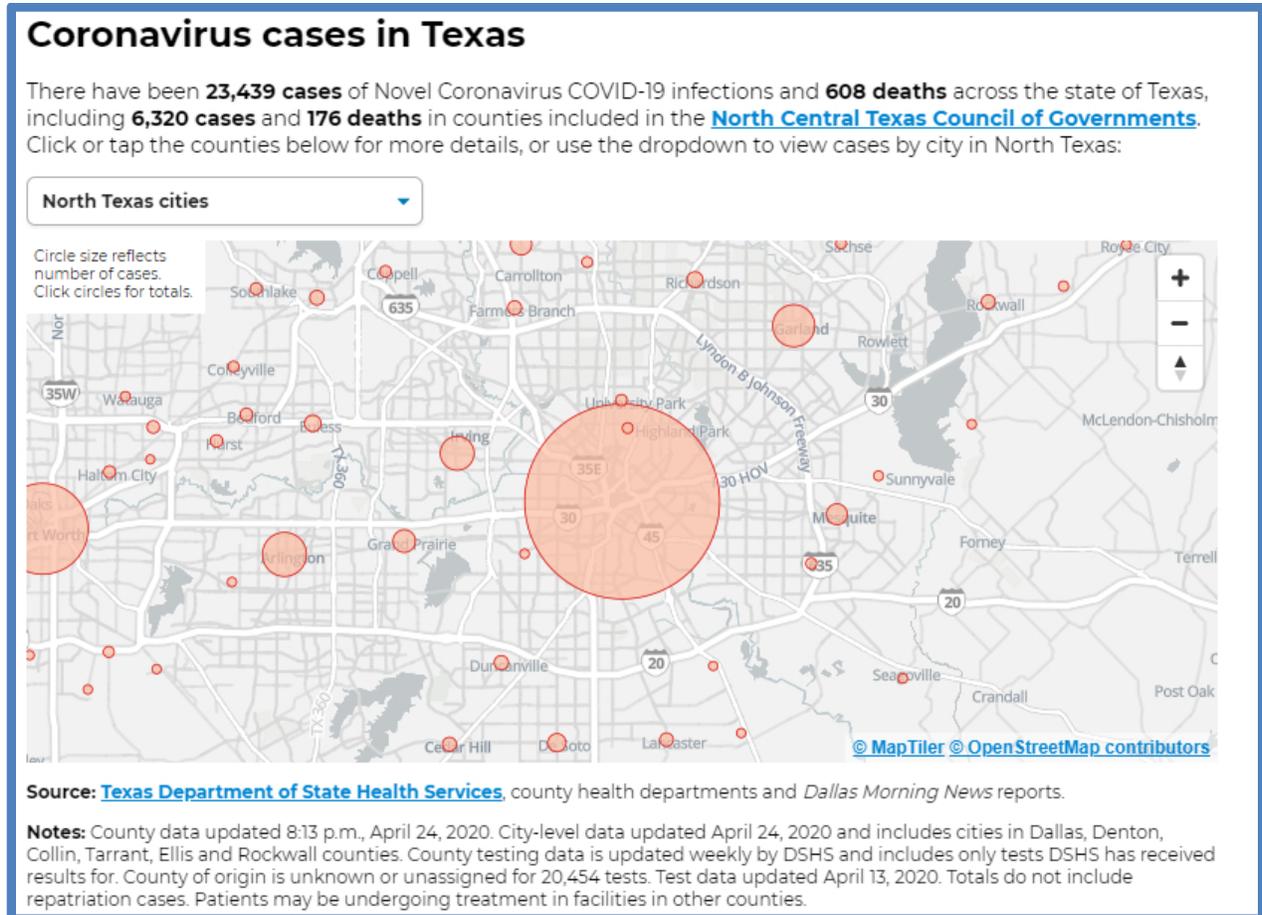
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C. Recommended Course of Action.

Pursuant to Governor Abbott’s Executive Order No. GA-18, and the Dallas County Safer at Home Order subject thereto, FBCD may legally begin hosting worship services on a limited basis; however, as of April 27, it is not safe or practical for FBCD to resume hosting its worship services. Accordingly, we are recommending a course of action consistent with the Federal Guidelines, which would likely lead to reopening FBCD on Sunday, May 31. This plan contemplates the ability to accelerate or decelerate based on changing circumstances and updated data. It will also enable FBCD to reopen safely and on a much greater scale.

1. Dallas County is still in Phase Zero, so it is not yet safe to reopen FBCD.

As of April 25, 24,439 cases of COVID-19 had been reported in Texas. In North Texas, the vast majority of reported cases are located in Dallas County and the City of Dallas. As noted in the Federal Guidelines, “state or local officials may need to tailor the application of these criteria to local circumstances (e.g., metropolitan areas that have suffered severe COVID outbreaks...)”

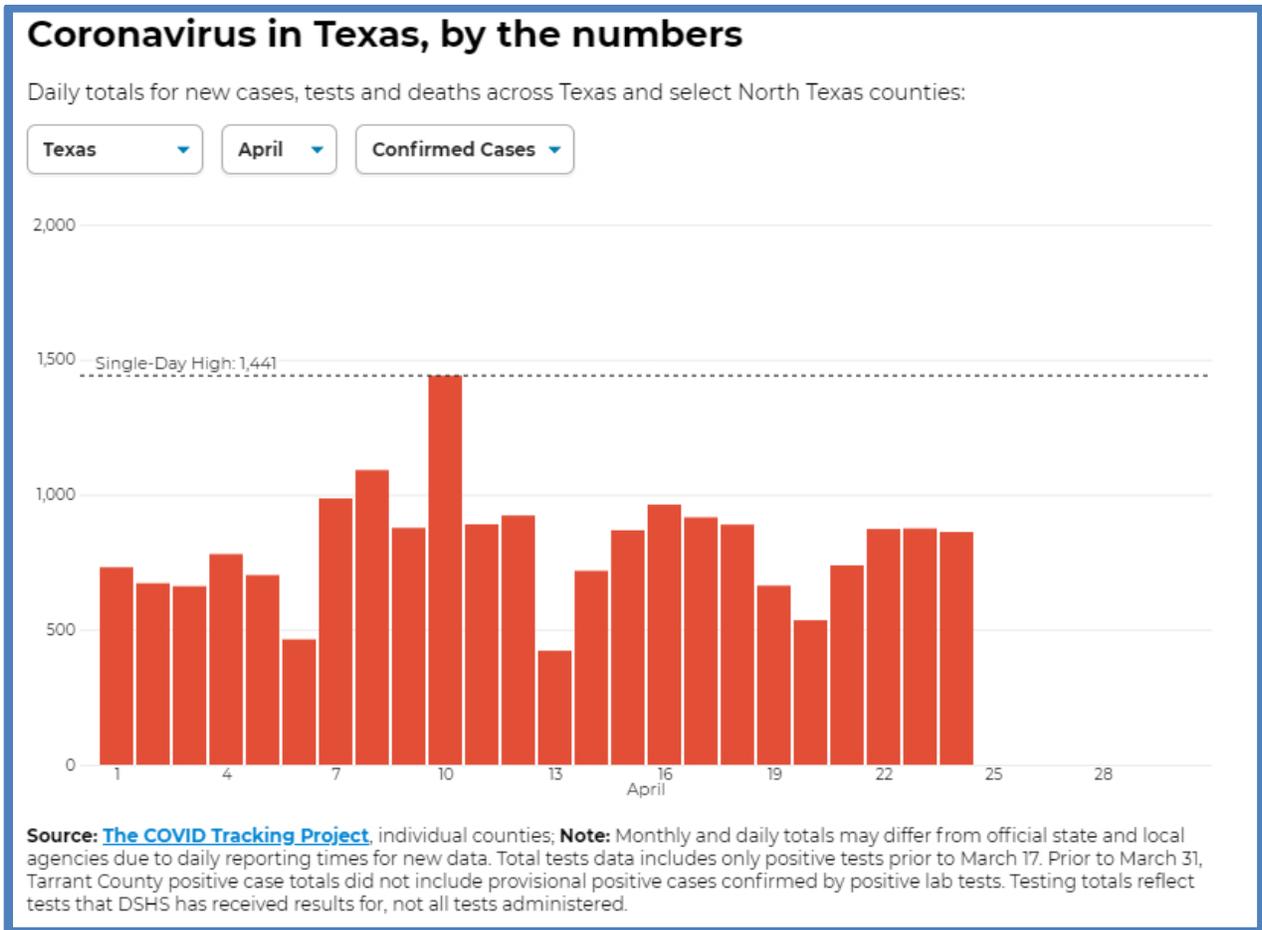


**Dallas Morning News*

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The State of Texas may have satisfied the Gating Criteria necessary to enter into Phase 1. While Texas recorded the highest number of reported cases on April 10, the number of reported cases has essentially remained flat since that time, averaging 795 reported cases over the last 14 days, but 870 reported cases over the last 3 days.

According to the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, however, the State of Texas reached its peak in daily deaths on April 24, and should be ready to move from employing mitigation strategies to containment strategies on June 8.



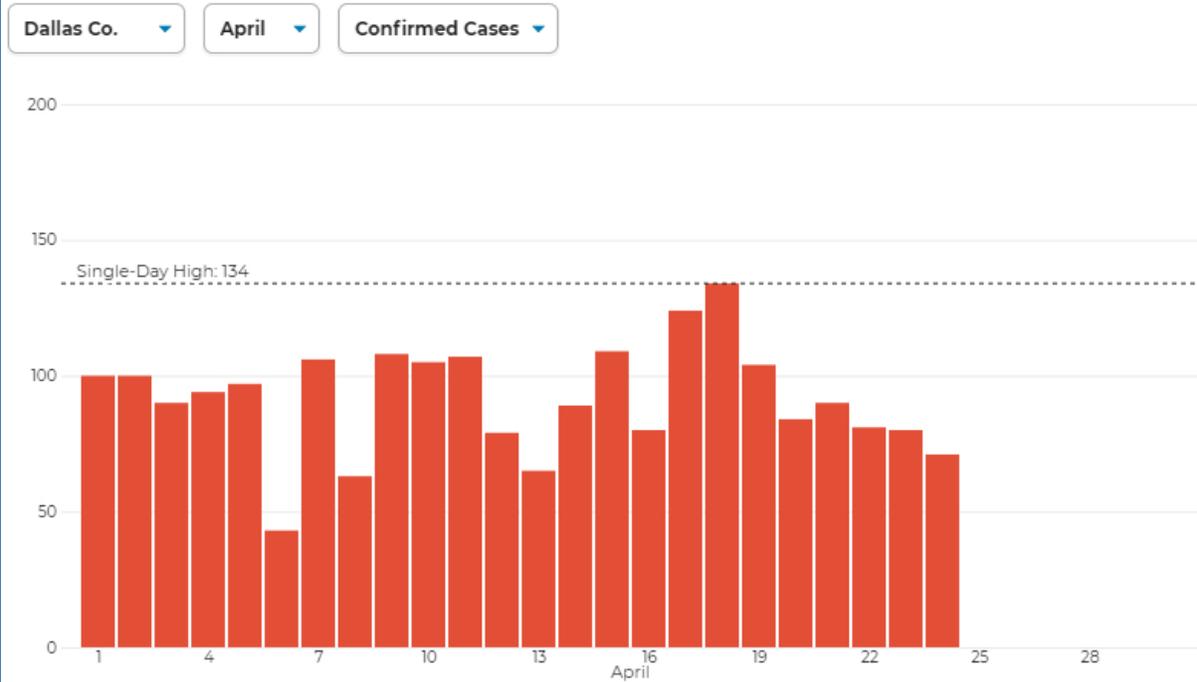
**Dallas Morning News*

Dallas County has not yet satisfied the Gating Criteria necessary to enter into Phase 1. Dallas County reported its highest number of reported cases on April 18. If we assume Dallas County will experience a downward trend in reported cases for 14 days from April 18, Dallas County would be prepared to enter Phase 1 in accordance with the Federal Guidelines on May 2.

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Coronavirus in Texas, by the numbers

Daily totals for new cases, tests and deaths across Texas and select North Texas counties:



Source: [The COVID Tracking Project](#), individual counties; Note: Monthly and daily totals may differ from official state and local agencies due to daily reporting times for new data. Total tests data includes only positive tests prior to March 17. Prior to March 31, Tarrant County positive case totals did not include provisional positive cases confirmed by positive lab tests. Testing totals reflect tests that DSHS has received results for, not all tests administered.

**Dallas Morning News*

As Governor Abbott acknowledged in his original Guidance for Houses of Worship, “Texas is a big state and the transmission rate of COVID-19 varies in different communities. Given this, houses of worship should work with counties and municipalities to evaluate the rate of local community spread and determine the appropriate level of mitigation strategies to implement.” Accordingly, when applied in Dallas County, Executive Order No. GA-18 seems overly aggressive as it is written broadly to cover churches of all sizes throughout the state. Indeed, although Governor Abbott’s Executive Order permits houses of worship to hold religious services, Dallas County remains under a strict Safer at Home Order requiring individuals to remain in their homes, prohibiting public or private gatherings, and mandating the use of face coverings when providing essential services.

Accordingly, in consideration of our biblical priorities, the Federal Guidelines, the State Orders, the Dallas County Orders, and the specific circumstances FBCD is facing, we recommend applying the Federal Guidelines to Dallas County to determine when to reopen the church. We further recommend reopening FBCD when Dallas County enters Phase 3, which should be Sunday, May 31.

2. **FBCD should reopen when Dallas County enters Phase 3.**

- **Phase 1.**
 - **Dallas County should enter Phase 1 on Sunday, May 3.** Pursuant to the Federal Guidelines, Dallas County remains in Phase Zero because it has not yet met the Gating Criteria. If April 18, marks the highest number of reported cases and Dallas County experiences a downward trend in reported cases for 14 days thereafter, Dallas County will meet the pertinent Gating Criteria on Saturday, May 2. As such, Dallas County may reasonably enter Phase 1 on Sunday, May 3.
 - **FBCD should not reopen during Phase 1.** According to the Federal Guidelines, during Phase 1, all vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place, social settings of more than 10 people should be avoided, and schools and organized youth activities should remain closed, but large venues may operate under strict physical distancing protocols. Therefore, we do not believe it is practical for FBCD to reopen while Dallas County is in Phase 1.
- **Phase 2.**
 - **Dallas County should enter Phase 2 on Sunday, May 17.** Pursuant to the Federal Guidelines, if Dallas County does not experience a rebound and again satisfies the Gating Criteria by reporting a downward trend in reported cases for 14 days, Dallas County should enter Phase 2 on Sunday, May 17.
 - **FBCD should not reopen during Phase 2.** According to the Federal Guidelines, during Phase 2, all vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place and social settings of more than 50 people should be avoided, but schools and organized youth activities (e.g., daycare, camp) can reopen and large venues may operate under moderate physical distancing protocols.
- **Phase 3.**
 - **Dallas County should enter Phase 3 on Sunday, May 31.** Pursuant to the Federal Guidelines, if Dallas County does not experience a rebound and again satisfies the Gating Criteria by reporting a downward trend in reported cases for 14 days, Dallas County should enter Phase 3 on Sunday, May 31.
 - **FBCD could reopen when Dallas County enters Phase 3.** According to the Federal Guidelines, during Phase 3, all vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions and large venues may operate under limited physical distancing protocols.

Therefore, FBCD could reopen its doors with few limitations on Sunday, May 31.

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- **FBCD should balance its worship services and Sunday School.** Prior to reopening on Sunday, May 31, we will work to balance attendance in our worship services and Sunday School hours. The average worship attendance in the 10:50 am worship service is approximately 2,000. The average worship attendance in the 9:15 am worship service is approximately 1,000. By moving Sunday School classes representing 500 people, we will balance worship attendance in both services at 1,500 (or 50% of capacity in the Worship Center). We will open up all seating in the Worship Center to allow for sufficient social distancing.
 - Initially, we will also balance attendance in the choir at approximately 100 choir members in the choir loft during both services. While this will not provide six feet of separation, that level of social distancing should not be required in Phase 3.
 - We will likely host worship services and provide childcare for the nursery – Pre-K when we first reopen, and resume Sunday School, Children’s and Student Ministries, and other programming three weeks later.
 - By reopening when Dallas County enters Phase 3, we may be able to resume normal activities in our Children’s and Student Ministries when we resume worship services or shortly thereafter. The opening of the new Horner Family Center Expansion in June (and any delay in young families’ return to church) will allow for additional social distancing in classrooms, though not required. Additionally, by balancing attendance, we will be able to launch new adult Sunday School classes and allow for more social distancing where necessary.
 - FBCD will continue to practice all guidelines recommended by the CDC to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 or any other virus.
- **FBCD will be prepared to accelerate or decelerate its plans.** By preparing a well-considered plan to reopen the church, FBCD is effectively positioned to reevaluate its plan in light of ever changing circumstances. For example, if there is a drastic decline in reported cases of COVID-19 after other sectors reopen and the data indicates it would be in the best interest of the church to reopen sooner than May 31, we may accelerate our plans and open sooner, possibly with additional restrictions. If there is an increase in reported cases such that it appears unsafe to reopen on May 31, we may delay our plans to reopen until a later date.
- **FBCD Staff will return to the workplace pursuant to the Federal Guidelines.** FBCD will also follow the Federal Guidelines (as legally restricted by the State of Texas and Dallas County) in returning its employees to the workplace.

This plan, based in well considered scientific data and objective criteria, balances our strong desire to reopen the church as soon as possible and practical, with our obligation to care for, protect, and shepherd our church family, while allowing us to adjust as circumstances rapidly change around us.