

More than 2,930 Consumers Share Their Feelings On The Importance of Social Distancing in Maine Businesses

Survey identifies specific examples of how social distancing has impacted some businesses and how views differ based on age and location in the State

BRUNSWICK, MAINE – The [Southern Midcoast Maine Chamber](#) (MACCE), surveyed consumers across the state on their feelings on social distancing in business and how it impacts their patronage decisions. A total of 2,939 respondents answered the 20 question “Consumer Attitudes About Masks and Social Distancing in Maine Businesses” survey, conducted online from June 4 to June 12, 2020.

The purpose of the survey was to provide businessowners with key insights into what consumers value in terms of social distancing and to try and determine whether adhering to social distancing could have any effect on consumer confidence. The survey contained four categorization questions, 15 social distancing questions and one open-ended question inviting survey feedback. The survey results were filtered into five categorization categories, thus the results are presented in five ways. The five categorization filters were: Overall results, by Age, by County, by Knowing Someone with Covid and by Knowing Someone in the High risk Category.

Key findings from the overall results include:

- 1/4 of all survey respondents said they have left a business they intended to purchase something at without purchasing it because they felt unsafe due to those around them not practicing safe social distancing practices.
- An additional 1/4 of respondents said they would leave a business without purchasing an item if they were to be in that situation– thus a majority of respondents said they have done this or would do this (Q10)
- Similarly, over 50% of respondents said they have vowed to not return to a business that had unsafe social distancing practices (Q11)
- If your business or employees are not social distancing adequately, you have about a 1 in 3 chance, according to this survey, that a customer will either write a negative social media post about your business or tell a friend or family member about it (Q12)
- If your customers don’t follow social distancing there is a 40% chance a customer will write about it on social media or tell a friend or family member that it happened at your business (Q13)
- Question 15 offered 11 statements that respondents could agree with about how they react when they see social distancing guidelines not being followed, and the six most popular overall

answers were:

- (1) “I will reach out to friends who I know are high risk for infection and tell them to avoid that business” 41.1% (1207 responses)
- (2) “I will consider not returning to that business next time” 39.6% (1164 responses)
- (3) “I won’t return to that business in the future” 28.2% (829 responses)
- (4) “I will leave that business immediately” 27.3% (803 responses)
- (5) “It doesn’t bother me” 24.5% (719 responses)
- (6) “If they force me to wear a mask I will go somewhere else” 21.4% (629 responses)

- 2/3 of survey respondents say they would travel over 10 miles to shop and eat in a community that pledged to follow safe social distancing practices, or at least consider doing so (Q17)

- Over half of survey respondents say they would shop and eat in a safe community if it were 25 miles or more away, or at least consider it (roughly ¼ said they would and ¼ said they’d consider it) (Q18)

- 1 in 10 respondents said they would travel over 50 miles to do the same and an additional 23% said they would consider going 50 miles to do it (meaning 1/3 of respondents could) (Q19)

Key findings from the Age, County, Knowing Covid, and Knowing Someone High Risk were:

- Questions 5-9 compared how much value respondents put on five aspects of social distancing. When analyzing these results, 21.2% more respondents in the 60+ age group valued these social distancing aspects than those in any other age group (other subgroups were 18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59)

- When analyzing the same results for Questions 5-9, 16.6% more respondents who Know Someone with Covid Complications valued these social distancing aspects than those who Didn’t Know Someone with Covid

- When analyzing the same results for Questions 5-9, 15.2% more respondents who Know Someone in the High Risk Category valued these aspects than those who Didn’t Not Know Someone in the High Risk Category, or those Unsure if they Knew Someone in the High Risk Category)

Specific regional data is presented within the full report for those interested in the results from certain counties.

What the Southern Midcoast Maine Chamber, who administered the survey, is saying:

“Social distancing is good business, but we didn’t know how impactful until this survey,” says SMMC Executive Director Cory King. “It’s not absolute- no survey is- but clearly 40-65% of Maine consumers factor social distancing and masking into their business patronage decisions.”

“We knew there were some people who felt this way,” King said, “but these numbers really bear it out. When 25% of respondents are saying they have left a business they are intending to purchase something at without purchasing it, that should perk up the ears of any business owner,” King said. “When an additional 25% say they would do that if they feel unsafe, now you’ve got half of your potential customers saying they might walk out.” King concluded.

“The full report breaks out a lot of the countywide data, and depending on where you live, it certainly changes your view,” King summarized. “Covid case count could be a factor for how some people feel, though certain low case-count counties like Franklin and Washington counties both were very pro-social distancing.”

“The age splits are decisive. Basically most age groups are within 5 points of each other on every question, maybe 8 points.” King says. “But the consumer over 60 years old in Maine is saying ‘we want the masks and social distancing’ 15-20% more than any other age group. In the oldest State in the country, that is a ton of consumers.”

“Knowing people with Covid and knowing someone in the high risk category was important too,” King shared. “We wanted to find which group felt more strongly and it’s still a toss-up. Knowing Someone with Covid had higher overall answers, but knowing Someone in the High Risk group had a larger statistical variance over their counterparts, so it’s tough to say. Either way, both are major factors,” King said

“It was a lot of work, but when almost 3,000 Maine consumers respond to your survey, you have a responsibility to show the data and trends as many ways as possible,” King said. “I hope this can be instructive for town, county leaders and my fellow chamber of commerce directors.”

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The Southern Midcoast Maine Chamber is a regional and local chamber of commerce serving Bath, Brunswick, Topsham, Harpswell and a dozen other surrounding communities. Find out more about them as www.midcoastmainechamber.com
