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1. [Coronavirus](#)

## Coronavirus restaurant crisis: Why is it so hard to find Chinese takeout?

Posted Apr 27, 2020



Good Taste Chinese Food restaurant on North Third Street in midtown Harrisburg is temporarily closed until further notice due to COVID-19. Photo by Sue Gleiter | [sgleiter@pennlive.com](mailto:sgleiter@pennlive.com)

By [Sue Gleiter](#) | [sgleiter@pennlive.com](mailto:sgleiter@pennlive.com)

Diners hungry for Chinese takeout are frustrated.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, many of the establishments have temporarily locked doors and stopped accepting orders.

“Can someone give me a Chinese restaurant that will answer their phone and deliver,” recently wrote Tammy Lynn Feliciano on the Facebook group [Virtual Dinner Party](#).

Rich Johnson of South Hanover Township posed a similar question a few weeks ago. None of his regular go-to Chinese restaurants were open. After scanning various websites and apps, he was at a loss.

“I don’t want to just go driving around looking,” he said. “Every place is closed.”

Finally, Johnson called [Hong Kong Ruby in Lower Paxton Township](#) and nabbed food, but not without a wait.

Overall, the restaurant industry faces severe economic repercussions as a result of the coronavirus. [The National Restaurant Association reports the industry lost \\$30 billion in March](#) and is expected to lose an additional \$50 billion by the end of April.

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Specifically, Chinese restaurants have been hard hit from the virus, first detected in Wuhan, China. It’s puzzling since the establishments are notorious for takeout.

Recently, software provider [Wombly](#) reported about 59 percent of the nation’s independent Chinese restaurants ended credit and debit card transactions as of April 15, an indication the restaurants have closed, [according to CNN Business](#).

Likewise, in New York City, Wellington Chen, executive director of Manhattan’s Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation, [told CNN only 40 of the 270 restaurants in Chinatown are open](#). Closures have been reported across the nation.

Calls by PennLive to several Chinese restaurants in the Harrisburg area found a handful still operating, including [Great Wall](#) and [Beijing Restaurant](#), both in Susquehanna Township. On the West Shore, [Ho Wah Restaurant in Lemoyne](#) answers calls.

But others such as Dragon Chinese Restaurant at Kline Village, Good Taste Chinese Food in Midtown Harrisburg and Best Wok in Paxtang are closed.

A message on [Good Taste’s website](#) reads: “We have been carefully keeping our eye on the ongoing national crisis that is COVID-19. With that in mind, we carefully considered the general health and well-being of our staff, customers, and all of your loved ones. With hope and concern in our horizon, we want to inform you that we will be temporarily closing until we feel it is safe for our customers and staff and until everything is under control according to the CDC.”

And it’s not just Chinese restaurants with locked doors. Other Asian restaurants from hibachi tables to buffets are shut down. Likewise, a smattering of Thai, Japanese and Vietnamese restaurants are closed, too.

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Nationally, restaurant owners have said reasons for the closures range from supply chain disruptions due to workers calling off sick to baseless fears linking Chinese immigrants to the virus. Others want to protect employees or don’t want to pay high delivery fees associated with online platforms such as GrubHub and DoorDash.

“It’s mostly about the fear of the virus at that moment,” said Howard Dong, owner of two central Pa. Chinese restaurants.

Dong said he closed [He Express Authentic Chinese Food in Harrisburg](#) in March, a week before Pa. Gov. Tom Wolf’s shelter-in-place order. He continues to operate with contactless carryout and delivery at his other restaurant, [He Authentic Chinese Cuisine in Middletown](#).

While he would not speak about other Chinese restaurants in the area, Dong said when President Donald Trump shut down travel to and from China, he thought measures were being taken to prevent the spread of the virus in the United States. But he said eventual lack of action on the part of the federal government, led him and others to feel afraid.

In the meantime, Dong said he removed a few items from the menu due to supply issues and food costs. Prices for a type of Chinese long green pepper increased from \$20 a case to \$60, he said.

“Because we do authentic, we had to make sure it’s the ingredients from China. We couldn’t sacrifice the quality of the dish,” Dong said.

Many owners and those in the industry note the economic impact on American Chinese restaurants started in February when the United States confirmed its first cases of the virus, according to [Eater](#). The online site said at the time fallout was felt at restaurants from New York to Seattle.

Many blame [xenophobic reactions to the outbreak, as well as fewer Chinese tourists visiting the United States](#). Indeed, reports of anti-Asian attacks have been on the rise since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

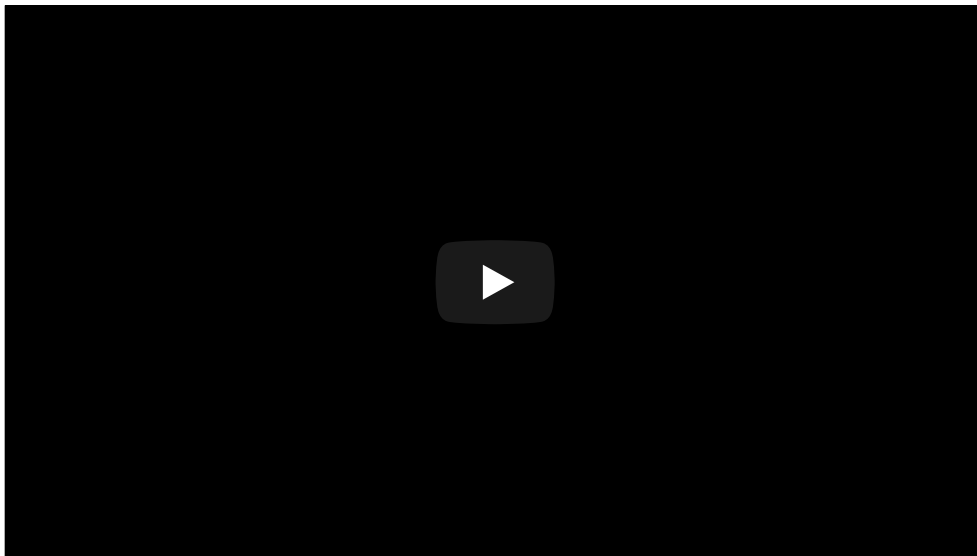
And the number of incidents rose sharply after President Trump started calling coronavirus the “Chinese virus,” noted Russell Jeung, an Asian American studies professor at San Francisco State University, in an interview with [NPR](#).

To track incidents, the [Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council](#) launched a [STOP AAPI HATE](#) survey in March and within two weeks received 1,100 reports of coronavirus discrimination from Asian Americans across the country. The group said the numbers “reflect the hostile environment that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders face during this pandemic.”

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Caroline Lai, owner of several Asian restaurants, including [Miyako Sushi in Harrisburg](#) and [Sawasdee Thai Cuisine](#) and [Wasabi Bistro](#), both in Hershey, said she didn’t notice a drop in business before the pandemic. But she said she suspects some of the closures are related to owners choosing to protect workers as well as themselves.

Lai noted a few of her employees do not want to work during the outbreak over fears of getting sick. Her establishments remain open with takeout and/or delivery, and she pays a fee to DoorDash for the service.



“It is true it hurt their business and I think most people in the line of business are already burned out and are taking this as an opportunity to take it easy,” she said. “A lot of people don’t want to take the chance to risk to be out there and be infected with the disease.”

Lai noted they’re making enough money to pay the bills.

“We’re not talking about profit, we are talking about survival,” she said.

While it’s not a traditional Chinese restaurant, [Fusion Fire Asian Restaurant](#) in Hampden Township voluntarily closed for a few weeks, said co-owner Frank Dominick who operates it with his wife, Vivian Dominick.

Several factors led to the couple’s decision, including difficulties obtaining supplies, rising cost of goods and the apex of the virus spreading. In the coming weeks, Dominick anticipates the restaurant will reopen for takeout.

“We feel safety and health are paramount to each one of our futures. We also want to provide the best possible meals to our customers,” he said.

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