

Restaurants in much of NY get green light for outdoor dining

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In this May 5, 2020 file photo a New York Metropolitan Transportation authority worker disinfects a subway train at the Coney Island Stillwell Avenue Terminal, in the Brooklyn borough of New York. New York City appears to be on track to begin loosening restrictions in June, but residents who don't yet feel comfortable commuting by subway may have to improvise, NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio said Friday, May 29, 2020. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II, File)

New York will start to allow outdoor dining at restaurants as soon as Thursday in much of the state outside of New York City and its suburbs as coronavirus restrictions ease, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Wednesday.

Restaurants must place outdoor tables 6 feet (2 meters) apart, all staff must wear face coverings, and customers must also wear a covering when not seated, under the rules Cuomo announced in a news release.

The order applies to regions that have entered the second phase of Cuomo's four-step reopening plan, including the Capital region, western New York, central New York and the Finger Lakes.

The areas that will have to wait for outdoor dining include Long Island and the mid-Hudson Valley, which entered the first phase of reopening last week, and New York City, which is scheduled to enter the first phase next week.

Cuomo announced earlier that 49 additional coronavirus-related deaths were reported statewide Tuesday, a small fraction of the 700-plus daily deaths the state was recording during the height of the virus outbreak in April.

Mayor Bill de Blasio said New York City buses and subways should look different when the city begins reopening next week, with hand sanitizer in stations and social distancing markers in place, but the agency that runs the buses and subways said some of the mayor's ideas are unrealistic.

"I want to see that everywhere you go, whether it is in a subway station, on the platform or on the train or on a bus, there are markings telling you exactly where to be," de Blasio said at his daily briefing Wednesday.

Ridership on subways and buses is expected to increase when the city enters the first phase of the reopening process Monday.

Officials with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority said they are taking steps to prevent a flareup of the virus but cautioned that some of de Blasio's suggestions, like distance markers on buses and trains, are impractical.

"Like many of the mayor's ideas, this is nice in theory but utterly unworkable," MTA spokeswoman Abbey Collins said in a statement. "The mayor's plan would allow us to serve only a tiny percentage of our riders—likely around 8%."

She added, "We look forward to hearing more from the mayor and NYPD on their plans for enforcement and compliance with this proposal."

Mitch Schwartz, a spokesman for de Blasio, said in an email, "It's common sense that people shouldn't sit directly next to each other on the subway in a pandemic. That obviously wouldn't allow for social distancing. We'll work with the MTA to ramp up their capacity, but public health comes first."

The closure of the subway system between 1 a.m. and 5 a.m. for disinfecting will continue when the reopening starts.

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