

# **New Bedford will pause bar area seating due to Thanksgiving travel**

In an effort to stay ahead of rising cases of COVID-19 expected after travel due to the Thanksgiving holiday, the City of New Bedford will prohibit bar area seating over the long holiday weekend.

Bar seating will pause from Wednesday, November 25 through Sunday, November 29, as travel is expected to increase, including from parts of the country where COVID-19 cases are significantly higher than in Greater New Bedford. This pause in bar seating is intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the only public, indoor gathering environment where individuals are in close proximity to one another without masks. It is a proactive step to avoid necessitating further restrictions on gatherings in the weeks following the holiday.

Indoor dining with seating at tables, as well as outdoor dining, will remain in place in accordance with the state's guidelines.

In another step to prevent spread of the virus after the holiday, employers in New Bedford are encouraged to allow employees to work remotely wherever possible for at least the following two weeks.

City government offices will also increase the number of employees working remotely rather than in person over this period. Limited in-person hours at the City Clerk's Office, Treasurer's office, Election Commission Office, and Licensing Board will continue at City Hall Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

"The temporary pause on bar seating is a proactive step to

prevent a significant spread of the virus in New Bedford at a time when people are traveling from other parts of the country and could gather indoors at close proximity with many other people, without wearing a mask,” said Mayor Jon Mitchell. “The extended Thanksgiving weekend is traditionally one of the busiest occasions for bars, with many typically filled with patrons returning home for the holiday. The influx of holiday travelers and close proximity to one another creates a heightened risk for disease transmission. We don’t want to find ourselves in a far more serious situation in a few weeks, where we need to take more drastic and long-term measures, and look back on what simple steps we could have taken to prevent further transmission of the virus.”

City residents are also encouraged to take advantage of take-out dining at local restaurants to support local businesses. The City’s Health Department strongly urges Thanksgiving celebrations to be limited only to the people in your household, in an effort to prevent the virus from spreading during the holiday.

Mayor Mitchell also strongly encouraged all employers to offer remote work for the two weeks following Thanksgiving to every employee possible.

“Employers should actively seek out ways to accommodate remote work wherever feasible,” he said. “The New Bedford Health Department’s contact tracing data indicates that workplaces are the single largest exposure locations for transmission and spread of the virus. While the data shows that most workplace spread among city residents has occurred at workplaces outside New Bedford, it will be important to limit in-person contact as much as possible after the holiday. The City will continue to keep its non-essential staff as remote as possible, and I encourage businesses with the same ability to allow remote work as much as they can.”

Southeastern Massachusetts, along with the state’s general

trend, has seen an increase in transmission of COVID-19 in the past month. New Bedford has stringently enforced strong public health actions to keep residents safe, including at businesses that serve the public. Earlier this year, Mayor Jon Mitchell and the Board of Health announced emergency orders to keep employees safe at their place of work, and special rules concerning industrial workplaces. The orders continue to be enforced and include strong measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces.