

JUDE'S BARBERSHOP™

WHERE GUYS GET THEIR HAIRCUT

Whispers of underground hair services being done in homes- where there are no standards for safety and cleanliness- started trickling in just a week into the shutdown. Although it's not possible to quantify how much this has been happening, it is clear when looking at people out in public that the governor is not the only one getting their hair done in secret.

Governor Whitmer has emphasized that businesses, including barbershops and salons, need to remain closed to control the spread of the virus. Yet, when faced with no professional options to have their hair needs met, the public has resorted to settling for hair services behind closed doors at the homes of stylists and barbers. Women who have foregone their regularly scheduled color touchups and men who have gamely let their hair grow long and unruly eventually reach a point where they are willing to take the risk to have these kitchen cuts and colors. The existence of this underground market, where safety and cleanliness standards cannot be monitored or ensured, defeats the point of having actual licensed businesses closed for these same services.

One should consider the several factors leading to this unsafe situation. Businesses have been closed for over a month now, with stylists and barbers going that same length of time without any earned income. Most of those same people also have not received their unemployment checks and are desperate and willing to bend the rules to make money under the table just to get by. On the other side, as the public anticipates returning to normalcy and being out among people again, they want to look and feel like themselves. With all of these needs being unmet due to the lockdown order, rule following citizens who want to do the right thing, are left with no safe, legal options.

Customers and employees have been emailing more than ever before, desperate for our help. Customers want to know if it would be possible for our employees to travel to their homes for haircuts. Army bases and first responders ask if we can at least provide haircuts to our servicemen and essential workers during the shutdown so they can at least look professional while doing their jobs.

Frustrated employees email daily wanting to know when they will be able to work again. Although unemployment benefits have been "made available" by the state and federal government, many of our 221 employees have not yet seen or know when they will see these benefits. As a business, we have done all that we can to assist our 221 employees in filing for unemployment benefits and then jumping through the many unexpected hoops some have faced when their claims have been rejected. We have advanced money to many employees because they've run out of money and can't purchase food and medication. These requests continue to increase with each passing day.

The tax revenue lost by these underground transactions is a minor issue comparatively, but something the local, state, and federal governments so desperately need more than ever right now. These lost tax revenues could make a difference in helping the many people who have gone over a month with no income and no unemployment benefits.

Our industry has always been an area of the economy that requires education, training, and high standards in safety and cleanliness. In fact, since service providers are already used to focusing on safety and sanitation measures in all aspects of their work, they may be some of the people best prepared to return to work in the next wave.

It makes sense to allow businesses in the hair industry to open in areas of Michigan where the threat of coronavirus is limited as people don't typically travel more than 5 miles for a haircut. The longer the hair industry is not allowed to open to the public, the more these underground services will increase along with the greater potential for coronavirus spread in these unregulated environments.

In anticipation of reopening our barbershops safely, we have added new measures to guard the health of our employees and customers. Before work begins for the day, employees will fill out a short questionnaire to check that they are not sick and have not come into contact with someone who recently has been sick. No-contact thermometers will also check employee temperatures before starting work. We have also ordered masks and set up a plastic barrier at the checkout desks. We only provide appointments so there will be no customers waiting.

Even though a haircut requires close contact, it can be done safely in controlled, regulated businesses.

Jude's Barbershop wants to provide much needed professional hair services to meet the public's demand in a legal, state-regulated, safe way. As a locally owned family business, we want to continue to provide hundreds of jobs to our valued, hardworking employees. We want to be part of the solution to all these challenges Michigan faces, and do our part in restoring our local economy.

-Thomas Martin

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www.JudesBarbershop.com