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The holiday shopping season starts earlier every year, and this year will be no exception. Retailers are again inching back their opening times, with many stores now opening around 5 or 6 p.m. Thanksgiving.

JC Penny, Kohl's, Target, Macy's and Best Buy are among the list of stores starting their sales earlier this year. Kmart will again be the first major retailer to open at 6 a.m. Thanksgiving, followed by Big Lots an hour later.

The mall in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, will open 8 p.m. Thanksgiving — the

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rest of the company and will not open on Thanksgiving, according to the mall.

Similar to last year, Wal-Mart stores will unveil their first in-store sale event at 6 p.m. Thanksgiving and stagger events throughout the weekend. Last year, 22 million people shopped at Walmart on Thanksgiving.

“Black Friday is no longer about waking up at the crack of dawn to stand in long lines and hope for the best. At Walmart, it has become a family shopping tradition where everyone shops at some point throughout the weekend,” Duncan Mac Naughton, chief merchandising officer, Walmart U.S., said in a statement.

Just a few years ago, stores formally ushered in the busy holiday shopping season in the early morning hours of Black Friday. Little by little, retailers have been paring back their opening times, which they said is in response to customer demand.

“While we recognize the decision to open on Thanksgiving affects Best Buy employees, customers have made it clear that many of them want to begin shopping on Thanksgiving evening,” Best Buy said in statement Tuesday.

Despite some criticism from consumers who feel the early shopping push erodes a family holiday, many people still plan to shop in stores on Thanksgiving.

According to global consulting firm Accenture's annual holiday shopping survey, about half of consumers plan to shop in-store between 6 p.m. Thanksgiving and 5 a.m. Black Friday. About a quarter plan to begin their shopping on Thanksgiving.

While the larger stores begin their push on Thanksgiving or Black Friday, small businesses are hoping to capitalize on the busy shopping weekend on Small Business Saturday.

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American Express established Small Business Saturday in 2010 as a way to promote small businesses during one of the biggest shopping weekends of the year.

“This is a day for everyone to recognize and support small businesses in our community,” said Noel Purdy, president of DCI. “Small businesses are the backbone of the U.S. economy and they contribute a great deal to our community.”

Many experts are forecasting stronger holiday sales this year as the economy continues to improve.

Accenture's survey found about a quarter of consumers plan to spend more this year. Spending on holiday gifts is expected to average \$718, according to the survey.

Online and mobile shopping continue to grow. According to the National Retail Federation's holiday survey, about 56 percent plan to shop online, up slightly from last year.

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Small Business

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