

Party's over: 4 states close bars, restaurants over virus

March 15 2020, by Sudhin Thanawala



Revelers celebrate St. Patrick's Day Saturday, March 14, 2020, during an unofficial gathering at Tracey's Original Irish Channel Bar in New Orleans. (Scott Threlkeld/The Advocate via AP)

On Saturday night, revelers in many parts of the country ignored warnings against attending large gatherings to prevent the spread of coronavirus. On Sunday, it became clear that in many places, the party is over.

Illinois, Ohio, Massachusetts, Washington state and New York City are among the places that ordered bars to close and restaurants to stop dine-in service. Takeout and delivery will still be allowed.

In New Orleans and Chicago, people clad in green for St. Patrick's Day packed bars and spilled onto crowded sidewalks Saturday, even after the cities canceled their parades.

"I'm not about to put my life on hold because this is going around," Kyle Thomas told the Chicago Sun-Times. Thomas, a nurse from Colorado, said he had flown to Chicago to celebrate St. Patrick's Day with friends and thought people might be "overreacting."

In New Orleans, Syd Knight, 86, celebrated despite the public health warnings and the higher risk she faced because of her age.

"The Lord will take care of us all," Knight told The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate.

Oklahoma's governor tweeted a picture of himself and his children at a crowded metro restaurant Saturday night.

In the since-deleted tweet, Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt wrote: "Eating with my kids and all my fellow Oklahomans at the @CollectiveOKC. It's packed tonight!"

"The governor will continue to take his family out to dinner and to the grocery store without living in fear, and encourages Oklahomans to do the same," Charlie Hannema, a spokesman for the governor, said in an email.

Health officials have advised people to distance themselves from each other socially. Some states have banned gatherings with more than a

certain number of people. Those warnings have become more urgent as the disease spread in the U.S., where about 3,500 people have become infected and more than 60 have died.

The vast majority of people who contract the new virus recover within weeks. It causes only mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but can lead to more severe illness, including pneumonia for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems.

"The time for persuasion and public appeals is over," Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker said. "This is not a joke. No one is immune to this."

The Democratic governor ordered all bars and restaurants in his state to close from Monday night until March 30. He said he had tried earlier last week to appeal to everyone's good judgment to stay home, to avoid bars, and not congregate in crowds.



A streetcar conductor wears a mask on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans on Saturday, March 14, 2020, amid an outbreak of the COVID-19 coronavirus. (Scott Threlkeld/The Advocate via AP)

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio issued a statement saying he will limit the city's 27,000 restaurants, bars and cafes to food takeout and delivery beginning Tuesday. Nightclubs, movie theaters, small theater houses, and concert venues will have to close.

Washington, the state hardest hit by the virus with more than 40 dead, will see its bars, restaurants, entertainment and recreation facilities all temporarily closed except for food takeout and delivery.

"These are very difficult decisions, but hours count here and very strong measures are necessary to slow the spread of the disease," Inslee said.

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker also ordered all bars and dine-in restaurants to close for three weeks. The Republican asked residents "to take a deep breath and understand the rationale behind this guidance."

All bars and restaurants in Ohio are closed until further notice. Republican Gov. Mike DeWine said the "very drastic action" was prompted by concerns from around the state about crowded bars. "If we don't take these actions now, it'll be too late," he said.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom called for all bars, wineries, nightclubs and brewpubs to close in the nation's most populous state. The Democrat said the new orders are guidelines that "we have the capacity to enforce if necessary."

In Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti issued an executive order Sunday to close bars, nightclubs, entertainment venues and gyms until at least March 31. Restaurants will be closed to the public but Garcetti will allow them to do takeout and delivery. Grocery stores will remain open.

Officials in New Jersey are considering a statewide curfew to help prevent the spread of the virus, New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy said Sunday.

"A friend of mine walked into a bar/restaurant last night in Asbury Park and they were packed," Murphy, a Democrat, said on WBLS-FM 107.5. "And people are on top of each other. And that's probably, sadly, at least for the near term, scenarios that we're not going to be able to abide by much longer because, inevitably, somebody is going to infect somebody else in a situation like that."

New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell said it was "unacceptable" that people were ignoring a ban issued by Gov. John Bel Edwards on gatherings of more than 250 people. The violators were "actively increasing the danger to their neighbors and their loved ones," Cantrell said.

The hashtag "StayTheFHome" was trending on Twitter on Sunday. Several countries in Europe have closed bars.

Advising people to completely avoid restaurants "might be overkill right now," the nation's top infectious disease expert, Anthony Fauci, said on CBS' "Face the Nation," but he added that he wouldn't go to one himself because he didn't want to be in a "crowded place" and risk having to self-quarantine.

Republican Rep. Devin Nunes had a different message on Fox News Channel's Sunday Morning Futures, encouraging people to go to local restaurants and pubs.

"There's a lot of concerns with the economy here because people are scared to go out, but I will just say one of the things you can do—if you're healthy, you and your family it's a great time to just go out, go to a local restaurant, likely you can get in easily," he said. "Let's not hurt the working people in this country that are relying on wages and tips to keep their small business going."

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