

What contact restrictions are still in place?

The following contact restrictions are in effect until 18 April:

Meetings in public spaces between one's own household and the members of another household, with no more than five people total, are permitted. Children up to and including 14 years of age are excluded from this count. Couples, regardless of their living arrangements, are considered one household. One household (without a limit to the number of people in this household) and one other person from another household can also meet. Children requiring supervision can be accompanied by persons from their household. With regard to custody rights situations, the parent living separately from the children may also accompany them.

The previous exceptions for minimum distance remain largely unchanged and are listed in § 2 paragraph 2 Coronavirus Protection Ordinance. These include children playing on a playground, usage of public transportation (where medical masks must be worn), and accompaniment and supervision of underage persons and persons requiring assistance. The use of voluntary or communal driving services, e.g. to vaccination centres, is also permitted according to the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance.

What are the mask requirements?

The obligation to wear a medical mask is still in effect in certain areas. Medical masks, according to the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance, are surgical masks (standard EN 14683, must be specified on the sales packaging) or masks compliant with standards KN95/N95 or FFP2, and masks of higher standards (but without an exhalation valve). The obligation to wear a mask applies, regardless of adherence to the minimum distance requirement,

- in indoor spaces of commercial facilities, medical practices and similar facilities for rendering medical services,
- in indoor spaces of museums, art exhibits, galleries, palaces, castles, memorials and similar facilities, as well as in zoos,
- for permitted in-person education and exams that take place in indoor areas and buildings,
- when using transportation services, public transport and its facilities, and voluntary or communal driving services to vaccination centres (for example),
- in indoor areas of other means of transportation, excluding personal vehicle use and the use of service vehicles of security personnel, the fire department, rescue services and disaster response personnel,
- when using and rendering hair styling services and other close-contact trades or services and apprenticeships without adherence to the minimum distance,
- during religious services and other religious meetings, including while seated.

According to federal law (SARS-CoV-2 Workplace Safety Ordinance (Corona-ArbSchV) from the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs from 21 January 2021), there is also an obligation to wear a medical mask at the workplace in areas where the minimum distance of 1.5 metres cannot be adhered to. In this case, the employer must provide the medical masks.

The mask requirement (at least a reusable mask) also applies in the following areas, whereby a reusable mask is sufficient:

- in indoor public areas if they are accessible to customers and visitors, with or without admission monitoring,
- at markets and similar outdoor sales areas,
- on the entire property of retail businesses and their parking areas, as well as pathways up to a distance of 10 metres from the entrance.

What are the mask requirements for children?

Children who are not yet of school age are not required to wear a mask. If a medical mask does not properly fit on children under 14 years of age, a reusable mask is sufficient, including in areas where a medical mask is stipulated.

What are the mask requirements in day cares and schools?

- Medical masks are required in schools, whereby children up to grade 8 can wear a reusable mask instead if the medical masks do not (yet) fit.
- The mask requirement (specifically medical masks) in day cares applies only to adults, and only if they cannot adhere to the minimum distance from other adults. This also applies to children, in particular when dropping off and picking up their children.

When can salons and non-medical pedicurists open? What about other services?

Services and trades in which a minimum distance of 1.5 metres from the customer is not possible (in particular hair stylists, facial treatment, cosmetic services, foot care, nail studios, manicures, massages, tattoos and piercings, and custom fitting by a tailor) are permitted, pending strict adherence to the hygiene requirements of the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance. If the customer permissibly does not wear a mask temporarily or for the entire duration of the service (e.g. during facial cosmetic treatment), these services or trades may only be rendered if the customer has a negative rapid or self-test for the specific day and the personnel performing these services or trades obtain a rapid or self-test every two days.

What is the legal situation in food service and hospitality?

Restaurants and public houses will remain closed until further notice. This includes canteens and dining halls.

Only delivery and pick-up are permitted. Company canteens and dining areas in educational facilities may operate to feed their employees or users of the educational facilities if their closure would impede work processes or permissible education operations.

Overnight accommodations for private purposes remain prohibited. Business/service trips are exempt.

What are the next steps for retail?

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The following applies to retail:

1. Grocery stores, pick-up and delivery services, beverage markets, kiosks, farmers' markets, pharmacies, health food shops, medical stores, baby supply stores, chemists, petrol stations, banks, credit unions, post offices, newspaper sales stands, animal feed stores, pet supply stores and social facilities that serve food will remain open. Wholesale facilities are open for wholesale customers, but end customers are only permitted to buy groceries. Florists and other retail shops that sell short-lasting cut flowers and potted plants may also remain open, provided they limit their sales to these and directly related supplies.
2. All other retail businesses (such as stationery shops, bookstores and garden stores) may open with access restrictions. The number of customers present simultaneously must be limited to one customer per forty (full or commenced) square metres of the sales area. Customers are only permitted to enter if they have made an appointment in advance. The appointment must be limited to a set time window, and serves to simplify traceability.

Can construction stores open?

Yes. The retail openings apply to these stores as well.

The case has been that construction stores are allowed to open to supply business owners, and to sell short-lasting cut flowers and potted plants, vegetable plants and seeds (seeds, onions, potatoes, etc.) to private customers.

Construction stores may now offer their full range of products to private customers, but with the access restrictions that apply to other newly opened retail businesses: the number of customers within the business simultaneously must not exceed one customer per forty (full or commenced) square metres. Only customers who have made an appointment in advance are permitted to enter. The appointment must be limited to a set time window, and serves to simplify traceability.

Are mail-order business and customer pick-up permitted?

Yes. Although all retail businesses are reopening to customers under specific conditions, mail-order business and the delivery of ordered goods are still permitted.

Under what circumstances are music and art instruction permitted?

As of 8 March, music and art schools have been allowed to offer in-person courses in groups of up to five students.

Large spaces and the option of hybrid and alternating instruction must be used as often as possible.

What are the regulations for education and training?

All education and training services, including compensatory basic education services and education for integration purposes, and exams, including from adult education centres and externally operated training services, and self-help services are prohibited.

This prohibition does not apply to the following:

- personal instruction and other personal education measures outside of enclosed spaces,
- in-person instruction for graduating classes in programmes for state-accredited second-chance certification,
- in-person instruction for graduating classes to prepare for professional qualification,
- in-person exams for professional and leaving certification that serve purposes of integration, as well as preparatory in-person measures if they cannot be postponed for legal or objective reasons, or if relocation is not feasible for the exam takers,
- publicly-funded extracurricular educational services for students pursuant to § 1 Coronavirus Support Ordinance, provided the services are conducted on the basis of the directives for promoting extracurricular educational and support services during the coronavirus pandemic for reducing pandemic-induced disadvantages.

New additions to this from 8 March:

- in-person tutoring for groups of no more than five students,
- services by social and youth assistance facilities for groups of no more than five students, and outdoors for groups of up to twenty children up to and including 14 years of age.

The distance requirements and safety precautions must be strictly adhered to for the exceptional cases. Furthermore, large spaces and the option of hybrid and alternating instruction must be used as often as possible.

What are the regulations for driving schools?

Driving schools, pilot schools and boating schools are allowed to operate. The minimum distance requirement does not apply to practical instruction, whereby only students, instructors, assistance and exam supervisors are permitted to be present within the vehicle or airplane cockpit. Everyone must be wearing a mask that is compliant with standard FFP2 at the very least.

Will colleges and public-law extracurricular educational services remain open?

Instruction and examination at colleges and medical schools are permitted with adherence to the Infection Protection Act's stipulations.

Lectures may only be held in person if they cannot be held in another manner or postponed without serious detriment to the students.

In-person examinations and preparatory measures are only permitted if they cannot be postponed due to compelling circumstances, or if the exam takers cannot be relocated.

Internal instruction, including exams for preparatory services and occupational education and training at the public-law colleges, schools, institutes and similar facilities that engage in occupational education and training, as well as in courts and authorities, cannot be conducted in person. This excludes in-person instruction in the final year and one-year education in the final education period before the final/career examination. Large spaces should be used for these whenever possible.

Is there a home office requirement?

The Federal Ministry of Labour has passed an ordinance (Corona-ArbSchV from 21 January 2021) that stipulates that employers must allow their employees to use home offices wherever possible. This aims to reduce personal contact on the way to work and in the workplace. The ordinance will soon come into effect.

What regulations apply to amateur and recreational sports?

Sports in outdoor facilities have been permitted since 22 February. This now also applies to individual sports, sports with two people or with members of one household, and, as of 8 March, with up to five people from a maximum of two households. Groups of up to 20 children up to 14 years of age and with up to two educational personnel or adult supervisors can also play sports outdoors.

Minimum distance requirements do not apply to these groups while playing sports.

However, a minimum distance of 5 metres applies between different groups or different individuals in the same sporting area.

Individual athletic education in outdoor areas has also been permitted since 22 February 2021.

The use of shared spaces, including dressing rooms and shower areas, in sporting facilities is prohibited.

Gyms, swimming pools and similar facilities are currently prohibited from opening.

What will happen with cultural events?

Concerts and performances in theatres, operas and concert halls, cinemas and other public or private (cultural) facilities will remain prohibited until 18 April 2021. Such events are only permissible outdoors if the performers adhere to a minimum distance of 2 metres, and the spectators can view the performance from their home (window concerts).

What regulations apply to professional musicians?

Rehearsals for professional purposes are still permitted. Professional musicians are also allowed to hold concerts and performances without an audience, for recording or broadcasting via radio and the internet.

What will happen with cultural facilities, as well as recreation and leisure areas?

There are changes here as well.

The following are prohibited:

- swimming pools and recreational pools (with the exception of beginner lessons with groups of no more than five children), saunas, thermal baths and similar facilities,
- indoor playgrounds and similar recreational facilities,
- gambling halls, casinos and similar facilities,
- night clubs and similar facilities,
- brothels, facilities for prostitution and similar facilities,
- excursions via ship, carriage, historical trains and similar facilities.

Tanning salons are permitted to operate pending adherence to the Ordinance's hygiene requirements, because these facilities do not entail personal contact.

Bookies are only permitted to accept betting slips, bets, etc. Visitors are prohibited from spending any additional time in these facilities (e.g. to watch the games and events on which they are betting).

Visitors have been allowed in museums, art exhibits, galleries, palaces, castles, memorials and similar facilities since 8 March, provided they make an appointment in advance and that simple traceability is ensured. The number of visitors simultaneously present in the indoor facilities must not exceed one person per 20 square metres of the space open to visitors.

Visits to zoos are also contingent on advance appointment and ensured traceability. Here, too, the number of visitors simultaneously present in indoor areas must not exceed one person per 20 square metres.

Can events and gatherings be held again?

No, not yet. Events and gatherings that are not subject to special regulations of the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance remain temporarily prohibited. The following, among others, are permitted (pending conditions to be observed in each instance):

- gatherings according to the Assembly Act (e.g. demonstrations)
- events that serve to provide fundamental services to the population, uphold public security and order, or provide essentials (e.g. political party meetings for elections, or blood donations)
- meetings by legally stipulated committees for municipal self-administration
- meetings by legally stipulated committees, societies, parties, associations or homeowner associations that cannot be conducted digitally
- funerals, including the preceding funeral service
- civil weddings
- religious services.

What are the regulations for religious services and other religious gatherings?

Churches and religious communities decide, on the basis of the local infection rates, the extent to which in-person religious gatherings can be held, and will notify the local authorities accordingly.

They ensure adherence to the minimum distance requirements, limit the number of participants, impose a registration requirement for gatherings where the number of visitors is expected to exhaust the facility's capacity, obligate participants to wear a medical mask (surgical masks or masks compliant with standards KN95/N95 or FFP2) including while seated, record participants' contact information, and abstain from joint singing.

The regulations for religious services and other religious gatherings that churches and religious communities are required to draft in accordance with § 1 paragraph 3 Coronavirus Protection Ordinance must be submitted to:

- the State Chancellery of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (for churches and other parent organisations of religious communities). **ONLY CHURCHES AND OTHER PARENT ORGANISATIONS OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES** may send an e-mail to: [Referat I B3@stk.nrw.de](mailto:Referat_I_B3@stk.nrw.de).
- the respective municipality (for communities that do not belong to a church or parent organisation).

Communities that belong to a church or parent organisation are required to coordinate their safety concepts within the respective church or parent organisation.

What is the Coronavirus Emergency Brake?

If the 7-day incidence rate in a district or district-free city exceeds 100 over a consecutive three-day period, the Coronavirus Emergency Brake comes into effect on the following business day.

In this case, the present relaxations will be repealed and stricter restrictions will be imposed. For example, persons from one household will only be allowed to meet with one person from another household. Furthermore, non-essential retail facilities will be prohibited from operating, with the exception of delivery and pick-up of ordered goods. This applies accordingly to close-contact services, with the exception of medically necessary services, hair styling and non-medical foot care services. If the infection rates fall below 100 for a consecutive three-day period, the restrictions will be lifted again.

Affected municipalities are also given the newly devised test option. This means that the municipalities, in agreement with the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, can decree that the aforementioned services are accessible to persons with confirmed negative rapid test for the respective day, and in accordance with the aforementioned regulations. This is contingent on a sufficient supply of free civilian tests. The stricter regulations concerning contact limitations remain unaffected by this, as they are still in effect even in the event of a test option.

Overview of regulations for districts and district-free cities: [link to summary of measures](#)

Do you have questions about the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance?

Send them via e-mail to corona@nrw.de.