



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

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Mass Gathering Restriction FAQs

Governor Tony Evers and Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Secretary-designee Andrea Palm [ordered](#) a statewide moratorium on mass gatherings of 10 people or more to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, effective at 5:00pm on Tuesday, March 17th. This order applies to all public and private mass gatherings.

What is a “mass gathering”?

A “mass gathering” means any planned or spontaneous, public or private event or convening that will bring together or is likely to bring together 10 or more people in a single room or single confined or enclosed space, whether inside or outside, at the same time.

What does “social distancing” mean?

“Social distancing” means maintaining at least six feet between people and avoiding all direct physical contact.

Why are mass gatherings being prohibited?

The DHS is intending to slow the spread of this epidemic to a level such that the healthcare system is able to maintain quality care for patients. Mass gatherings during an outbreak of a particularly infectious disease such as COVID-19 have the potential to result in large numbers of ill people that can quickly overwhelm local hospitals. There are only so many doctors, nurses, and hospital beds to go around. That is why it is important that even people who do not think they personally would be significantly affected by a COVID-19 infection have to do their part to help stop the spread of the infection to the more vulnerable members of our communities. This not only affords the health care system time to care for the people who are already sick, but it also provides health care experts more time to develop treatments, testing kits, and hopefully even a vaccine, before the health care system gets overwhelmed.

Are there restrictions on gatherings involving 10 or less people?

Yes. All gatherings that bring together or are likely to bring together less than 10 people in a single room or confined or enclosed space, whether inside or outside, at the same time must: (1) preserve social distancing and (2) follow all other recommendations issued by the DHS and U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Voluntary cancellation, closure, or limitations on the size of gathering beyond the requirements of this order are permitted and encouraged.

Does it matter if the gathering is held outdoors?

No. The order applies to gatherings of 10 or more people that are held in a single room or single confined or enclosed space, whether inside or outside, at the same time.

Does this order change the school closure order?

A previous order mandating the closure of public and private schools at 5pm on Wednesday, March 18th is still in effect. The previous anticipated re-opening date of April 6th has been rescinded. All schools should remain closed for instructional and extracurricular activities for the duration of the public health emergency or until a subsequent order lifts this specific restriction. This does not apply to facilities or schools operated by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections.

However, schools may be used for other purposes, including school board meetings, polling locations, and food distribution.

Are personal care businesses allowed to remain open?

No. All hair salons, barber shops, nail salons, day spas, tattoo parlors, body art establishments, and tanning facilities were required to close effective 5:00pm on Friday, March 20th. Dog grooming salons are exempt from this order as their primary customer is a dog, rather than a person. Dog grooming salons must still follow the less-than-10 person gathering restriction in their waiting and services areas and must implement social distancing.

Are restaurants, bars, breweries, brewpubs, wineries, distilleries, and alcohol beverage retailers required to close?

These entities may operate under very limited circumstances, and are otherwise closed to the public. No seating may be provided, food and drink may not be consumed on the premises (either indoors or outdoors) and customers may enter the facility only to pick up and pay. Self-service operations, including salad bars, beverage stations, and buffets are prohibited. Customers are prohibited from self-dispensing all unpackaged food.

Carryout sales of alcohol beverages and food are allowed, if permitted by state law and municipal ordinance. Delivery of alcohol beverages to retail customers is prohibited, unless the customer first comes to the licensed or permitted premises to pay in person. Wineries can deliver wine in accordance with their direct wine shippers' permit. Please see the Department of Revenue's [Alcohol Beverage Guidelines](#) for additional information.

In all cases, social distancing must be preserved when customers are ordering and picking up.

Are hotels and motels required to close?

No. Hotels and motels may remain open as long as bars and restaurants that are located within them operate under the above requirements. Guests are not allowed to congregate in lobbies or other common areas.

Does this order apply to childcare locations and children and youth facilities?

Group homes, shelter care facilities, runaway homes, residential care center for children and youth, crisis stabilization centers, secured residential care centers for children and youth, Type 2 residential centers for children and youth, juvenile correction facilities, and Type 1 and Type 2 juvenile correction facilities are exempt from this order.

Childcare locations are exempt from this order, but subject to [Emergency Order #6](#), which states that child care settings may not operate with more than 10 staff present at a time and may not operate with more than 50 children present at a time. Please also see the Department of Children and Families [Guidance Order #2](#).

Will grocery stores remain open?

Yes. Grocery stores, retail food establishments, bakeries, convenience stores, and produce stands engaged in the retail sale of food, including pet supply, may remain open if the following requirements are met: (1) close all seating intended for consuming food; (2) cease self-service operations of salad bars, beverage stations, and buffets; and (3) except for grocery stores, prohibit customers from self-dispensing all unpackaged food. Grocery stores can continue to display unpackaged fresh fruits, vegetables and other produce for selection and purchase by consumers. To minimize the likelihood of repeated hand contact with produce, retailers should consider decreasing the amount of products displayed for sale and restock items more frequently. Retailers should also regularly clean and sanitize all containers used to store produce.

Certified farmers markets can continue to operate if the following requirements are met: (1) prohibit customers from self-dispensing all unpackaged food; and (2) maintain social distancing between customers and vendors.

Will hospitals remain open?

Yes. All health care facilities and related facilities, including hospitals, medical facilities, home health agencies, personal care agencies, hospices, allied health providers, acupuncturists, massage therapists, chiropractors, adult family homes, dentists, blood drives and blood banks, pharmacies, detoxification and alcohol or drug treatment programs and facilities, adult day care, adult day services, and supportive home care are all exempt from this order.

Long-term care and assisted living facilities are also exempt from this order and may remain open as long as they follow all current DHS [Recommendations for Prevention of COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Facilities and Assisted Living Facilities](#) and all applicable U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommendations.

Cafeterias and food service in health care facilities may remain open, for staff and authorized visitors only, if the following requirements are met: (1) self-service operations of salad bars, beverage stations, and buffets are prohibited; (2)

customers are prohibited from self-dispensing all unpackaged food; and (3) the facility shall preserve social distancing between customers.

Does this order apply to having 10 or more people my home?

No. All residential buildings, shared rental units, homeless shelters, or other similar facilities where a person usually sleeps are exempt.

What types of retail establishments are exempt?

Retail establishments, including gas stations and laundromats, where large numbers of people are present but are not generally within arm's length of one another for more than 10 minutes are exempt. In all cases, social distancing must be implemented. Indoor shopping malls are not exempt and must close.

Will my polling or in-person absentee voting location remain open?

Any location or facility used as a polling or in-person absentee voting location is allowed to remain open, with the exception of long-term care and assisted care facilities. If a location used for this purpose is prohibited elsewhere in this order, the location or facility may remain open solely for this purpose.

Are any spaces exempt?

Yes – The order specifically exempts the following spaces, unless otherwise noted:

- Commercial and non-profit entities
- Construction sites and projects, including public works and remodeling projects
- Energy and telecom infrastructure
- Financial institution and services
- Food production and distribution
- Government and first responders
- Media and news organizations
- Retail and laundromats (except for indoor shopping malls, which must close)
- Airports, mass transportation systems, freight rail and other transportation systems that distribute and deliver goods, and taxi and private transportation services.

In all cases, social distancing must be implemented.

Does my workplace have to close?

It depends – If your workplace falls into one of the exemptions listed above, your workplace can remain open subject to any applicable conditions in the order. While office spaces are exempt, social distancing must be implemented and employees should work remotely, as much as practicable.

Will Senior Centers remain open?

Senior Centers will not remain open unless they are located in a government facility. But even those allowed to stay open must practice social distancing.

Can my I proceed with a wedding or funeral as planned?

Funerals and weddings are not exempt from this order and must be less than 10 people.

Will hourly staff at affected businesses be paid?

Governor Evers recognizes that the closure presents challenges to businesses across Wisconsin, including financial impact. Individual businesses will need to determine how to best address the impacts of closures on hourly staff. Governor Evers encourages business to take whatever steps they can to minimize the economic impact to workers due to public health closures, and he will work with legislative leaders to provide assistance to Wisconsinites impacted by workplace closures.

Can local government bodies of 10 or more people meet?

The order specifically exempts local government facilities, so that local governments can continue to function. They should follow DHS guidance regarding social distancing, cleaning, and other measures to protect the health and safety of those in attendance. The Wisconsin Department of Justice has provided [additional guidance](#) on this topic. Specific

questions from individual government entities should be directed to the Department of Justice's Office of Open Government.

How long will this order remain in effect?

The order will remain in effect for the duration of the public health emergency and will be re-evaluated as updated information becomes available.

How will the order be enforced?

This order is enforceable by any local law enforcement official, including county sheriffs. Violation or obstruction of this order is punishable by imprisonment, fines, or both. Wis. Stat. § 252.25. Please contact your local law enforcement agency to report violations of the order.