

Self-Certification Program

Frequently Asked Questions

April 1, 2021

Self-Certification General Questions

1. Why was the self-certification program for restaurants created?

Pennsylvania enacted mitigation efforts in July due to a rise in cases here and in surrounding states. As we continue to make progress as noted in our [Early Warning Mitigation Dashboard](#), along with a concerted effort to support these businesses, this effort has been introduced to give restaurants the opportunity to increase indoor capacity should they pledge to uphold all health and safety guidelines.

Also, it's important to note that, according to the most recent [Longwoods International tracking study](#) of American travelers, only 40 percent of Americans are comfortable dining in local restaurants. This mitigation effort is not only for public health and safety, but also to provide consumer confidence in restaurants.

2. How do I self-certify my restaurant?

Restaurant owners or their official business representatives can certify their restaurant online ([visit the pa.gov/COVID website](https://www.pa.gov/COVID-website)). To certify your restaurant, you must read through the health and safety requirements, input your contact information, and click SUBMIT. You will then receive an email with a link to validate your email address and complete the self-certification process. Upon validating your email, the self-certification process will be complete, and your restaurant will be added to the [searchable public database of certified restaurants](#) by the next business day. Physical materials, such as window clings and other signage, will be mailed to the address listed on your self-certification within a few weeks.

3. Does self-certification alter the prior orders and guidance issued by the Governor, Secretary of Health, or otherwise?

Self-certification does not alter any other restriction or limitation other than allowing certified establishments to operate at 75% indoor occupancy, rather than 50% indoor occupancy. All other restrictions or limitations put in place by orders or guidance remain in full effect.

NOTE: Self-certification does not override more restrictive dining requirements that have been implemented at the county or municipal levels. Even if your restaurant is self-certified with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, you must follow local dining requirements if your restaurant is located within a jurisdiction that has implemented more strict requirements. For instance, self-certification does **not** permit your restaurant to operate at 75% indoor capacity if your restaurant is located in a jurisdiction that does not allow indoor dining, or allows indoor dining at a lower capacity.

4. Will self-certifying open up my business to further inspections, penalties, etc?

Self-certifying will not lead to additional inspections. The occurrence of regularly scheduled or complaint-based inspections from enforcement agencies will not be affected by certification status. In

fact, certifying helps demonstrate your business commitment to protecting employees and providing patrons a safe dining experience, in addition to the benefit to move from 50% to 75% indoor capacity. Any health and safety violations from self-certified businesses will be handled first with warnings and education rather than fines or other penalties.

5. What if a county health department has issued its own guidance? What do I follow?

County and municipal health departments may issue more restrictive, not less restrictive, public health orders.

6. Is my restaurant required to be certified? Will my restaurant face any penalties if it is not certified?

No. Restaurants may choose to not self-certify with no additional penalties. However, uncertified restaurants must remain at 50% indoor capacity and are not permitted to increase indoor capacity to 75%. Whether self-certifying or choosing to remain at 50% capacity, all restaurants and bars must still abide by all applicable orders and guidance issued by the Governor and Secretary of Health.

7. What if I have multiple restaurant locations?

Restaurants with multiple locations should certify each location separately.

8. If I self-certify my restaurant, am I required to keep track of contact information for my customers to assist with potential contact tracing?

No. While the health and safety guidelines for restaurants *encourage* keeping track of this information, it is not a requirement for any restaurant, and not a requirement for self-certification.

9. Should my private club (e.g. social club, VFW, night club) self-certify?

If the private club is serving members dine-in sit down food and alcohol in a regular, non-event capacity, it would fall under the same guidance as restaurants. Therefore, if the club self-certifies, it can increase indoor capacity to 75% for normal, non-event operations, though bar seating is still prohibited (these social clubs often have bars). Starting April 4, 2021, maximum occupancy is 25% for indoor events and 50% for outdoor events, regardless of venue size and only if attendees and workers are able to comply with the 6-foot physical distancing requirement.

10. Should my event center self-certify?

An event center may self-certify if it wishes, but certification will not increase the event/gathering limit. Starting April 4, 2021, maximum occupancy is 25% for indoor events and 50% for outdoor events, regardless of venue size and only if attendees and workers are able to comply with the 6-foot physical distancing requirement.

11. What if I do not have internet access or there is a language barrier?

Businesses without internet access can call 1.866.466.3972 and a representative will be able to assist.

The [self-certification process](#) is currently provided in both English and Spanish.

12. I am a consumer and want to see which restaurants in my area are self-certified. How do I do that?

Consumers will be able to view a [public database of self-certified restaurants](#) which will be searchable by business name and/or location.

13. I'm a consumer and I was at a restaurant that was not following guidelines. How do I report a non-compliant business?

Consumers that believe a restaurant is not compliant with certification requirements, or is not certified but operating at greater than 50% indoor capacity, can fill out the [Department of Health complaint form](#).

14. I have a catering license, what does this mean for me?

Self-certification is not directed to licensees. It only increases the maximum indoor capacity to 75% of total indoor occupancy pertaining to regular meal service. Starting April 4, 2021, maximum occupancy is 25% for indoor events and 50% for outdoor events, regardless of venue size and only if attendees and workers are able to comply with the 6-foot physical distancing requirement.

15. What are the current booth safety/separation requirements?

There are no mandated standards regarding height requirements. The goal is to prevent respiratory droplets from passing from one booth to another. Depending upon the height of the back of the booth itself, the height of plexiglass partition could vary. Some booths with very high backs may fully separate patrons. Booths with shoulder high backs (ie, low enough to expose the back of an adult's head or permit a toddler standing on the bench to reach into the neighboring booth) might be served well with a 24, 30, or 36 inch plexiglass or other physical barrier.

The restaurant operator is essentially creating sneeze guards between the booths where physical distancing of 6 feet between guest is not feasible. The inspectors will accept practical solutions; but, they have rejected an attempt to isolate seating by hanging shower curtain rods and curtains around tables.

16. Will nightclubs or bars that do not serve food, be able to self-certify to go to a greater occupancy?

Nightclubs and bars that do not serve food, may open at 50% capacity, but self-certification does not apply to such businesses at this point and does not allow an increase in capacity beyond 50%.

Benefits of Self-Certification

17. What are the benefits of self-certifying my restaurant?

Self-certifying your restaurant tells consumers that Pennsylvania is open for business, and is unified in its safety measures, allowing consumers to dine at certified restaurants with confidence. When a business certifies, it shows it cares about its customers, employees, community, and the economic future of the state.

Certified businesses will appear in [an online database that is searchable by consumers](#). When consumers see that your business is certified, they will know that your business is looking out for their health and well-being, thus giving them additional confidence to patronize your restaurant. Certified restaurants will also receive a physical mailing of branded physical materials, such as window clings and other signage, to display proudly to their employees and customers.

Finally, restaurants that self-certify are pledging that they adhere to health and safety requirements and are thus permitted to increase their indoor capacity from 50% of maximum occupancy to 75% of maximum occupancy.

NOTE: Self-certification does not override more restrictive dining requirements that have been implemented at the county or municipal levels. Even if your restaurant is self-certified with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, you must follow local dining requirements if your restaurant is located within a jurisdiction that has implemented more strict requirements. For instance, self-certification does **not** permit your restaurant to operate at 75% indoor capacity if your restaurant is located in a jurisdiction that does not allow indoor dining.

18. Is there a cost to self-certification?

No. There is no cost to self-certification. The physical materials, such as window clings and other signage, will be mailed to your restaurant's physical address at no cost.

19. How long will it take me to receive my physical materials?

We anticipate that restaurants will begin to receive their physical certification materials within the next few weeks. We appreciate your patience as we work to print and ship a large volume of materials while keeping our employees safe and healthy.

20. What do I do if a few weeks pass and I haven't received my materials?

Please contact the help desk at 1.866.466.3972 or covidselfcert@pa.gov.

Capacity

21. Can I remain at a capacity lower than 75% if I wish to do so after self-certifying?

Yes. Self-certification simply gives restaurants the option to increase their indoor capacity to 75%. They may choose to keep their occupancy limit lower.

22. Does the increased capacity include both indoor and outdoor seating?

The increased capacity refers to indoor seating. Restaurants can continue to offer outdoor seating as long as they follow all health and safety protocols for outdoor dining, such as ensuring proper distance between tables.

23. Can event spaces, bingo halls, or other large facilities increase capacity to 75%?

Self-certification only increases the maximum indoor capacity of restaurants to 75% of total indoor occupancy. All other facilities must follow the [most recent capacity guidelines effective April 4](#).

24. Can a restaurant host a single group greater than 25 people as long as they don't exceed the new 75% maximum occupancy requirement?

Starting April 4, 2021, maximum occupancy for distinct gatherings and events is 25% for indoor events and 50% for outdoor events, regardless of venue size and only if attendees and workers are able to comply with the 6-foot physical distancing requirement.

Restaurants may host a group as defined by the percentages above, in addition to their ordinary business if all other requirements are met, including limiting overall capacity to 75% of total occupancy.

Alcohol Sales and On-Site Consumption

Effective April 4, 2021, restaurants may resume bar service, alcohol service will be allowed without the purchase of food and the curfew for removing alcoholic drinks from tables will be lifted. Requirements such as mask-wearing, social distancing, include 6 feet between diners, also still apply.

Enforcement of Self-Certification

25. When will enforcement begin?

Enforcement will begin April 6. If a restaurant is operating between 50% and 75% indoor capacity and has not self-certified, they will be subject to penalties. Information regarding violations will be shared with the Departments of State, Labor & Industry, and Health, and other enforcement agencies.

26. How will certifications be enforced?

Restaurants are not required to self-certify and will not face any penalty if they do not self-certify, but any restaurant that does not self-certify must ensure that the restaurant remains at 250% indoor capacity. Beginning on April 4, 2021, restaurants may increase indoor capacity to 75%. The Department of Agriculture and Pennsylvania State Police Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement will begin

enforcement actions based on these new occupancy limits starting on April 6. Following April 6, if a restaurant is operating between 50% and 75% indoor capacity and has not self-certified, they will be subject to penalties. Information regarding violations will be shared with the Departments of State, Labor & Industry, and Health, and other enforcement agencies. However, restaurants may still self-certify after April 4 if they would like to increase indoor capacity to 75%.

27. If my restaurant self-certifies but does not comply with all the mandates, could I be charged with a felony for falsification?

Section 4904, which applies to many commonwealth documents and processes (everything from filing a workers compensation claim or purchasing a fishing license to registering a boat), only affects knowingly false statements made “with intent to mislead a public servant in performing his official function.” As such, mere noncompliance with the guidance or mask orders would NOT be an offense under 4904.

28. What happens if a certified business is found in violation of the health and safety requirements to which it attested?

Businesses may have their certification revoked and be removed from the searchable online database of certified businesses if they are found in violation of the health and safety requirements. If a business has its certification revoked, continuing to display physical certification materials may result in additional penalties.