

NYC restaurants can open with outdoor seating on Monday

June 18 2020, by Karen Matthews and Marina Villeneuve

Restaurants will be allowed to open with outdoor seating on Monday as New York City enters the second phase of easing coronavirus restrictions, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced Thursday.

De Blasio said the outdoor seating plan will provide a lifeline for New York's crucial restaurant industry as the city emerges from lockdown.

"We have to save this industry," he said. "It's part of our identity."

Offices, hair salons, retail stores and playgrounds in public parks will also be allowed to open during Phase 2 of reopening, de Blasio said. He said 150,000 to 300,000 more people should be back at work.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo followed the mayor's briefing by cautioning that public health experts will continue to review data for another day to finalize whether the city can start Phase 2, but he said businesses should plan on it happening.

"We have global experts who look at the data and when they sign off, then I sign off," Cuomo said at his own briefing. The two Democrats have often been at odds over details of managing the pandemic, but de Blasio said, "there's been a high degree of unity."

While celebrating the retreat of the virus, Cuomo warned businesses not to jump ahead on the state's methodical reopening plan.

He signed an executive order giving state authorities the power to immediately revoke the liquor licenses of establishments that don't follow rules on social distancing.

Some New York shops have already been allowing patrons inside, in violation of rules that until Monday only allow curbside pickup of merchandise. And many restaurants and bars in the city now have crowds outside them on nice days eating and drinking without masks, which are still required in public settings.

"Where people follow the rules, the infection rate stays down. That's called good news," Cuomo said.

De Blasio said restaurateurs in the city will be able to go online starting Friday to apply to open with seating on the sidewalk, in a backyard patio or using parking spaces. He estimated that 5,000 restaurants employing 45,000 workers would be able to open starting next week.

The rest of New York state is farther along in the reopening process than New York City, where the virus has killed more than 22,000 people, according to city health officials.

Cuomo said nearly 1,400 people remained hospitalized for the coronavirus in the state. On Wednesday, 29 deaths were blamed on COVID-19—a fraction of the 700-plus daily deaths the state recorded in mid-April.

In a turnaround from the early days of the outbreak when some other states sought to keep New Yorkers from entering, Cuomo said he is considering requiring a 14-day quarantine for people traveling to New York from Florida, where COVID-19 cases are rising.

"I'm considering it now," he said, "In some ways, you want to talk about

a full 180."

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