



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

Updated on 3/17/20

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”?

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 10 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?

This order applies to all spaces where 10 or more people may gather, unless they are specifically exempt. This order may include, 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, and places of worship and religious gatherings.

Are any spaces exempt?

Yes – The order specifically exempts the following spaces:

- Transportation
 - Airports as long as restaurants within them comply with the restrictions below
 - Mass transportation
- 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.
- Hotels and motels as long as restaurants comply with the restrictions below.
- Government
 - Military and National Guard facilities
 - Law enforcement, jails, secure treatment centers, and correctional facilities, including any facility operated by the Department of Corrections, and any facility used to respond to natural disasters or public health emergencies
 - State and local government facilities, including government service centers, unless prohibited elsewhere in this order or another order
 - Facilities operated by the Wisconsin Legislature or Wisconsin Court System
- Relief Facilities
 - Food pantries and shelter facilities, including day centers, for individuals and families.
- Residential Buildings

- All residential buildings
- Healthcare
 - All health care facilities, including hospitals, medical facilities, home health agencies, personal care agencies, hospices, adult family homes, 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 and all Centers for Disease Control recommendations
 - Alcohol and drug treatment centers or similar facilities
- Facilities for Voting
 - Libraries when operating as polling places
- Commercial and Non-Profit Entities
 - Office spaces. Such facilities must implement social distancing, including teleworking, as much as practicable.
 - Manufacturing, processing, distribution, and production facilities
 - Utility facilities
 - Job centers

Please see FAQs below for additional, specific exemptions and guidance.

[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 listed above, your workplace can remain open subject to any applicable conditions in the order. For example, office spaces, manufacturing facilities, processing facilities, and retail establishments are exempt. 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.

Are banks required to close?

No. Banks are not required to close. The Department of Financial Institutions has encouraged banks and credit unions to be proactive in preventing disruption of operations.

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

No. Residential facilities are exempt.

Does this order change the school closure timeline?

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.

Will hospitals remain open?

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

Are dental offices exempt?

Yes. Dental offices fall under the healthcare exemption.

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

Restaurants may remain open for take-out or delivery service only. No seating may be provided, and food may not be consumed in the restaurant. Restaurants must preserve social distancing of six feet between customers during pick up. Hotels and motels may remain open, but their restaurant facilities must comply with these restrictions. Bars must close.

Will Senior Centers remain open?

Senior Centers will not remain open unless they are located in a government facility.

Will grocery stores remain open?

Grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmer's markets are exempt from the order as long as: (1) they close all seating intended for consuming food; (2) self-service operations of salad bars and buffets is ceased; and (3) customers are prohibited from self-dispensing all unpackaged food.

Will retail stores remain open?

Retail establishments where large numbers of people may be present but are not generally within arm's length of each other for more than 10 minutes may remain open. Indoor shopping malls must close. This exemption covers retail establishments such as salons, banks, and stores.

Are bakeries considered restaurants?

Bakeries and other food retail and food processing facilities are exempt.

Does it matter if the gathering is held outdoors?

The order applies to gatherings of 10 or more people that are held in a single room or single confined or enclosed space at the same time.

Should gatherings smaller than 10 be canceled?

Voluntary cancellation, 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 less than 10 people in a single room or confined or enclosed space at the same time must:

- Preserve social distancing of 6 feet between people, and
- Follow all other public health recommendations issued by the Wisconsin Department of Health Service and Center for Disease Control.

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.

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.