

We can't afford any more false starts, say hospitality bosses

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HOSPITALITY bosses today warned that the industry could afford "no more false starts" when restaurants and bars start reopening later in the spring.

The sector is today being given a green light to start serving outdoors first before indoor dining can resume weeks later if cases continue to fall.

Industry leaders said they could not survive a repeat of last autumn when they had to cope with "stop-start" openings and changing restrictions.

Rob Pitcher, chief executive of Revolution Bars, said: "We can't afford for this to be another false start."

Chief of the Hippodrome Casino Simon Thomas said: "I fear the West End will have to wait until May to return to something close to normal trading."

Des Gunewardena, head of the D&D London, added: "There is likely to be

massive demand from customers after being locked down. So if this is the plan then the Government should do all it can to allow squares and pavements to also be used for terrace seating."

Clive Watson, chairman of the City Pub Group, said: "Hopefully today's announcement will give us hope... that we can re-open our pubs and build for the future without any further closures."

Other sectors also said they were looking forward to a return to trading with the hope of no further forced closures.

Chief of the British Independent Retailers Association Andrew Goodacre said: "If re-opening has to be a cautious approach, then knowing this will be the final lockdown is of some consolation."

But Ros Morgan, of Heart of London Business Alliance, said: "Central London will continue to be affected [by] reduced footfall, therefore businesses will need continued support for the rest of the year at least."