



Safer Ways to Use New Outdoor Shared Spaces for Commercial Activities During COVID-19

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The following guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) and is posted at <https://www.sfdcph.org/>. This interim guidance may change as knowledge, community transmission, and availability of PPE and testing change.

AUDIENCE: Businesses or services that wish to operate outdoors and construct new shelters to perform approved outdoor services in accordance with Health Orders and Directives in effect during COVID-19.

For the purpose of this guidance, a shelter is new construction comprised of fences or overhead coverings to provide protection from sun, rain, other weather elements, and to provide privacy. This guidance applies to shelters in the public right-of-way, such as the sidewalk or parking lane. This does not apply to shelters placed on private property.

BACKGROUND: To prevent transmission of COVID-19, indoor activities must be limited. The San Francisco Health Officer Orders and Directives allow some activities that are normally conducted indoors to be conducted outdoors to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

This Interim Guidance provides a framework for businesses and service providers to construct or erect new shelters in approved shared spaces. This framework applies to any newly erected shelter specifically constructed that surrounds a person or persons who are gathered in a space for 15 minutes or more for the purpose of obtaining a service such as dining or an allowed personal service.

Critical Requirements for Outdoor Shelters

- The MOST important consideration is to maintain outdoor airflow through the shelter in the area of the breathing zone of personnel, clients and customers. It may not be possible to maximize privacy and still provide sufficient airflow.
- Surfaces must be easily cleaned and sanitized.
- For safety of all SF residents and workers all shelters must comply with OSHA, ADA, Fire and all local and state permitting requirements.
- Wearing face coverings and maintaining 6 foot distances between individuals from outside a household must be practiced consistently in accordance with all Health Orders and Directives.

Free Flow of Air

Evidence shows that when air is moving freely outdoors the risk of COVID-19 transmission is greatly reduced. Any outdoor activity permitted under a Health Order or Directive must allow for the “free flow of air in the breathing zone.” The breathing zone refers to the area of space around a person’s nose and mouth through which air passes as they breathe in and out. A face covering is required to cover a person’s breathing zone, unless the person is actively engaged in eating or drinking. The breathing zone may be at different heights for personnel, clients and customers. For instance, the breathing zone of someone performing a pedicure and the individual receiving the pedicure are at different heights. Maintaining the outdoor free flow of air in the breathing zone, for all individuals using the outdoor space is important to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission between people.



Fences, Walls and Barricades

Mandatory Design Criteria

Outdoor shelters must adhere to the following mandatory design criteria:

One Wall, One Roof

- New outdoor spaces cannot be enclosed or partially enclosed on more than one side in a way that otherwise restricts the free flow of air.
- Per the State of California rules, “outdoor operations may be conducted under a tent, canopy, or other sun shelter as long as no more than one side is closed, allowing sufficient outdoor air movement.”

Barrier Composition or “When is a Screen a Wall?”

- Rigid walls, plastic or plexiglass will not let any air through and are considered a wall.
 - Impermeable barriers, such as Plexiglas, should only be installed if tables, chair, benches, etc., cannot be moved more than 6 feet apart.
 - To minimize exposure between groups only install impermeable barriers in such a way that only one side would need the barriers, and the other sides allow the free flow of air.
- Barriers such as a lattice fence with widely separated slats, or a coarse mesh screen will allow more air to flow freely and are not considered a wall.

Risk Recommendations

It is not possible to anticipate each type of outdoor shelter and pre-determine whether any specific configuration allows for the free flow of air in the breathing zone for personnel, customers, and clients. In addition to the composition of the barrier, air flow is affected by the height, number, and angle of the barriers, as well as the percentage of the space covered by impermeable barriers. Businesses are encouraged to refer to the FAQ at the end of this document and consider the following when designing an outdoor shelter:

- If the shelter has two impermeable walls that are at right angles to each other, consider reducing the height of one wall to be less than 42” in height (e.g. one wall can be a building wall, but the second wall would be lower than 42” to easily allow the flow of air above it).
- If the shelter has impermeable walls that are both greater than 42” in height and parallel to each other, consider making the walls no closer than 10 feet apart to ensure sufficient cross flow of air between the two walls.
- Increasing the flow of air by incorporating permeable barriers like mesh and lattice into the design, or by reducing any unnecessary height from a proposed wall.
- Encourage as much free flow of air in the breathing zone as possible.

Relationship to Parklets and Shared Spaces Program

The Parklet and Shared Spaces design criteria include requirements for wall heights, pedestrian visibility, and ceiling heights. If your shelter is permitted pursuant to one of these programs, it likely provides for the free flow of air in the breathing zone, but it is your obligation to review the mandatory and permissive design criteria included in this document.



FAQ

What does “free flow of air in the breathing zone” mean?

The breathing zone refers to the area of space around a person’s nose and mouth through which air passes as they breathe in and out. A face covering is required to cover a person’s breathing zone, unless the person is actively engaged in eating or drinking. Maintaining the free flow of air in the breathing zone is important to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission between people.

Can I put umbrellas/canopies up over tables?

If the umbrella/canopy allows for the free flow of air in the breathing zone of your personnel, customers or clients, then it is allowed. All such umbrellas and tents may not extend past the barrier, obstruct access to or ventilation of utility covers, and be ADA compliant.

Is my newly made shelter in compliance, who can I contact to verify?

For more information about setting up your outdoor space please visit San Francisco’s Shared Spaces website at <https://sf.gov/shared-spaces> .

Can I use heaters, fans, swamp coolers, etc.

Yes, however, we strongly recommend that you place fans so that they do not blow air between different groups of patrons. Fans do not increase ventilation in a manner sufficient to permit use of enclosed shelters that would otherwise not be allowed.

Why can’t I put people in the same household or group in a more enclosed shelter?

An outdoor enclosed shelter does not allow the free flow of air to move freely in the space. If you create single-party enclosed spaces outdoors, personnel would still need to interact with the space while serving the customers and when disinfecting after use. Outdoor dining does not require everyone at the table to be part of the same household.

How else can I help reduce risk among my personnel and customers?

Flu vaccines are critical in the fight against COVID-19 by (1) keeping workers and communities healthy and (2) reducing strain on our healthcare and testing systems that are responding to COVID-19. Strongly encourage all personnel to get a flu shot. Post signage to encourage flu vaccine among customers, visitors, etc.

Resources

Reopening Guidance for Restaurants: <https://sf.gov/resource/2020/reopening-guidance-restaurants>

COVID-19 Industry Guidance: Expanded Personal Care Services Provided Outdoors:
<https://files.covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-outdoor-personal-care--en.pdf>

CDC Considerations for Restaurants and Bars: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/business-employers/bars-restaurants.html>