

BUSINESS

There's A New Harris County Mask Order. What Does That Mean For Businesses?

Businesses in Harris County are now required to have both staff and customers wear face covers.

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KHOU / POOL

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo at a press conference on Thursday, May 21, 2020. Hidalgo on Friday issued an order requiring businesses to mandate masks on customer

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A new mask order is now in effect for businesses in Harris County.

Businesses who don't require their staff or customers over the age of 9 to wear masks risk a \$1,000 fine for each violation. Exception for people while dining, pumping gas, operating outdoor equipment, or while in banks or other buildings requiring security surveillance

"This order is not just the right thing to do for our health and safety, it is also good for business," Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo said at her press conference [announcing the order](#) on Friday. "It gives businesses a tool they didn't have."

While the order went into effect Monday, some businesses got a head start.

Astral Brewing in Independence Heights implemented the order on Saturday, two days before its official implementation.

"It was a little awkward before when we would say please use masks, but because without any kind of official rules, it sort of left it up to enforce things," said Alex McDonald, co-owner of the brewery.

McDonald said he welcomes the rule.

"Now with the official rule, we can just point to that and say, 'hey, the county needs you to wear masks so please follow the rules,'" he said.

The brewery provides masks for those who don't have any. They ask that people wear their masks or face covering any time they are in the brewery.

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Over the weekend, the staff handed out 12 masks to customers who didn't bring their own, McDonald said. But most people had one of their own.

Astral Brewing didn't have to lay off any staff during the pandemic, McDonald said, although hours were radically reduced as the tap room remained closed for nearly three months.

Other than requiring masks, Astral Brewing ensures social distancing by having tables at least 6 feet apart from each other. Since last month, the brewery has kept the tap room to about one-third capacity, despite being allowed at 75%, McDonald said.

"If I have to turn away a few customers, that's better for us than to go into a second shutdown," he said. "We really want to avoid a second shutdown."

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Florian Martin

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Florian Martin is currently the News 88.7 business reporter. Florian's stories can frequently be heard on other public radio stations throughout Texas and on NPR nationwide. Some of them have earned him awards from Texas AP Broadcasters Association, Houston Press Club, National Association of Real Estate Editors, and Public Radio...

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