

# DeSoto Times-Tribune

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## Are businesses following the mask mandate?



**Top left:** Cars wait in the drive-thru at Velvet Cream. **Top right:** Shoppers at the grand opening of Ultimate Gifts' new location browse merchandise. **Bottom left:** A sign on the front door of children's store Aiden + Ollie encourages customers to wear masks. **Bottom right:** A self-serve hand sanitizer and face mask station at pet food store Hollywood Feed.

## Coroner says fears, not virus, cause surge in deaths

### Experts disagree, say claims are unfounded

BY DANIEL PAYNE

The DeSoto County coroner disputed the validity of state health department statistics and said that fear of the virus is more dangerous than the virus itself in a Facebook post that has been shared over 3,500 times.

In the 654-word post, Josh Pounders, who has been the county coroner since January 2018, said that he believed people without training have been stirring fears about the dangers of COVID-19. The fears surrounding the pandemic have been so powerful, he said in the post, it has caused a drastic increase in cardiovascular and pulmonary-related deaths.

"I see on a daily basis in the last few months many facebook google experts and politicians with politically driven agendas driven by money reporting information that is twisted and false to the public," he said in the post. "Stress causes high blood pressure and high blood pressure with heart disease or vascular disease cause heart attacks and strokes."

In the post, he noted that the largest group of deaths in DeSoto County in July was from cardiac and pulmonary issues.

Pounders has training as a registered nurse, but top experts in hospitals said his claims are opinions and are not rooted in science or evidence.

Pounders declined to be interviewed for this article.

"I think it's fairly unlikely that we will see actual proof that misinformation about COVID... led to an increase in mortality," Dr. Stephen Threlkeld, an infectious disease specialist who works at the Baptist Memorial

### Most buying into mask order, no enforcement for those who don't

BY WILL STRIBLING

We visited 12 businesses across DeSoto County to see who's complying with pandemic guidelines. What we found is that most customers and employees were following the enhanced safety protocols, but enforcement was nonexistent for patrons who refuse to follow guidelines.

DeSoto is one of 37 Mississippi counties under the enhanced safety protocols under Gov. Tate Reeves' executive orders.

The enhanced protocols are:

- All employees are required to keep at least 6 feet from other employees, or wear a face mask.
- All employees must be screened at the beginning of their shift.
- Employees in contact with the public must wear a face covering.
- Members of the public must wear a face covering at all times in a business, except for some circumstances such as eating, or special medical conditions.

Only one business we visited was in violation of Gov. Reeves' executive orders, High Definition Salon & Spa. No employees or customers were wearing masks when we visited, though masks

SEE BUSINESSES, P8

## Teachers and students stay busy amid delays

BY ERIN KILLION

DeSoto County Schools delayed classes one week, but teachers and students continue creating and recreating plans for an uncertain fall semester.

Student-athletes are still hard at work preparing for seasons still hanging in the balance, and teachers rush to learn new software and classroom procedures. Classes will now start on Aug. 17, with practices for most fall sports beginning earlier this week.

Cindy Steve, a parent whose son will be a senior at Lake Cormorant High School, said that her son's plans for his football career were what made her decide to send him back into school this year.

"He cannot do virtual learning his senior year because if he isn't in attendance, he can't play football," Steve said. "I'm concerned for his health and wellbeing, but he's hoping to get a football scholarship."

Steve said that she and her

SEE DELAYS, P3



Courtesy Jana Malone via Twitter

Teachers are preparing for the upcoming school year even as the start date for classes was pushed back one week.

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662-403-9380  
2342 Hwy., 51 North  
NESBIT, MS 38651

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