

Governor Wolf Announces Restaurants May Increase Indoor Occupancy to 50 Percent Starting September 21

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Restaurants to self-certify that they are in compliance with appropriate orders

Governor Tom Wolf today announced that restaurants may increase indoor occupancy to 50 percent starting September 21. To ensure that these businesses operate safely as Pennsylvania continues to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, and to instill customers and employees with confidence knowing that they can dine safely, restaurants will commit to strictly complying to all public health safety guidelines and orders through a self-certification process.

"While our aggressive and appropriate mitigation efforts have kept case counts low, we must continue to take important steps to protect public health and safety as we head into the fall. At the same time, we must also support the retail food services industry that has struggled throughout this pandemic," Gov. Wolf said. "The self-certification ensures that restaurants can expand indoor operations and commit to all appropriate orders so that employees and customers alike can be confident they are properly protected."

Restaurants that self-certify will appear in the Open & Certified Pennsylvania searchable online database of certified restaurants across the commonwealth. Consumers will be able to access this database and find certified businesses in their area, ensuring that consumers can make more informed choices about the food establishments they are looking to patronize.

The self-certification documents and information about the Open & Certified Pennsylvania program can be found online starting September 21 and will contain the following:

- A list of requirements contained in the current restaurant industry guidance and enforcement efforts;
- A statement that the owner has reviewed and agrees to follow these requirements;
- The business' maximum indoor occupancy number based on the fire code; and
- A statement that the owner understands that the certification is subject to penalties for unsworn falsification to authorities.

Any restaurant that wishes to increase to 50 percent indoor capacity on September 21 must complete the online self-certification process by October 5. Business owners should keep a copy of the self-certification confirmation they will receive by e-mail. Social distancing, masking, and other mitigation measures must be employed to protect workers and patrons. Further, starting September 21 restaurants that have alcohol sales will close alcohol sales at 10:00 PM.

Additionally, restaurants that self-certify will be mailed Open & Certified Pennsylvania branded materials, such as window clings and other signage designating their certification, which they can display for customers and employees.

The self-certification will be used as part of ongoing enforcement efforts conducted by Department of Agriculture and Pennsylvania State Police Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement, and will be shared with the departments of State, Labor & Industry and Health, and other enforcement agencies. Restaurants operating at 50 percent capacity will have their self-certification status checked as part of ongoing enforcement by these agencies starting on October 5, and will focus on educating businesses. The commonwealth will continue its measured approach to easing restrictions, keeping the rest of the targeted mitigation tactics specific to the food retail industry in place as restaurants increase capacity to 50 percent.

Further, a restaurant's listing in the Open & Certified Pennsylvania restaurant database shows it cares about its customers, employees, community and the economic future of the state.

The self-certification process is modelled after a similar mitigation effort in Connecticut, and the alcohol sales limitation is modelled after a similar mitigation effort in Ohio.

Boosting consumer confidence is critical for restaurants, as according to the most recent Longwoods International tracking study of American travelers, only 40 percent of Americans are comfortable dining in local restaurants.

"We recognize the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Pennsylvania's small businesses, especially on our restaurants," added Gov. Wolf. "Through this self-certification process, our commonwealth's restaurant industry will ensure the safety and well-being of both employees and patrons alike, and will be able to begin a return to normal operations and financial recovery."

Restaurant owners with additional questions about the self-certification program can contact covidselfcert@pa.gov.

In July, following the recommendations of the federal government and in response to a rise in COVID-19 cases, Governor Wolf and Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine signed orders for targeted mitigation efforts for all Pennsylvania businesses in the food services industry, including restaurants, wineries, breweries, private clubs and bars. Commonwealth and local agencies continued and even increased appropriate enforcement measures.

The governor has urged the General Assembly to support his plan to provide additional recovery for small businesses, including proposing \$100 million in forgivable loans and grants for the hospitality, leisure and service industries.

The governor has also urged Congress to quickly provide financial relief to the nation's restaurants by passing the Real Economic Support That Acknowledges Unique Restaurant Assistance Needed to Survive (RESTAURANTS) Act. The bipartisan bill in Congress provides \$120 billion to help independent restaurants with the economic challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.