



Economic Reopening Cleared to Expand on Monday

Shopping, Outdoor Dining to Resume, Bars Remain Closed - Colin A. Young 6/6/20 3:45 PM

BOSTON, JUNE 6, 2020.....Massachusetts restaurants, retail shops, child care facilities and hotels got the green light Saturday to emerge from their government-induced slumbers beginning on Monday, though every business that reopens will have to follow [mandatory safety regulations](#) and industry-specific [guidelines](#) for keeping workers and customers safe as the highly-contagious coronavirus continues to circulate.

Gov. Charlie Baker said Saturday afternoon that the public health data the state uses to track the COVID-19 pandemic has been trending in the right direction and that the virus has receded enough to allow another measured step towards what used to be normal. As of Friday, Massachusetts had seen 102,557 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and likely many more, and had lost 7,235 people to the virus.

"This terrible virus and the terrible toll that it takes will be with us until there are medical breakthroughs with respect to treatments or vaccines. But thanks to your hard work and your sacrifices, we're bringing the fight to the virus. So we're moving forward and Massachusetts is continuing to reopen," the governor said, commending residents for practicing social distancing and covering their faces in public.

Not all of the Phase 2 businesses will be allowed to reopen on Monday, however. Housing and Economic Development Secretary Mike Kennealy said the phase will have two "steps" to it, the first of which will begin Monday and the second of which will be allowed to start at a point "determined based on continued improvements in public health metrics," the secretary said.

Here's what can resume starting Monday, June 8: in-store retail, with occupancy limits; [outdoor dining](#) at restaurants; [child care centers](#) and day camps; hotels and other [lodgings](#); warehouses and distribution centers; youth and adult amateur sports; house cleaning, photography, window washing and other personal services that do not require close contact; funeral homes; outdoor recreation at pools, playgrounds and driving ranges; and professional sports team practices.

Health care providers on Monday can resume in-person elective, non-urgent procedures and services, including office visits, dental visits and vision care, though elective cosmetic procedures and in-person day programs will remain prohibited until Phase 3.

Later in Phase 2 these businesses and activities can resume: indoor dining at restaurants, and personal services that require close contact, like nail salons, tanning salons, tattoo parlors and body

piercing, personal training, massage therapy, hair removal, and hair replacement or scalp treatments.

Though the state's reopening plan calls for the limit on gathering size to be "determined based on trends," an executive order Baker signed Saturday did not increase the 10-person limit on gatherings indoors or in enclosed outdoor spaces.

While business will begin to reopen and consumers will have greater freedom, the governor and others on Saturday cautioned that things will be a little unusual as employers, workers and customers all get used to the safety measures required to be in place.

"In a world where COVID-19 exists, everything looks little different. We're asking people to follow new safety protocols, to change how they interact with customers, to stagger work schedules and to work remotely," Baker said. He added, "Since the middle of March, we've asked a lot of everybody here in the commonwealth -- every family, every business, every employer, every government agency, every individual -- to get to this point, but so far we've made tremendous progress. We've been successful in bending the curve on COVID-19 and the metrics reflect that."

Since mid-April, the seven-day average of the positive COVID-19 test rate is down 82 percent, the three-day average of hospitalized patients is down 55 percent and the number of hospitals still relying on their COVID-19 surge capacity is down 76 percent, Baker said.

"We are clearly on the path to beat the virus. But as I said earlier, until there are medical breakthroughs, we have to continue to take the fight and play our part in fighting the virus. COVID-19 is still very much with us and it's incredibly contagious, and in some cases, merciless to those that are affected by it," Baker said. "And while we should all feel a certain sense of relief and progress with respect to the start of Phase 2, we should also keep in mind that we have a way to go to get to what we would call the permanent new normal."

Indeed, bars, movie theaters, entertainment venues, gyms, museums and casinos remained closed and will stay that way for at least three more weeks. The four-phase reopening plan Baker and Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito detailed last month requires a minimum of three weeks between phases, meaning the absolute earliest possible date that Massachusetts could move into Phase 3 is Monday, June 29.

Though some have slammed Baker for being too slow to reopen the economy, others said this week that the state is not yet ready to move into Phase 2. The Massachusetts Public Health Association and other groups [came together](#) to produce a set of criteria that they insist should be met before further reopening. The demands include a significant boost in testing activity and a demonstrated decline in infection rates among populations for which the state has incomplete or zero data on the spread of the coronavirus.

Several of the group's benchmarks would have precluded Baker from reopening the next group of businesses by Monday.

"Today, Governor Baker chose to ignore these basic standards and instead to put Massachusetts residents at increased risk of illness and death -- with little in the way of data to track impact on

Black and Latinx residents, no meaningful protections for low-wage workers, testing that falls dramatically short of the Governor's own goals, and "adding insult to injury" no seat at the table for the very communities that stand to be most impacted," Carlene Pavlos, executive director of MPHA, said. "The Governor claims to always 'follow the data' and to 'listen to the experts,' but today he did exactly the opposite. For these reasons, we strongly oppose the Governor's decision today."

On the other end of the spectrum, the Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance criticized the governor Saturday for splitting the second reopening phase into two steps and delaying the return of some businesses.

"Seems like the Governor is moving the goal post again," spokesman Paul Craney said. "Phases now have parts. For part 2 businesses, they have to wait even though they thought they could open. It's tone deaf and out of touch to the concerns of business owners. Cruel to start to introduce parts when it was never originally disclosed on day one."

As businesses reopen, they can only be successful if consumers feel comfortable venturing out to shop or dine.

"It will be up to consumers to decide with their \$'s when & how they will again buy on #MainStreet. But they should be assured that they can shop locally safely," Jon Hurst, president of the Retailers Association of Massachusetts, tweeted Saturday afternoon. "Consumers=70% of economy. How we spend our \$'s in months to come will truly determine futures of countless #SmallBiz."

Polito, who led the state's reopening advisory board alongside Kennealy, implored people to shop locally.

"When you buy from the local and small businesses that make up the fabric of your community, you support our Massachusetts economy. You may decide enjoy to enjoy outdoor dining, or visit a local or family-owned restaurant in your neighborhood, one of your favorites," she said. "Make sure you visit and enjoy some of that experience, I think it will be a lot of fun for all of us. Go to the corner stores and shops in your town centers, they need you."

Baker, who has been relatively quick on the take-up as businesses and services have returned (he got a haircut in the first few days barber shops were reopened and recently took advantage of new outdoor visitation regulations to visit his father in a long-term care facility), said Saturday that he might dine al fresco next week.

Asked if he plans to take First Lady Lauren Baker out for an outdoor dinner, the governor said, "Maybe. We'll see what happens." -END- 06/06/2020