

Outdoor dining beginning June 1: Answers to commonly asked questions

On June 1, Minnesota moves into [Phase 2](#) of the #StaySafeMN Plan, which includes the option for restaurants and bars to re-open for outdoor dining.

We know that there are many questions from businesses and customers about how that process will work. Please see below the answers to questions we've been hearing about [Executive Order 20-63](#).

What establishments can be open for outdoor food and alcohol sales? Restaurants, food courts, cafes, coffeehouses, bars, taverns, brewer taprooms, micro distiller cocktail rooms, farm wineries, craft wineries, cideries, and golf courses may be open for outdoor service with the following requirements:

- Adopt and implement a [COVID-19 Preparedness Plan](#)
- Ensure a minimum of 6 feet of distance between tables
- Limit on-premises capacity to no more than 50 persons
- Limit table service to 4 persons, or 6 if part of one family unit
- Require reservations in advance
- Require workers to wear masks and strongly encourage masks be worn by customers

Are restaurants and bars still allowed to be sell wine and beer curbside/to-go after June 1? Yes, to-go sales of wine and beer are still permitted.

Are customers allowed to use the restrooms while dining outdoors? Yes, customers can go indoors to use the restroom. Social distancing protocols must still be followed and people should avoid congregating indoors to wait for a restroom.

Are customers allowed to go indoors to access an outdoor space, such as a rooftop patio? Yes, customers can go indoors if necessary to access an establishment's outdoor space. Social distancing protocols must still be followed and people should avoid congregating indoors.

What about inclement or severe weather? Can customers go indoors then? Yes, the underlying goal of all guidelines and requirements is to keep people safe and save lives. In the event of

inclement weather, customers may move indoors to package food and pay bills but must exit quickly – businesses should not allow customers to move indoors to continue their meal. While indoors, customers must follow social distancing rules and avoid congregating. Nothing in Executive Order 20-63 prohibits indoor sheltering in the event of severe weather.

Can restaurants set up tents to offer dining in a screened-in or covered setting outdoors? Yes, as long as at least half of the sides of the tent are open or screened.

What about fast-casual restaurants or cafes? Do they have to take reservations? These establishments should plan to take on-site reservations for people who sit down at outdoor tables to eat or drink products they buy on site. They must also ensure that tables are 6 feet apart and that customers are not standing and waiting for tables to open.

Why a 50 person maximum, instead of deciding on a percentage of total capacity? Setting a percentage for capacity of outdoor spaces presents a number of additional challenges because it isn't as clearly determined as indoor spaces – and, in coordination with municipal governments, some establishments may create new outdoor spaces that were not previously used for dining. A cap on the total number of people is more consistent with limiting the amount of people any person might come into contact with for extended periods of time.

Does the 50 person maximum include employees? No. An establishment is limited to a maximum of 50 customers on the premises at any one point, not including employees.

Are restaurants required to keep a log of reservations? No, restaurants are not required to keep a log, nor are they discouraged from doing so. There is no requirement that a business check an ID or verify a person's identify with their reservation.

What if a restaurant doesn't have a patio or outdoor space? Can they use a parking lot or create a new outdoor space beginning on June 1? Establishments will need to work directly with their local governments on permitting for spaces not typically designated for outdoor dining. [Executive Order 20-63](#) encourages local governments to work collaboratively with establishments on this process.

For local governments interested in using right of way on state highways for food and beverage service, the Minnesota Department of Transportation is working on a permitting process for cities and townships and will provide more information soon.

Can restaurants combine seating areas, or close down a street to make a communal dining area? Spaces should be clearly defined and marked for each restaurant and contiguous to the establishment.

Can a restaurant inside a mall reopen? At this time, only restaurants with existing or newly-permitted outdoor space (in coordination with their local government) can reopen. A restaurant, food court or other communal dining area that is fully enclosed within another setting such as a mall cannot reopen at this time for indoor dining.

Does a restaurant that has been operating as takeout-only need to develop a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan if they choose not to offer onsite outdoor dining? Businesses that were included on the Critical Sector list are required to comply with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) COVID-19 guidelines and OSHA standards, but they are not at this time required to have a written COVID-19 Preparedness Plan.

Why can't restaurants open for indoor dining, but other places such as retail and salons can be open for indoor services and sales? Based on what we know at this point about COVID-19, some of the key factors that determine transmission risk of the virus include: how close you are to other people, how long you are in close proximity to another person, and how predictable the setting is regarding the ability to maintain social distancing. People eating and drinking indoors for extended periods of time in confined air spaces put customers and workers at an increased risk.

Certain establishments, such as hair salons or tattoo parlors, are more conducive to requiring customers and workers to wear masks at all times – and paired with strict occupancy capacities, those establishments present a more predictable environment and less direct interaction with other people.

Other retail environments, with strict occupancy capacities and social distancing protocols, can effectively minimize the number of people who might come into contact with others for extended periods of time.

When will restaurants be able to reopen for indoor dining? [Phase 3 of Minnesota's Stay Safe Plan](#) will include some capacity for indoor dining. A date has not yet been set for when Phase 3 will begin.