



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

Updated on 3/24/20

Safer at Home FAQs

Governor Tony Evers and Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Secretary-designee Andrea Palm issued a Safer at Home order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, effective at 8 am on Wednesday March 25th. This order will remain in effect until 8 am on Friday, April 24th or until a superseding order is issued.

Where does the Safer at Home order apply?

This order applies to the entire state. All Wisconsinites must stay at home as much as possible and non-essential businesses and operations must cease, with limited exceptions for minimum basic operations and working from home. All public and private gatherings of any number of people that are not part of a single household or living unit are prohibited, except for the limited exceptions contained in the order.

What are social distancing requirements?

Under the order, social distancing requirements include:

1. Maintaining social distancing of six feet between people;
2. Washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as frequently as possible or using hand sanitizer;
3. Covering coughs or sneezes (into the sleeve or elbow, not hands);
4. Regularly cleaning high-touch surfaces;
5. Not shaking hands; and
6. Following all other public health recommendations issues by DHS and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

Is this order mandatory?

Yes. All Wisconsinites need to do their part to keep their family, friends, neighbors and communities safe.

Individuals may leave their homes for the following reasons:

1. To perform essential governmental functions, to work at essential businesses and operations, to do minimum basic operations for non-essential businesses, and essential travel, all of which is defined in the order;
2. To obtain services at or to work for health care and public health operations, certain human services operations, or essential infrastructure;
3. To perform tasks that are essential to health and safety such as obtaining medical supplies or medication, seeking emergency services, or visiting a health care professional;
4. To obtain necessary services or supplies such as food, gasoline, pet supplies, and other household consumer products;
5. To engage in outdoor activity, as long as they maintain social distancing; and
6. To care for a family members, friend, or pet in another household, and to transport family members, friends, or pets as allowed under the order.

Will I be required to carry documentation to leave my home?

No. Individuals do not need special permission to leave their homes, but they must comply with this order as to when it is permissible to leave home. Similarly, if a business is an essential business or operation as outlined in this order, it does not need documentation or certification to continue work that is done in compliance with this order.

Can I go outside for walks, outdoor exercise, or to play?

Yes. You may engage in outdoor activities that meet social distancing requirements. You may travel to public and state parks for walks, hikes, and bike rides. No team or contact sports are permitted. Playgrounds are closed.

What is considered an essential business?

Please read the order carefully to determine what is considered an essential business or operation. Even if a business or operation is essential, there are still important restrictions on how the business can operate. For example, all entities that remain open as essential businesses or operations must implement social distancing as much as possible and use technology to avoid meeting in person, including virtual meetings, teleconference, and remote work (i.e., work from home). The order contains specific restrictions on each kind of essential business and operation.

Essential businesses and operations include the following, which are clarified in detail in the Order:

1. Any business or worker identified in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) memo, and any subsequent version of this memo
2. Stores that sell groceries and medicine, including bakeries, provided they: (i) close all seating intended for consuming food; (ii) cease any self-service operations of salad bars, beverage stations, and buffets; (iii) except for grocery stores, prohibit customers from self-dispensing all unpackaged food; and (iv) abide by social distancing requirements.
3. Food and beverage production, transport, and agriculture
4. Restaurants and bars, for take-out and delivery service of food
5. Organizations that provide charitable and social services, including food banks and shelters
6. Religious entities as long as any gathering includes fewer than 10 people in a room or confined space at a time and individuals adhere to social distancing requirements as much as possible.
7. Weddings and funerals as long as any gathering includes fewer than 10 people in a room or confined space at a time and individuals adhere to social distancing requirements as much as possible.
8. News media
9. Gas stations and businesses needed for transportation
10. Financial institutions and services
11. Hardware and supplies stores
12. Critical trades
13. Mail, post, shipping, logistics, delivery, and pick-up services
14. Laundry services
15. Supplies to work from home
16. Supplies for essential businesses and operations and essential governmental functions
17. Transportation to and from activities permitted in the order
18. Home-based care and services
19. Professional services
20. Manufacture, distribution, and supply chain for critical products and industries
21. Critical labor union functions
22. Hotels and motels
23. Higher educational institutions for purposes of facilitating distance learning, performing critical research, or other essential functions

In the exceptional circumstance that a business is not explicitly listed as an essential business or operation, but believes it should be included, businesses should consult the information page on the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) website, here: <https://wedc.org/essentialbusiness/>.

In addition to essential businesses and operations, healthcare and public health operations, human services operations, essential infrastructure, essential governmental functions will continue to operate.

Will restaurants and bars remain open?

Restaurants may remain open for food take-out or delivery only and no seating may be provided. Carryout sales of alcohol beverages and food are allowed if permitted by state law and municipal ordinance. Customers may enter these establishments only for the purpose of ordering, picking up, and paying for food or beverage. Food and drink may not be consumed on the premises, either indoors and outdoors.

Any self-service operations of salad bars, beverage stations, and buffets must cease. Customers are prohibited from self-dispensing any unpackaged food or beverage.

Social distancing requirements must be implemented as much as possible.

Will hotels and motels remain open?

Hotels and motels are essential businesses and operations and can remain open if they follow the guidelines imposed on stores that sell groceries and medicine, restaurants, and bars. Guests are prohibited from congregating in lobbies or other common areas and social distancing requirements must be implemented. Hotel and motel swimming pools, hot tubs, and exercise facilities must close.

Does this order apply to child care settings?

Child care settings are essential businesses and operations. Secretary-designee Andrea Palm's Emergency Order #6 remains in effect, with the following amendments:

Child care settings must prioritize care for families as follows:

Tier 1: Employees, contractors, and other support staff working in health care

Tier 2: Employees, contractors, and staff in vital areas outlined in the order

Child care settings include all licensed and certified child care providers who may provide care for any age or ages of children up to 13 years of age, unless specially licensed for children with disabilities up to 19 years of age.

Please see the Department of Children and Families FAQ on this topic for additional information.

Can I proceed with a wedding or funeral as planned?

Weddings and funerals can proceed as long as any gathering includes fewer than 10 people in a room or confined space at a time and individuals adhere to social distancing requirements as much as possible. If you need to travel to attend a wedding or funeral, you should check before you leave that your means of travel is still available. If travel is to another state, you should read any orders in place in that state before you leave.

What if I still have to go to work?

All essential businesses and operations are encouraged to remain open, but are encouraged to have employees work from home if it is possible for them to complete their job duties remotely. If you are a worker at one of these businesses, you must implement social distancing requirements as much as possible.

What if my business or operation is not essential?

Your business must close. Individuals are encouraged to work from home where possible.

You are permitted to do the minimum basic operations to maintain the value of your business's inventory, preserve the condition of the business's physical plant and equipment, ensure security, process payroll and employee benefits, or for related functions, including where these functions are outsourced to other entities.

Can I travel?

All forms of travel are prohibited unless explicitly excepted. Individuals utilizing mass transit must maintain social distancing of at least six feet as much as possible. Essential travel that is exempt includes:

1. Any travel related to essential activities, essential governmental functions, essential businesses and operations, or non-essential businesses' minimum basic operations.
2. Travel to care for elderly, minors, dependents, persons with disabilities, or vulnerable persons.
3. Travel to or from educational institutions for purposes of receiving materials for distance learning, for receiving meals, or any other services.
4. Travel to return to a place of residence from outside the jurisdiction.
5. Travel required by law enforcement or court order, including to transport children pursuant to a custody agreement.
6. Travel required for non-residents to return to their place of residence outside Wisconsin.

Individuals who work outside of Wisconsin are allowed to commute to other states for work purposes, as long as they comply with this order and orders from other states.

Does this order change the school closure order?

A previous order mandating the closure of public and private K-12 schools at 5pm on Wednesday, March 18th is still in effect. All schools must remain closed for instructional and extracurricular activities for the duration of the public health emergency or until a subsequent order lifts this specific restriction. Schools may be used for facilitating distance or virtual learning, essential government functions, and food distribution.

Are personal care businesses allowed to remain open?

No. All hair salons, barber shops, nail salons, day spas, electrolysis providers, waxing salons, eyebrow-care establishments, tattoo parlors, body art establishments and tanning facilities must close.

Will public libraries remain open?

Libraries must close for all in-person services, but may continue to provide online services and programming. Libraries may be used for essential government functions and food distribution.

Does the order specify places that must close?

Yes. All non-essential businesses and operations must close. K-12 schools and public libraries are closed, with some exceptions including virtual learning and on-line services. Additionally, all amusement parks, carnivals, water parks, licensed public or private swimming pools, splash pads, aquariums, zoos, museums, arcades, fairs, children's play centers, playgrounds, funplexes, theme parks, bowling alleys, movie and other theaters, concert and music halls, country clubs, social clubs, and gyms and fitness centers. This order applies the above places and those like them whether they are indoors or outdoors.

Can I obtain care or boarding for my pet?

Non-essential veterinary care should be avoided, but you may leave your home to obtain necessary veterinary care and supplies for your pet. Grooming services must close. Pet boarding and daycare is an essential business and operation that may remain open.

Am I able to proceed with plans to move out of my house?

Moving and relocation services are essential businesses and operations.

Will golf courses remain open?

Golf courses are not considered essential businesses. Staff can perform minimum basic operations as defined in the order.

Are landscaping businesses allowed to operate?

Landscape businesses are not considered essential businesses or operations. Staff can perform minimum basic operations as defined in the order.

Can local government bodies continue to conduct business?

All state, tribal, and local essential governmental functions can continue. This means that government bodies should continue all functions needed to ensure the continuing operation of the government body and provide and support the health, safety, and welfare of the public. Each government body is responsible for determining what functions, if any are necessary and identify employees and contractors necessary to perform those functions.

Government bodies should continue to follow the Wisconsin Department of Justice's Office of Open Government guidance regarding holding government meetings, and should consult directly with that office regarding specific open meetings questions.

My local government also issued an order like this. Which one do I follow?

You must follow the statewide order issued by DHS Secretary-designee Andrea Palm. If a local order conflicts with the statewide order, you must follow the statewide order.

How will this 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.