

MARCH 24, 2020 – LATEST LOCAL INFORMATION ON COVID-19 – Q & A

Understandably, there are a lot of questions swirling around. We hope this answers at least some of them.

Q: Why doesn't Jackson County close its borders like Graham County and Qualla Boundary?

A: The current assessment is that the logistics of closing major highways and roads and the subsequent manpower drain would overwhelm current county resources.

Jackson County is a highway/traffic crossroads for the other westernmost counties and Qualla Boundary. Resident pass-through, trucking of supplies and food, all transport must continue to flow. We cannot stop traffic or create traffic bottlenecks that prevent or hinder the abilities of our neighboring counties – and states – to provide for their residents.

Graham County is smaller and more isolated than Jackson. It does not have the same logistical issues. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is a sovereign nation, with powers comparable to the federal government. The tribe has blocked secondary roads using concrete barriers. Jackson County cannot legally do the same.

Q: I'm on the road and traveling. Can I drive through Jackson County?

A: Yes.

Q: Why do some county Health Departments seem to be releasing more information than our Health Department?

A: Jackson County is abiding by medical-privacy regulations as mandated by HIPPA and the communicable-disease law. The Institute of Government (UNC School of Government) released a blog post today discussing privacy concerns. Though written within the context of emergency responders, it contains detailed information about current legal constraints (see: <https://tinyurl.com/un55jip>)

Q: "Jackson County now has a confirmed case and we have evidence of community spread in North Carolina," Health Director A: Shelley Carraway said. "In consideration of those facts, everyone should be staying home as much as possible and social distancing if you must go out anywhere. Knowing exactly where one case lives and has visited could give a false sense of security if you avoid that area alone. "While the risk is low unless you have been less than 6 feet away from the confirmed case for at least 10 minutes, the safest thing is to assume everyone has it and keep your distance."

Q: Who decides which businesses must close?

A: Gov. Roy Cooper ordered certain businesses to close beginning March 25 (see: <https://governor.nc.gov/news>). Jackson County on Monday elected to close additional ones on a local level to add protection (see: www.jacksonnc.org and click on State of Emergency at the bottom of the page for a list).

Short-term rentals of less than a month are not allowed starting Wednesday at 5 p.m.; however, the restriction does not apply if you are working in the area, staying for emergency shelter or the housing is for COVID-19 medical-response personnel.

Jackson County leaders fully understand this decision brings further financial hardships to the hard-hit tourism industry, a critical component of the local economy.

"The action was not taken without extensive discussion and deliberation," acting Jackson County Manager Heather Baker said. "However, we believe this is a critical step in helping to curb continued spread of COVID-19."

Q: How can I volunteer to help?

We are setting up a system to involve volunteers in the local COVID-19 response. We'll release details as soon as possible.

A: What about domestic-violence victims?

Care for victims of domestic violence will not stop; shelter needs will continue to be met in the same way – shelter has been provided and is not prohibited by these restrictions.

Q: How can I access up-to-date information?

A: For expert COVID-19 information, email questions to: publichealthinfo@jacksonnc.org. Also, visit <http://health.jacksonnc.org> and follow the Health Department on Facebook: @JacksonCoDPH.

For emergency and law enforcement response, go to jacksonnc.org and scroll to the bottom of the page. Click on Declaration of State of Emergency and follow Jackson County Emergency Services on Facebook (@jacksonNCEM).

On a state level, if you have questions or concerns, call the COVID-19 phone line toll-free at 866-462-3821. This helpline is staffed by North Carolina Poison Control 24 hours a day, seven days a week.