

MEDIA RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 17, 2020

BENTON COUNTY DECLARES EMERGENCY IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19, CHANGES IN OFFICE HOURS & SERVICES

Kennewick, WA – In an abundance of caution and with concern for maintaining the safety and health of the public and our employees, we will be limiting operations at County offices and departments for a minimum of two weeks as a precautionary measure to help slow the spread of COVID-19 (novel coronavirus).

Starting Tuesday, March 17, 2020 at 5 PM most County offices will be closed to in-person visits from the public, but staff will remain at work for the remainder of the week. Starting Monday, March 23, 2020 some County offices will be closed except for essential services. Certain other services may continue in a limited capacity, at the discretion of the Elected Official or County Administrator. All County offices will reopen to the public on Monday, April 6, 2020 at normal business hours unless otherwise extended.

Updates to this information will be provided as they become available.

We are doing everything we can to protect the public and our employees in the midst of this expanding public health crisis. We will continue to provide essential services to residents but we are monitoring the situation closely and urge the public to follow the guidance of the [Benton-Franklin Health District](#), [Washington State Department of Health](#), and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#).

CORRECTIONS & JAIL

Effective March 14, 2020 the Benton County Jail is temporarily suspending video visitation taking place in the Jail Lobby. All inmates within the Benton County Jail will be authorized four (4) Skype visits per week, free of charge. A web link for instructions to complete Skype visits are available on the [Corrections Department website](#) and also on the [visitation system website](#). The visitation schedules listed on the County website remain in place without change.

In addition, the Corrections Department is no longer allowing volunteers into the facility, in an effort to reduce potential exposure and keep everyone safe. Questions regarding Corrections Department issues can be directed to (509) 783-1451.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The Benton County Sheriff's Office will continue to have regular staffing of its law enforcement personnel to ensure the safety of our citizens. To keep the community and staff safe, the Sheriff's Office will be taking the following measures to limit exposure:

- [Phone Reports](#) – If a call for law enforcement service can be handled via telephone and not in person, Deputies will make attempts to do so to limit in-person contact.
- [Fingerprinting Services](#) – Suspension of fingerprinting services until further notice.

- Lobby Hours – The Sheriff’s Office lobbies in Kennewick and Prosser will remain open for business and hours of operation will not change. However, we ask that you limit these contacts to only those that are imperative to public safety.
- Records Requests – Please submit records requests electronically to BCSORecords@co.benton.wa.us

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

At this time, the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office will continue to have regular office hours and staffing. Any changes will be announced as information is available. Please contact the Prosecutor’s Office with any questions via phone at (509) 735-3591 or via email at prosecuting@co.benton.wa.us.

DISTRICT COURT

The Benton County District Court has issued [Administrative Order No. 20-001](#), in the matter of emergency response to community health, effective March 17, 2020 until April 24, 2020 unless otherwise extended.

The Benton County District Court front counters in Kennewick and in Prosser will be closed from March 17, 2020 through April 24, 2020. The District Court office is re-directing the public to communicate with their office via internet, email, and telephone as well as having e-filing set up and running.

Mental Health Court and Veterans Court will be conducting business telephonically.

Questions regarding the Benton County District Court can be directed to:

Benton County District Court Administration
509-735-8476
District.Court@co.benton.wa.us

SUPERIOR COURT & JUVENILE COURT

The Benton-Franklin Counties Superior Court has issued [Emergency Order #1 RE: Court Operations](#), effective March 16, 2020 until further notice. Under this Emergency Order, the Superior Court will conduct no jury trials until April 24, 2020, and changes have been made to adult criminal cases as well as juvenile cases, domestic matters, and other cases. Adult Drug Court will be conducting business telephonically.

Full details of this Emergency Order are available on the Superior Court website (below). Questions regarding the Superior Court can be directed to:

Benton-Franklin Counties Superior Court Administration
509-736-3071
www.benton-franklinsuperiorcourt.com

CLERK’S OFFICE

The Benton County Clerk’s Office will no longer be accepting passport applications, effective Wednesday, March 18, 2020 until further notice, due to the COVID-19 emergency throughout the State. Their office would like to apologize for this inconvenience and ask for your understanding as they work to continue to provide services during this public health crisis.

For additional information or updates regarding Clerk’s Office services, please contact their office at (509) 735-8388 or via email at Clerk@co.benton.wa.us.

OFFICE OF PUBLIC DEFENSE

The Office of Public Defense front window will be closed to all walk-in traffic effective Wednesday, March 18, 2020 until Monday, April 6, 2020. Their office will continue to be available via phone at (509) 222-3700 or via email at opd@co.benton.wa.us. All Public Defense attorneys will continue to be available to clients and the public remotely and will continue to provide public defense services to all defendants as needed.

COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE & ADMINISTRATION

The Commissioners' and Administration Offices will be closed to in-person visits from the public starting Wednesday, March 18, 2020 until April 6, 2020 and will be monitoring emails and phone calls during this time. At this time, the Board of Commissioners will continue to hold their regularly scheduled Board meetings, unless otherwise posted.

HUMAN SERVICES

The Benton County Human Services Department will be closed to in-person visits from the public starting Wednesday, March 18, 2020 until Monday, April 6, 2020 unless otherwise extended. Their office will continue to be available via phone at (509) 783-5284 and staff will be monitoring emails.

TREASURER'S OFFICE

The Treasurer's Office will be closed to in-person visits from the public starting Wednesday, March 18, 2020 until Monday, April 6, 2020. Property tax payment drop boxes will remain open until April 30, 2020 at the Kennewick Annex (5600 W. Canal Drive, Kennewick) and the Prosser Courthouse (620 Market Street, Prosser) for residents to pay their property taxes during this closure. Residents can also pay their property taxes via mail or online at bentoncountytax.com.

For those needing assistance with Real Estate Excise Tax or manufactured home transfers or plats, please contact the Treasurer's Office at (509) 735-8505 to make an appointment. All other inquiries should be directed to treasurer@co.benton.wa.us.

ASSESSOR'S OFFICE

The Assessor's Office will be closed to in-person visits from the public starting Wednesday, March 18, 2020 until Monday, April 6, 2020 unless otherwise extended. Staffing will be limited during this time but will answer phone calls and emails as available. The Assessor's Office can be reached via phone at (509) 786-2046 or via email at assessor@co.benton.wa.us.

AUDITOR'S OFFICE

The Auditor's Office will be closed to in-person visits from the public for all services except the recording department starting Wednesday, March 18, 2020 until Monday, April 6, 2020 unless otherwise extended. Appointments may be made to record documents and/or apply for marriage licenses. Title companies are encouraged to use e-recording. To schedule an appointment with the recording department, contact (509) 736-2727.

For questions regarding licensing, please contact one of the [licensing sub-agents](#). All other inquiries should be directed to (509) 736-2727 or auditor@co.benton.wa.us.

FAIRGROUNDS

All events scheduled to take place at the Benton County Fairgrounds have been cancelled until May 1, 2020. All event holders will be fully refunded any fees or invited to reschedule their event at no additional cost within 12 months of their event.

Questions about Fairgrounds event cancellations and rescheduling can be directed to:

Benton County Fairgrounds Event Coordinator
509-222-3751
bc.fairgrounds@co.benton.wa.us

CANINE SHELTER

The Benton County Canine Shelter Office will be closed to in-person visits from the public starting Wednesday, March 18, 2020 until Monday, April 6, 2020 unless otherwise extended. Canine Shelter staff will continue to monitor calls and provide emergency services but will not be allowing visitors or facilitating adoptions during this time.

Questions regarding the Canine Shelter can be directed to:

Benton County Canine Shelter
(509) 460-4923
Canine.Shelter@co.benton.wa.us

PUBLIC SERVICES (BUILDING, PLANNING, PUBLIC WORKS)

Effective Wednesday, March 18, 2020 the Public Services Building and the Prosser Offices for Building, Planning, and Public Works will be closed to in-person visits from the public until April 6, 2020 unless otherwise extended.

During this time period, these offices will be operating at a limited capacity and will be monitoring emails and phone calls as necessary. Road maintenance operations will continue without interruption. Building inspections will continue in a limited capacity, with certain site restrictions. To schedule an inspection, please contact the Building Inspection line at (509) 736-2763.

PARKS

The Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility is closed until further notice. All other Benton County Parks will remain open to the public, including Badger Mountain and Candy Mountain Preserves.

ABOUT BENTON COUNTY

Benton County is located in south-central Washington. The county seat is located in Prosser, and its largest city is Kennewick. Benton County was created on March 8, 1905 and was named after U.S. Senator Thomas Hart Benton. Benton County operates under the plural executive form of government with three commissioners and seven other elected officials. Benton County has offices located in Prosser, Kennewick, and Richland. For more information, please visit our [website](#).

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