

# Mayor Mitchell announces New Bedford's reopening plan

Mayor Jon Mitchell announced that the City of New Bedford will follow and implement the first phase of Governor Charlie Baker's reopening plan, with adjustments warranted by the current risk level of disease transmission in the city and region.

On Monday, Governor Baker announced his plan to reopen the Commonwealth of Massachusetts "to methodically allow businesses, services, and activities to resume, while avoiding a resurgence of COVID-19." The plan sets forth three phases of reopening, along which the state will proceed in light of health data trends.

The plan includes sector-specific guidance businesses, worship services, recreation, municipals services and other activities. The Governor's plan may be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/reopening-massachusetts>. As the Governor made clear, his reopening decisions are based in part on the progress the state has made in lowering the number of new positive cases and the positive test rate.

The state of the virus in New Bedford is different from that of the state as a whole. There have been fewer positive COVID-19 cases in New Bedford per capita than most cities in the Northeast, but the number of new positive cases and hospitalizations have been relatively flat – that is, not declining – and the rate of positive tests is higher than the rest of the state. Current information on these trends may be found on the city's website: <https://www.newbedford-ma.gov/health-department/coronavirus/>.

The current rate of disease transmission in New Bedford warrants additional precautions, especially with respect to

indoor settings with the potential for large gatherings, where the risk of transmission is relatively high. Of particular concern are industrial facilities. Because traditional industry represents a larger portion of Greater New Bedford's economy than the state as a whole, and given that the city has witnessed disease spread in industrial facilities which have remained open, the City will continue to enforce its order concerning industrial facilities, which was issued by Mayor Mitchell and the Board of Health on May 6. That order establishes hygiene, social distancing and employee screening requirements, and reporting mandates that are stricter than the state's new directive for manufacturing facilities.

Churches and other houses of worship likewise have the potential to hold large numbers of people. The state's reopening plan includes useful guidance on social distancing in church services, and establishes a cap on attendance in houses of worship equal to 40% of permitted capacity. Given the potential for large gatherings in some congregations that utilize large facilities despite the cap, the city will establish a lower cap for larger houses of worship. Attendance at worship services in the city will be capped at 40% of permitted capacity, or 100 people, whichever is lower. In any case, all houses of worship are strongly encouraged to promote social distancing, maintaining at least six feet between families at all times.

The details of the remaining activities allowed to resume during Phase I of the state's reopening plan are set forth below.

Mayor Mitchell remarked, "The governor's approach to reopening the state is a sound one, as it is grounded in reliable data about the current rate of transmission of the coronavirus in Massachusetts and the relative risk of outbreak associated with the activities that are allowed to be resumed. While it is important for the cities and towns to take a uniform approach to implement the governor's plan to avoid confusion

and unfair competition, the reality is that not every region of the state is experiencing the disease in the same way. Here in New Bedford, we are adopting additional, reasonable precautions given that, unlike the rest of the state, we have yet to see a consistent decline in new cases.”

## **Reopening New Bedford: Phase 1**

### **For operations permitted to reopen May 18**

**Manufacturing & Industrial Operations:** As noted above, earlier this month, Mayor Mitchell and the Board of Health laid out important requirements to protect all workers at large workplaces in New Bedford. As manufacturers reopen in New Bedford, they will be required to enforce social distancing, perform regular cleaning, designate a health and safety officer for COVID-19, and conduct temperature checks of all workers at the start of each shift to protect workers. The City will continue to enforce its orders regarding large workplaces, copies of which is attached.

**Construction:** New Bedford will follow the state’s guidelines concerning construction, reopening May 18. The state requires construction operations to enforce social distancing, properly disinfect workplaces, and obtain self-certification from employees that they haven’t experienced symptoms or been in close contact with those who are positive for COVID-19. In-home installations and home remodeling can begin following the state’s guidance on social distancing and cleaning, starting May 18.

**Places of Worship:** New Bedford will follow the state’s guidelines concerning places of worship, reopening May 18, but with additional guidelines. The state has announced that no more than 40% of the building’s maximum capacity as documented in its occupancy permit may be allowed to attend worship services. In New Bedford, as noted above, the cap will be at 40% of capacity or 100 people, whichever is lower.

## **For operations permitted to reopen May 25**

**Parks, Trails & the Blue Lane:** Parks, trails and the Blue Lane in New Bedford have remained open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with social distancing measures enforced. Based on the first phase of the state's reopening, that won't change – New Bedford's parks will remain open, with social distancing. Specifically, playgrounds, basketball courts and soccer fields will reopen at a later date.

**Beaches:** New Bedford will follow the state's guidelines concerning beaches, reopening May 25, but with additional guidelines. At New Bedford's beaches, only New Bedford residents will be able to purchase a beach pass until further notice. Social distancing measures will be enforced, with no beach volleyball or other organized sports permitted. Public restrooms at the beach will be closed until further notice.

Beach parking passes will be sold on-site at Fort Taber Park (cash only) and with credit/debit card only at [www.nbprb.com](http://www.nbprb.com), under Register Now, Beach Parking Information. The City will also conduct a pop-up beach parking pass sale on Friday, May 22, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. outside the Andrea McCoy Recreation Center, 181 Hillman Street. Cash, credit/debit cards will be accepted. Masks must be worn and social distancing and hygiene protocols will be observed.

**Buttonwood Park Zoo:** Based on the state's announcement, the Buttonwood Park Zoo will reopen on May 30. The Zoo will operate under regular business hours but on an adjusted schedule from Wednesday through Sunday only, until further notice. Tickets for time-based admission will be sold online in accordance with state guidelines at [www.bpzoo.org](http://www.bpzoo.org). Social distancing protocols and reduced capacity of visitors will be observed in accordance with state guidelines, and indoor exhibits and rides will be closed to the public. The Buttonwood Park Zoo will follow stringent social distancing, hygiene, and cleaning protocols in order to keep all visitors

to the Zoo safe and healthy.

**Hair Salons & Barbershops:** New Bedford will follow the state's guidelines concerning these businesses, reopening May 25. Strict health and safety measures will be enforced under the state's guidelines, including social distancing, capacity limitations, staffing and operations, and hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting protocols.

**Pet Groomers:** New Bedford will follow the state's guidelines concerning these businesses, reopening May 25. The state's guidelines around social distancing, staffing and operations, and hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting protocols will be enforced.

**Car Washes:** New Bedford will follow the state's guidelines concerning these businesses, reopening May 25. The state's guidelines around social distancing, staffing and operations, and hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting protocols will be enforced.

**Recreational Boating:** New Bedford will follow the state's guidelines concerning recreational boating, which is allowed to resume May 25.

**Private Offices:** New Bedford will follow the state's guidelines concerning private offices, reopening May 25. The state's guidelines around social distancing, hygiene protocols, and cleaning will be implemented.

**Retail (e.g. clothing stores, toy stores, jewelry stores, nurseries and garden centers that do not sell food products):** Based on the first phase of the state's reopening guidelines, these stores will be permitted to offer curbside pickup and delivery only, beginning May 25.

**Parking at Meters:** Enforcement of metered parking will not be resumed under the first phase of reopening. When retail stores and restaurants reopen during the second phase of reopening,

metered parking enforcement will take effect.

**Auto Dealers & Wholesalers:** Under the state's guidelines, auto dealers and wholesalers will be permitted to offer curbside pickup and delivery only beginning May 25.

**City Offices & Facilities:** City Hall and other city offices continue to serve residents remotely, as they have since mid-March, until further notice.

**Libraries:** Under the state's first phase of reopening, beginning June 1, the New Bedford Free Public Library system will be open for curbside pickup only during regular branch hours, available at [www.newbedford-ma.gov/library](http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/library). Patrons with books on hold may be called the week of May 25 for curbside pickup.

For more information on the status of reopening in New Bedford and other important news, visit the COVID-19 page on [www.newbedford-ma.gov](http://www.newbedford-ma.gov). For information on the masks available to any New Bedford resident who wants one, visit [www.masknb.com](http://www.masknb.com).