

US capital Washington eases coronavirus lockdown

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The US capital is relaxing lockdown restrictions following a sustained period of decreased coronavirus infections, Washington's mayor said Wednesday, announcing that restaurants and other businesses can reopen under social distancing guidelines.

All US states have taken some steps to ease the lockdowns aimed at slowing the spread of the [coronavirus](#), and the capital is joining them this week.

"Today I will be signing a mayor's order that will lift the stay-at-home order" and move the city into a "Phase 1" reopening beginning Friday, Mayor Muriel Bowser told a press conference.

"As we begin reopening ... it's critical that people wear masks, social distance, and continue to practice good hygiene," she added.

The United States has been more severely impacted by the pandemic than any country in the world, with more than 1.6 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and at least 99,000 deaths.

Washington, a city of 700,000, is the seat of US government and a major tourist destination.

Some 8,400 infections and 445 deaths have been reported in the district, and a citywide stay-at-home order has been in place since April 1.

But Bowser, a Democrat, said Washington has seen 14 days of sustained decline of community transmission and met other US government metrics such as boosted coronavirus testing capacity.

Restaurants can open for business using outdoor seating only, and under strict guidelines that mandate six feet (1.8 meters) distance between tables, Bowser said.

Non-essential retail businesses can provide curbside pickup and delivery, while barber shops and salons may open by appointment only.

"I know that many people are eager to get your hair done," Bowser said.

"But we want you to remember also to do your part to keep yourself and your stylist or barber safe."

With the virus still prevalent, Bowser sounded a further note of caution.

"I want to make sure we all understand that moving into Phase 1 means that more people can get infected because now more people will be moving around in the community," she said.

Parks, golf courses and tennis courts are reopening but public pools and playgrounds will remain closed.

US Capitol tours remain suspended. But the US Senate and House of Representatives are open for business, although the House is allowing remote voting by proxy, a historic first.

Washington each year hosts Independence Day celebrations on the National Mall, but the mayor reiterated that the traditional July 4 parade and fireworks show remain cancelled.

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