



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 50 people or more to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, effective at 12:01am on Tuesday, March 17th. This order applies to all public and private gatherings.

What is a “mass gathering”?

The order defines a “mass gathering” as any planned or spontaneous, public or private event or convening that will bring together or is likely to bring together 50 or more people in a single room or single confined or enclosed space at the same time.

Why are mass gatherings being prohibited?

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.

What types of spaces are subject to the order?

The order includes, but is not limited to mass gatherings at: public or private schools, auditoriums, theaters, movie theaters, museums, stadiums, arenas, conference rooms, meeting halls, exhibition centers, taverns, health and fitness centers, recreation centers, licensed pools, places of worship and religious gatherings.

Are any spaces exempt?

Yes – The order specifically exempts the following spaces:

- Airports;
- Public, private, and charter schools only for noninstructional purposes, such as medication pickup, childcare services, providing meals, and when operating as polling places;
- Childcare locations (including those that operate within a facility that is otherwise prohibited), residential care centers, and group homes;
- Military and National Guard facilities;
- Law enforcement, jails, and correctional facilities, including any facility operated by the Department of Corrections, and response to natural disasters;
- Food pantries and shelter facilities, including day centers, for individuals and families;
- Detoxification centers;
- Residential buildings;
- Shopping malls and other retail establishments where large numbers of people are present but are not generally within arm’s length of one another for more than 10 minutes;
- Hospitals, medical facilities, and pharmacies;
- Long-term care and assisted living facilities, as long as the facility follows all current Department of Health Services’ Recommendations for Prevention of COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Facilities and Assisted Living Facilities;
- Libraries;
- Office spaces and government service centers;

- Manufacturing, processing, distribution, and production facilities;
- Public transportation;
- Utility facilities;
- Job centers; and
- Facilities operated by the Wisconsin Legislature and Wisconsin Court System.

Please see FAQs below for additional, specific exemptions.

[DHS guidance regarding social distancing should still be followed in these spaces.](#)

Does my workplace have to close?

It depends – If your workplace falls into one of the exemptions (i.e. office spaces, manufacturing and production facilities), your workplace can remain open. Employers should seek guidance from their local public health departments if they have questions and should follow [DHS guidance regarding social distancing](#) in the workplace.

Does this order move up the school closure timeline?

Governor Tony Evers directed Secretary-designee Andrea Palm to close all public and private schools beginning at 5pm on Wednesday, March 18th. This order does not impact that timeline.

Will hospitals remain open?

Hospitals, medical facilities, and pharmacies are exempt from the order and will remain open.

Are restaurants, bars, hotels and motels required to close?

Restaurants, bars, hotels and motels are exempt from the order if they operate at 50% of their capacity, or 50 total people, whichever is less. This includes bars and restaurants in airports. They also are required to: (1) preserve social distancing of 6 feet between tables, booths, bar stools, and ordering counters; (2) cease self-service operations of salad bars and buffets; and (3) prohibit customers from self-dispensing all unpackaged food. Employees are included in the 50 person maximum.

Will grocery stores remain open?

Grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmer’s markets are exempt from the order as long as: (1) if seating is offered, they must operate at 50% of seating capacity, or 50 total people, whichever is less; (2) social distancing of 6 feet between tables, booths, bar stools, and ordering counters are preserved; (3) self-service operations of salad bars and buffets is ceased; and (4) customers are prohibited from self-dispensing all unpackaged food.

Will Senior Centers remain open?

Senior Centers are exempt from the order only for the service of meals as long as the following guidelines are followed: (1) preserve social distancing of 6 feet between tables, booths, bar stools, and ordering counters; (2) cease self-service operations of salad bars and buffets; and (3) prohibit customers from self-dispensing all unpackaged food.

Does it matter if the gathering is held outdoors?

The order applies to gatherings of 50 or more people that are held in a single room or single confined or enclosed space at the same time.

Should mass gatherings smaller than 50 be canceled?

Voluntary cancelation, closure, or limitations on size of gathering beyond the requirements of the order are permitted.

All gatherings that bring together or are likely to bring together 50 or fewer people in a single room or confined or enclosed space at the same time must:

- Operate at 50% of seating capacity,
- Preserve social distancing of 6 feet between people, and
- Follow all other public health recommendations issued by the Wisconsin Department of Public Health.

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.

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?

Violation or obstruction of this order is punishable by imprisonment, fines, or both. Wis. Stat. § 252.25.