

# **NY Gov. Andrew Cuomo Calls Movie Theaters Riskier, Less Essential Than Other Businesses, No Word On Reopening**

New York Governor, Andrew Cuomo, Monday gave gyms a green light to reopen August 24 following recent nods to bowling alleys, museums and malls but is still leaving movie theaters, which he called less essential and higher risk, in the dark.

That's both literally and figuratively. Cuomo gave no indication of a reopening timetable for the key market, which is making theater owners increasingly hot under the collar. "I am unsure where the governor is getting his information," said Joseph Masher, chief operating officer of Bow Tie Cinemas and president of the National Association of Theatre Owners of New York.

Governor Cuomo said the decision was based on a calculation of relative risk. "It's the level of risk. If you look at our metrics, we started [reopening] with the most essential business that posed the least risk. And then it was the gradation to the least essential businesses that posed the most risk," he said in response to a question at his daily briefing about the kinds of operations allowed to reopen across the state and why.

Opening New York cinemas is not a conversation with purely local ramifications. Access to the nation's second-largest movie market after Los Angeles is a big factor in whether studios will release tent poles, which are needed to drive interest in going to the movies. "It's a chicken and egg situation," Masher said. "It has a gigantic ripple effect on the industry if New York doesn't get open."

Masher said he knows of no instances of coronavirus spread from U.S. cinemas, which are now open in 41 states. Recent renovations like stadium seating automatically distance patrons, he noted, and with capacity further reduced by COVID guidelines "that's like 30 people in a cinema," he said. "We would like to engage in a dialogue."

All regions in the state have passed Phase 4, the last one, but the Governor had held back a handful of businesses for further study and hadn't commented in some time on his rationale for movie theaters continuing to stay closed, along with live performances and, in New York City, indoor dining.

"I am sure there is a whole group people who say, 'I cannot live without going to the movies.' But on a relative risk scale, a movie theater is less essential and poses a high risk. It is congregant. It is one ventilation system. You are seated there for a long period of time," said Cuomo. "Even if you are at 50% capacity with one or two seats between the two of you, this is a risk situation and ... movie theaters are not that high on the list of essentials."

“Who has the bible of essentials? Nobody. You can’t go to the bible to figure it out [but] we are saying, ‘Yes, gyms for more New Yorkers are more essential than movie theaters.’”

Cuomo, credited with turning New York back from the brink after it was crushed by the COVID-19 pandemic last spring, also prefaced a speech he will deliver tonight for the virtual Democratic National Convention.

“I am going to speak about the national crisis that we are in, because I believe that this nation is in crisis. The illness showed us how weak we were and how under-prepared we were, and how divided we were. I say in the speech it takes a strong body to resist the virus, because it’s a great metaphor. The virus wreaks havoc when the body is weak, and our body politic was weak.”

**--Jill Goldsmith, Deadline**