

SPORTS

TCU defensive tackle drafted by the Texans already feels at home.

PAGE A13

SUBSCRIBERS

Get the latest news online!
Activate your digital subscription at
HoustonChronicle.com/activate

CORONAVIRUS

Instead of issuing citations, county deputies, HPD will give out masks.

PAGE A19

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2020 • HOUSTONCHRONICLE.COM • VOL. 119, NO. 195 • \$2.00 ★★

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Trump comment spurs health warnings

Medical professionals, manufacturers plead not to ingest disinfectants as virus treatment

By Christine Hauser and Alan Yuhas
NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — In Maryland, so many callers flooded a health hotline with questions that the state's Emergency Management

Agency had to issue a warning that "under no circumstances" should any disinfectant be taken to treat the coronavirus. In Washington state, officials urged people not to consume laundry detergent capsules. Across the country Friday, health professionals sounded the

alarm.

Injecting bleach or highly concentrated rubbing alcohol "causes massive organ damage and the blood cells in the body to basically burst," Dr. Diane Calello, the medical director of the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System, said in an interview. "It can definitely be a fatal event."

Even the makers of Clorox and Lysol pleaded with Americans not

to inject or ingest their products.

The frantic reaction was prompted by President Donald Trump's suggestion Thursday at a White House briefing that an "injection inside" the human body with a disinfectant like bleach or isopropyl alcohol could help combat the virus.

"And then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks it out in a minute," Trump said after a presentation

from William Bryan, an acting undersecretary for science at the Department of Homeland Security, detailed the virus's possible susceptibility to bleach and alcohol.

"One minute," the president said. "And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning? Because you see it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number

Disinfectants continues on A6

Malls reopen with launch of 'retail-to-go' in Texas



Brett Coomer / Staff photographer

Brandon Becker brings packages from Zumiez at the Woodlands Mall to customers waiting to pick them up Friday.

SALES: Pandemic requiring stores to have online, mobile presence

By Paul Takahashi
STAFF WRITER

Nine major Houston-area malls on Friday began facilitating curbside pickup for retail tenants restarting sales under Gov. Greg Abbott's recent executive order allowing "retail-to-go" operations.

Shoppers at Baybrook,

Deerbrook, First Colony, The Galleria, Houston Premium Outlets, Katy Mills, Memorial City, Willowbrook and The Woodlands malls can now purchase products from participating retailers via phone or online, drive to a designated pickup location at the mall and have a store employee drop it off in the back seat or trunk of their

More inside

» *Beyoncé is supporting local relief efforts.*

Page A2

» *County to close medical shelter at NRG Park.*

Page A3

For the latest updates, go to houstonchronicle.com/coronavirus

vehicle. At Memorial City Mall, customers can also pick up their purchases from an automated package locker.

Many retailers, forced to close indefinitely under stay-at-home orders, are offering steep discounts to draw customers and bolster lagging sales.

Malls continues on A10

Houston taking part in antiviral drug trials

REMEDESIVIR: Therapy hoped to fight COVID-19

By Todd Ackerman
STAFF WRITER

Estela Fuentes, a Channelview kidney transplant recipient, felt her heart palpitate when she learned she had tested positive for the new coronavirus. When doctors mentioned a clinical trial testing an experimental therapy, she jumped at the opportunity.

A day later, her nephrologist told her he wasn't sure it was such a great idea. It might or might not help her beat the disease, he said, but he would probably have to take her off her kidney medication, possibly causing the organ to lose function and her to need dialysis. You need to make a decision, he said.

"I already made my decision," she replied.

Fuentes enrolled in the Houston arm of a global trial of remdesivir, an anti-

Drug continues on A10

Questions about virus cloud school reopening

NO GUIDANCE: Little data on infection among kids

By Jacob Carpenter
STAFF WRITER

With Texas schools officially closed for the rest of the academic year, every exasperated parent and educator wants to know: When can kids go back?

The unsatisfying answer: Maybe this summer. Maybe in August. Definitely too soon to say for sure.

Uncertainty about the long-term spread of the novel coronavirus, coupled with a dearth of scientific research about the impact of reopening schools, will complicate decisions on resuming in-person classes in the coming weeks and months, education and public health officials said.

The choice to reopen schools will dramatically impact the families of Texas' 5.8 million children attending public

Schools continues on A6

County backs down as eatery defies order

HEDWIG VILLAGE: Restaurant opens for dine-in service

By Zach Despart and Marcy de Luna
STAFF WRITERS

When Federal American Grill owner Matt Brice opened the doors to his Hedwig Village restaurant for dine-in service at 5 p.m. Friday, he risked a \$1,000 fine and up to six months in jail.

At least on paper. No law enforcement officers or agencies

attempted to stop or cite Brice for defying Harris County's stay-at-home order, which limits restaurants to delivery and takeout orders in an effort to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Several agencies, including the Harris County Sheriff's Office, Harris County Fire Marshal, Precinct 5 Constable's Office and Houston Police Department each said Friday that a different entity was responsible for intervening.

Hedwig Village Police Chief David Gott did not respond to a

Restaurant continues on A6



Elizabeth Conley / Staff photographer

Owner Matt Brice talks to Hedwig Village officers before opening Federal American Grill to those with reservations.

Index

Business.....B1 | Directory.....A2 | Lotteries.....A2 | Sports.....A13
Comics.....D4 | Editorials.....A17 | Markets.....B3 | TV.....D3
Crossword...D3 | Horoscope...D4 | Obituaries...B5 | Weather.....B6

@HoustonChron | Houston-Chronicle | @HoustonChron | @HoustonChronicle

Breaking news alerts: HoustonChronicle.com: Visit now for breaking news, constantly updated stories, sports coverage, podcasts and a searchable news archive.
Text Houston to 77453





OPEN EVERY DAY 8 AM - 6 PM

ALL SALES FINAL • NO EXCHANGES • NO REFUNDS

CALADIUMS
FANCY LEAF & STRAPS
MANY COLORS

QUART \$3.99 | GALLON \$4.99 | 2 GAL \$9.99

KNOCKOUT ROSES
DOUBLE RED, DRIFT ROSES,
HYBRID TEAS, FLORIBUNDA,
CLIMBERS & GRANDIFLORA

3 GAL \$12.99 OR 10/\$125

CITRONELLA
NATURAL MOSQUITO FIGHTER

6 1/2 INCH \$3.99 OR 10/\$35

FROM THE COVER

MALLS

From page A1

Yesenia Gonzalez, 22, said she ordered some charms and earrings from Pandora on Friday morning, and drove to Memorial City Mall to pick them up from a package locker operated by a Houston start-up called Uno. An assistant manager at Panera Bread, she said she wanted to buy a birthday gift for her friend who is planning a small get-together after the stay-at-home order ends later this month.

"It's just weird," Gonzalez said of the experience of picking up her order from the mall. "I usually spend two hours here before I would go home."

The so-called "retail-to-go" business model has already been embraced by most major grocers and big-box retailers. Walmart has installed automated pickup towers, Target has designated online-pickup kiosks and Home Depot and Whole Foods have automated package lockers inside their stores. H-E-B and Kroger in recent years have expanded curbside pickup and home delivery, including investing in self-driving grocery delivery vehicles.

But malls, long focused on captivating leisure shoppers and tourists looking for a fun outing, have been slow to adopt the "buy online, pick up in



Yi-Chin Lee / Staff photographer

A customer picks up an engagement ring, which he ordered online, at an Uno locker Friday at Memorial City Mall in Houston.

store" model, which can be difficult to execute in a large sprawling mall with many retailers. Instead, malls have invested heavily in amenities such as outdoor green spaces, indoor playgrounds and ice-skating rinks, and repurposing defunct department stores into high-end and fast-casual restaurants, bars, movie theaters and fitness clubs to create the sort of engaging experiences that will lure back consumers increasingly shopping online.

"The whole premise of the mall is, you come here and experience things,"

said Venky Shankar, research director at Texas A&M University's Center for Retailing Studies. "But the business model of malls will have to change. The coronavirus has increased the need to have an online and mobile presence. It's the new normal."

Slow start

Shankar said it will take time for shoppers to return to malls, as consumers are still reeling from the virus and its economic fallout, which has caused a spike in unemployment. Since March, 1.3 million Texans have filed applications for

unemployment benefits, nearly double all the claims submitted statewide during all of 2019, according to the U.S. Labor Department.

Indeed, only a handful of customers showed up at local malls to pick up merchandise on Friday, underscoring the daunting task facing malls as they look to reopen to the public after the pandemic passes.

Before Simon Property Trust temporarily closed its malls, which include The Galleria, Houston Premium Outlets and Katy Mill, foot traffic across their Texas properties

plunged by 71.1 percent in early March from the month before as shoppers wary of public gathering places opted to stay indoors, according to commercial real estate firm JLL.

Retail sales nationally plunged 8.7 percent in March, the biggest one-month drop on record, according to the latest report from the U.S. Commerce Department. Apparel and accessories sales were down 50.5 percent, department store sales fell 19.7 percent and electronics sales dove 15.1 percent month over month.

Consumers who ventured out to malls to pick up their online purchases Friday said they needed to buy gifts for birthdays and the upcoming Mother's Day. One 20-something man said he was picking up an engagement ring to surprise his girlfriend.

Jump on competition

Uno, which installs automated package lockers at malls and strip centers and delivers online orders to customer homes, saw the need for malls to adopt e-commerce well before the coronavirus began spreading across the nation. The company in December installed 60 package lockers at Memorial City Mall. Shoppers can order online from a participating mall retailer, have their purchases placed in a secure locker and access

their goods via an emailed code.

Tyson Shields, an Uno co-founder, said the company handled 10 to 20 orders a day before it was forced to temporarily halt operations in March under local stay-at-home orders. After relaunching on Friday, Shields said he anticipated a surge in business from mall retailers looking to sell products online and from consumers looking for a contactless way to pick up products.

Uno has partnered with four Memorial City Mall retailers: GameStop, Hallmark, Pandora and Sun & Ski, and is in talks with more than 20 retailers interested in partnering with the company. By midday Friday, it had placed 25 online purchases from Pandora inside its mall lockers, Shields said.

Uno charges mall retailers \$1 per order to place inside its lockers, and between \$8 and \$10 to deliver orders to customers' homes. The company's package lockers are cleaned every time an employee places products inside, and a hand sanitizing station is located next to the lockers.

"It's taken a while for brick-and-mortar to grasp e-commerce," Shields said. "After coronavirus, they're starting to realize it's important."

paul.takahashi@chron.com
twitter.com/paultakahashi

DRUG

From page A1

ral drug that's one of the top therapeutic hopes in the fight against COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus currently spreading in Houston and around the world. While research involving hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial drug touted by President Donald Trump, and transfusions of blood plasma taken from people who've recovered from COVID-19 have attracted more attention, remdesivir is the would-be therapy farthest along in the testing process.

Early research results generated optimism. In a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine on April 10, nearly 70 percent of 53 patients given remdesivir through what's known as "compassionate use" required reduced oxygen support and 17 of the 30 on ventilators were able to come off them. Then, on April 16, the online health news organization STAT reported that a University of Chicago video shows a doctor saying the institution's hospital has discharged most of the 125 participants in an ongoing remdesivir clinical trial, almost all of whom had severe cases of COVID-19.

But hope took a step back Thursday when the World Health Organization inadvertently posted to its website a summary of a prematurely halted Chinese clinical trial, not yet peer reviewed and published, suggesting that remdesivir didn't show a benefit. Asian markets faltered in the aftermath Friday.

Houston researchers downplayed the significance of the reports, arguing that the leaks and not-yet-ready-for-publication papers only create more confusion and that no one should draw conclusions without seeing all of the analyzed and peer-reviewed data from the ongoing clinical trials.

Comparing outcomes

Those trials include three in which there's a Houston arm — the one, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, in which Fuentes is participating; and two sponsored by remdesivir's manufacturer, Gilead Sciences. Baylor College of Medicine is leading the first; Houston Methodist Hospital the other two.

The attention seems un-



Marie D. De Jesús / Staff photographer

Estela Fuentes, a Houston kidney transplant patient with COVID-19, took part in a clinical trial of remdesivir.

derstandable given the desperate need for therapeutic agents for the disease, which causes mild or moderate symptoms most of the time, but has killed nearly 200,000 people around the world, including more than 51,000 in the U.S. The risk of death, most often from pneumonia, is greatest in older adults and people with underlying conditions.

Effective treatment could enable the loosening of stay-at-home restrictions, the best defense people currently have against the virus. There is no approved therapy or vaccine.

The NIH study, being conducted at 40 academic hospitals around the nation and globe, is considered the most rigorous of the trials. Patients sick enough to require hospitalization are randomly assigned to receive either remdesivir or a placebo, both delivered by infusion for up to 10 days.

Investigators will compare outcomes in those who received remdesivir and those who received the placebo to determine whether the drug actually produced more of a clinical benefit. Outcomes are scored on an eight-point scale ranging from fully recovered to death.

Preliminary data from the NIH study, which has completed the enrollment of more than 1,000 patients and will soon commence a second phase, are expected in early May.

Dr. Hana El Sahly, a Baylor professor of molecular virology and microbiology

and the principal investigator of the Houston research, noted that the size of the trial will give it "more power to examine the efficacy" of remdesivir than the halted study in China.

"Depending on the data, we should have a better idea then whether we have a therapy that could help COVID-19 patients or we need to examine other options," El Sahly said.

The study is double-blinded — meaning neither the participant nor the researchers know who's receiving the drug and who's receiving the placebo — so even El Sahly doesn't know how remdesivir is performing.

A better target?

At Methodist, COVID-19 patients enrolled in remdesivir trials sponsored by Gilead Sciences, the drug's manufacturer, all receive the actual therapy. The major difference: Some get infusions for five days, others for 10.

Dr. Kevin Grimes, a Methodist infectious disease specialist and trial leader, said he's "very encouraged" with patient responses to the therapy, though he acknowledged it's possible they could have gotten better on their own. He said 20 of 34 severely ill patients in the trial have been discharged, including seven who'd needed breathing tubes. The rest are still early in the treatment, he noted. None has died.

Remdesivir was born as a general antiviral candidate

a decade ago and showed promise against the new coronavirus's older cousins, SARS and MERS, in previous preclinical testing. It was tried against Ebola in 2015 but didn't perform as well as other candidate drugs and was dropped.

But the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, could be a better target. Remdesivir, which works by interfering with the process coronaviruses use to make copies of themselves in the body, reduced the severity of symptoms in animals with SARS and MERS when given early enough in the course of the disease. More recently, the therapy prevented disease progression in monkeys infected with the new virus, according to an NIH study.

"There's only one drug right now that we think may have real efficacy," Bruce Aylward, an assistant director-general at the World Health Organization, said at a briefing in Beijing in late February. "And that's remdesivir."

The NIH trial's first patients, back in February, were the Americans repatriated aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship that docked in Yokohama, Japan. It has grown to more than 700 patients since then, said El Sahly, including about 15 at either Baylor St. Luke's Medical Center or Ben Taub Hospital.

Ramping up

Gilead Sciences, remdesivir's manufacturer, has already given the drug to more than 1,000 COVID-19

patients in the two trials at Methodist and around the globe — one for patients with moderate disease, the other for those with severe disease. The trials' second phases, already begun, will add more than 7,500 patients.

Gilead also provided the drug to more than 1,500 COVID-19 patients on a compassionate use basis, so many that last month the company suspended the program except for pregnant and pediatric patients. It currently has roughly 1.5 million individual dosages, enough for at least 140,000 patients, and has set a goal of making 500,000 treatment courses by October and more than a million by

the end of the year.

El Sahly noted the NIH "adaptive" trial is in the first stage. If patients getting remdesivir fare better than those on the placebo, the drug would move to a second phase, where it typically would be compared to another drug to determine the most effective therapy.

The timing of remdesivir's deployment, not acknowledged in the Chinese study summary, will also be an important data point in interpreting studies of the drug.

"I do not believe you can draw any conclusions from the leaked Chinese trial summary," said Katherine Perez, an infectious disease pharmacist at Methodist and a co-investigator of the studies there. "There is no way to authenticate the results or put the findings into context."

Fuentes ultimately remained on her kidney medication, in a lowered dose, in addition to getting remdesivir. She said she didn't notice a difference after receiving the infusion and still doesn't know if she got a placebo or the actual drug.

She was discharged a few days later and is doing well, "though very tired," back at home, where her husband and two grown daughters also have the virus.

"It was hard," said Fuentes, 53, a homemaker who sometimes teaches at a biblical institute. "I just kept telling myself I was in the hands of good doctors and God."

Marie D. De Jesus
contributed to this report.

todd.ackerman@chron.com

STORM DAMAGE

BRAUN'S
ROOFING
INC.

Roofing, Siding, and
Exterior Improvement

Free Estimates • Call Today!

281-480-9900

www.braunsroofing.com

Residential • Commercial

Heard on Michael Berry