

Massachusetts bars quietly moved to last phase of reopening

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Looking to grab a drink at your favorite watering hole? Unless it provides seated food service, you'll have to wait until Phase 4 after administration officials delayed the reopening timeline for bars.

Bars were originally slated to open in Phase 3 of Gov. Charlie Baker's restart plan but were moved to Phase 4 after administration officials determined that if they do not provide seated food service, they are more akin to nightclubs. Dance clubs and nightclubs aren't allowed to resume operations until Phase 4, which the administration has said will require a vaccine or effective treatment for COVID-19. It is unclear when the change was made.

Wineries, beer gardens, breweries, and distilleries all opened as of Monday with some restrictions in place if they provide seated food service. Bars with licenses to serve food can also open in Phase 2 under the state's restaurant reopening guidelines. State guidance prohibits seating customers at a bar, but it does allow restaurants to reconfigure the area to accommodate table seating.

A Housing and Economic Development spokesman said the list of businesses and activities is subject to revision based on the latest public health data and the issuance of sector-specific guidelines. As of Monday afternoon, a downloadable copy of the reopening plan on the state's website still lists bars under Phase 3. An FAQ page on the same website categorizes bars under Phase 4.