

COVID-19

OPERATING GUIDANCE

A GUIDE FOR THE
RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

UPDATED May 17, 2021

For other resources:
[RESTAURANT.ORG/COVID19](https://restaurant.org/covid19)



TO RESTAURANT OPERATORS OPEN AND READY TO OPERATE UNDER LOCAL REQUIREMENTS...

The purpose of this updated guidance is to continue to offer you direction and provide a framework for best practices as you as you operate under new COVID-19 operating rules.

COVID-19 is a new, novel virus meaning there is more health officials are learning. Good guidance will update over time to incorporate new information as it comes in.

Continue to implement and maintain requirements to wash hands after touching one's face covering, or after coughing or sneezing on a tissue.

The same applies to additional practices, such as wearing a cloth face covering that covers both nose and mouth, changing layouts to ensure employees and customers remain at least 6 feet apart, or limiting seating capacity to allow for proper social distancing where required. These measures should be observed and managed as diligently as any food safety practice.

Our latest document builds on our original guidance and reflects the most recent data from the CDC, FDA, EPA, OSHA and ASHRAE specifically related to operating your restaurant and interacting with diners and staff.

The National Restaurant Association wishes to provide both restaurant operators and diners information about what to expect as the industry returns to on-premises dining and increased dining capacities.

These recommendations are intended to complement existing state and local regulations concerning cleaning and sanitation, personal hygiene, social distancing, and health monitoring.

We recognize that not everyone has access to accurate guidance, and that is where the Association can provide help.

As restaurants continue to apply safety measures, each restaurant should, at a minimum:

- ✓ Make sure your person-in-charge has an up-to-date ServSafe Food Manager certification. The FDA Food Code requires every facility

to have a person in charge on site during open hours and also directs that the person in charge should have a food manager certification.

- ✓ Provide [ServSafe Food Handler](#) training for your workers as well as [COVID-19 training videos](#) for Reopening Guidance, Delivery and Takeout. They're your front line; educating them protects them, you and your guests.
- ✓ Make technology your friend. Contactless payment systems, automated ordering systems, mobile ordering apps, website updates and simple texts can help you to communicate and conduct business with reduced need for close contact. Keep communicating with customers (your hours, menu items, reservations, etc.), and help promote your social distancing and safety efforts.
- ✓ Some of the best advice comes from the government agencies including the [FDA's Best Practices for Re-Opening Retail Food Establishments During the COVID-19 Pandemic \(Food Safety Checklist\)](#), [FDA/ OSHA Employee Health and Food Safety Checklist](#), and [OSHA's Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#).
- ✓ Encourage all staff members to be vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus as soon as they are eligible.
- ✓ Teach the concepts contained in this Guidance to all staff members. It's critically important that all staff members know what to do as operations are allowed to increase capacity.

As we continue to learn more about operating businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, it's important to share with you the most current direction and advice from the experts at FDA, CDC, EPA, OSHA and other agencies. These documents will continue to reflect those best practices and will continue to be updated.

MAKE THE SERVSAFE DINING COMMITMENT

Through the ServSafe Dining Commitment, operators pledge to follow four best practices that are effective means for reducing the transmission of COVID-19.

- 1.** Adherence to this updated COVID-19 Operating Guidance and/or corporate brand guidelines, which are based on CDC, FDA, EPA and OSHA guidelines.
- 2.** Adherence to the laws and guidelines set by their state and local municipalities.
- 3.** Commitment to a minimum of one person per location with a current [ServSafe Food Protection Manager](#) certification.
- 4.** Commitment to ensuring employees have been trained in [ServSafe Food Handler](#) courses and have gone through the free [ServSafe COVID-19 Precaution Trainings](#)

Restaurants ready to make the commitment can sign on at [ServSafeCommit.org](#)



The National Restaurant Association partnered with representatives of the Food and Drug Administration, academia, the Conference for Food Protection, Ecolab, public health officials and industry representatives to develop these guidelines to help restaurants return to full operation safely as states continue to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak.

This guidance can help mitigate exposure to the COVID-19 virus through:

- ✓ Food safety
- ✓ Cleaning, sanitizing and safely disinfecting
- ✓ Employee health monitoring and personal hygiene
- ✓ Social distancing
- ✓ Effective ventilation
- ✓ Encouraging vaccinations for staff
- ✓ Training staff with this guidance

Combine this guidance with your existing policies as well as these resources from the CDC, [Considerations for Restaurants and Bars](#), and CDC's [Activities and Initiatives Supporting the COVID-19 Response and the President's Plan for Opening America Up Again](#).

Armed with information, ServSafe training and the recommendations of your local health departments, you can help secure safe operation.

For the most comprehensive and up-to-date COVID-19 resources and information for the restaurant industry, visit [restaurant.org/COVID19](#).

RESTAURANT OPERATION GUIDANCE



RESTAURANT RESPONSE

Food safety has always been—and will always be—a priority for the restaurant industry, for guests and employees.

The basis of an effective food safety culture is the Food and Drug Administration Food Code, which for decades has served as the foundation for restaurant operating procedures as they relate to safe food handling. The guidance outlined in the Food Code is science-based and is designed to reduce and prevent the incidence of foodborne illness. Food Code requirements related to sanitation and personal hygiene in particular are the most reliable protocols available to combat risks related to the spread of COVID-19.

AMONG THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FOOD CODE THAT APPLY TO CORONAVIRUS MITIGATION ARE

- ✓ Prohibiting sick employees in the workplace
- ✓ Strict hand washing practices that include how and when to wash hands
- ✓ Strong procedures and practices to clean and sanitize surfaces
- ✓ Ensuring the person in charge of a foodservice facility is a certified food safety manager
- ✓ Ensuring the person in charge is on site at all times during operating hours



FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS, THE NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION'S SERVSAFE PROGRAM HAS PROVIDED FOOD SAFETY TRAINING FOR BOTH MANAGERS AND FOOD HANDLERS.

ServSafe certifies food safety managers through an independently developed certification exam, which follows standards adopted by the Conference for Food Protection.

The Conference for Food Protection also collaborates with the FDA to develop the Food Code.

WHEN TRAINING, OPERATORS SHOULD MAKE USE OF THESE GUIDELINES AS THEY RELATE TO THEIR EXISTING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AND IN CONJUNCTION WITH INSTRUCTIONS THEY RECEIVE FROM AUTHORITIES.



EDUCATE

YOUR EMPLOYEES



According to [FoodCoVNET](#), of the small number of restaurants that reported COVID-19 outbreaks among staff, 55% provided **no** COVID-19 mitigation training to employees. Well-trained team members are your best defense against community transmission and your fastest route to a quick recovery.

Prepare your staff to protect your business.

Communicate your policies and train employees on how to prevent transmission to help them feel informed and safe as they work.

• COMMUNICATE

The [American Industrial Hygiene Association](#) recommends that you:

- ✓ Communicate and train your employees on everything your operation is doing to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and why (e.g., disinfection routines, customer service safety measures, and employee health policies including vaccination). Use team meetings, emails, texts, automated phone calls, websites and signage to continually communicate policy and procedures.
- ✓ Create formal and informal means for employees to express concerns, ask questions, make comments, and provide feedback.

- ✓ Tell employees to keep constant tabs on their health; if they're sick, have a fever or other symptoms—or someone at home is sick—they should stay home. NOTE: Employees must be trained to always follow their employer HR policies, HIPAA guidelines, and related local laws.

- ✓ Make sure current and returning employees are clear about the health check policy and reporting requirements they need to follow if they're infected with COVID-19.

- ✓ Inform employees returning to work about all new policies and changes before you fully reopen and resume traditional operation.

• TRAIN

- ✓ In training materials, clarify the difference between cleaning and disinfecting, including which products to use and how to use them. [OSHA Hazard Communication Standards](#) has guidelines on products, personal protective equipment needed, and proper product disposal.
- ✓ Train employees on new or modified work schedules, how they can stay up to date on new scheduling requirements, and how to make requests for schedule changes if coworkers become symptomatic or need to care for someone.
- ✓ Offer **free** ServSafe training videos on [COVID-19 Training & Resources](#), which includes Reopening Guidance, Takeout, Delivery and Conflict De-Escalation.



GUIDANCE

ON MONITORING HEALTH & HYGIENE

✓ Per existing FDA Food Code requirements, employees who are sick should remain at home.

✓ If an employee becomes ill or presents signs of illness, identify the signs during a pre-work screening and send the employee home. Local public health authorities determine and establish the quarantine options for their jurisdictions. The CDC currently recommends a quarantine period of 14 days. However, according to the CDC, the following options to shorten quarantine are acceptable:

- Quarantine can end after Day 10 without testing and if no symptoms are reported during daily monitoring.
- If the individual can be officially tested, quarantine can end after Day 7 if the test is negative and the person has no symptoms during daily monitoring. Seven days is the minimum quarantine period.
- Both cases require additional criteria (e.g., continuing to monitor symptoms and masking through Day 14).

✓ Taking employees' temperatures is at the operators' discretion. The CDC has not mandated the practice and any operator who chooses to do so should engage health officials first and adopt policies aligned with proper procedures. CDC guidance states the minimum temp that indicates fever is 100.4°F.

✓ Immediately notify local health officials, staff, and customers (if possible) of any possible case of COVID-19, but maintain confidentiality that's consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other federal and state privacy laws.

✓ Close off areas used by a sick person and do not use until the areas have been cleaned, sanitized and, in non-food-contact areas, disinfected. Try to wait 24 hours before you clean, sanitize and disinfect, or for as long as possible within 24 hours. Ensure safe and correct use and storage of disinfectants.

✓ Per the CDC, face coverings over the nose and mouth are effective in mitigating the risk of COVID-19 transmission between people, especially in close conditions. Some states and local jurisdictions require face coverings, as do some employers. In all cases, coverings worn by employees should be kept clean in accordance with [CDC guidance](#).

✓ Train employees on the importance of frequent hand washing, the use of hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol content and teach them to avoid touching their faces, whether gloved or bare handed. Wearing gloves front-of-house is discouraged and should not replace frequent hand washing and sanitizing. If required to use gloves, employees should be taught how to put gloves on and take them off properly after each service and wash their hands.

✓ Ensure adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene practices for both employees and customers including soap, hand sanitizer (on every table, if supplies allow), paper towels, and tissues.

✓ Post signs on "[How to Stop the Spread of COVID-19](#)", "[ServSafe Poster: 101 Hand Washing](#)", "[Promote Everyday Protective Measures](#)", and "[Properly Wear a Face Covering](#)".

COVID-19 EXPOSED EMPLOYEE

If an employee tells you they've been in close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19, evaluate the context of the interaction. Consider asking them to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms. Certain restaurant workers—including those at restaurants offering carryout or delivery—may refer to [CDC Guidance for Critical Infrastructure Workers](#).

✓ The CDC defines close contact as being within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.

✓ CDC advises that critical infrastructure workers may be permitted to continue work following potential exposure to COVID-19, provided they remain asymptomatic and take precautions to protect themselves and others.

✓ Additional precautions include pre-screening (with temperature checks) prior to each shift, self-monitoring for symptoms, wearing a face mask for 14 days after exposure, and social distancing as work duties permit.

✓ Workspaces, bathrooms, common areas, and shared electronic equipment should be routinely disinfected.

✓ Confirm guidelines with local health departments.



GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS



As municipalities increase capacity allowances and welcome diners back on-premises, it's more important than ever that management train employees on the points recommended in this guidance along with those set by management for the operation and/or by local public health officials.

Update existing policies and implement operating procedures in accordance with the latest FDA, CDC, EPA and OSHA guidance and in accordance with local and state officials regarding:

- ✓ Social distancing and protective equipment
- ✓ Employee health and personal hygiene
- ✓ Cleaning/sanitizing/disinfecting
- ✓ Facility maintenance to include HVAC and air circulation systems
- ✓ Vaccination policy

ON FOOD SAFETY

- ✓ Continue to practice all applicable food safety protocols.
- ✓ Where salad bars and buffets are permitted by local/state officials, they must have sneeze guards in place. Change, wash and disinfect utensils and containers that are handled frequently and place appropriate barriers in open areas. Alternatively, cafeteria-style service (employee served) is permissible with barriers between guests and servers, and when employees use personal protective equipment and limit close contact between guests. Where appropriate, use floor markers to help guests stay 6 feet apart.
- ✓ Wherever possible, assign a staff member to work the self-service drink stations, limit guest congregation/lines, and remove lemons and unwrapped straws from the area.
- ✓ If providing a "grab and go" service, stock coolers to minimum levels.
- ✓ Ensure the person in charge is ServSafe certified and that their certification is up to date, and provide food handler training to refresh food safety knowledge for employees.

GUIDANCE FOR CLEANING AND SANITIZING

✓ Thoroughly clean and safely disinfect entire facility (follow [EPA safety guidelines](#)). Disinfect both high-touch points and seldom-touched surfaces in back-of-house, front-of-house and guest-service areas. If a sanitizer is used, ensure it's effective against COVID-19. Follow the manufacturers' labels and guidance to ensure products are used correctly, safely, and for their intended purposes.

✓ Wash and rinse food-contact surfaces, food-preparation surfaces, and beverage equipment after use. Avoid food-contact surfaces when using disinfectants. However, if use of a disinfectant is necessary due to COVID-19 exposure, the food-contact surface should be washed, rinsed and sanitized after disinfectant use and prior to reuse of the surface.

✓ Clean and disinfect restrooms regularly and, when possible, stock them with individual disinfectant wipes.

✓ Make hand sanitizer readily available to guests. Consider touchless hand sanitizing solutions.

✓ Avoid sharing items such as menus, condiments and food orders. Use single-use or digital menus; toss single-use menus after each use. Opt for single-use condiments. Use no-touch trash cans.

✓ Use contactless payment options as much as possible. Ask customers and employees to exchange cash or cards by placing them on a receipt tray or on the counter to avoid hand-to-hand contact.

✓ Clean and disinfect any pens, counters, or hard surfaces between use or customer.



✓ Use disposable foodservice items (utensils, dishes). If not feasible, ensure that all non-disposable foodservice items are handled with gloves and wash according to FDA Food Code requirements. Employees should wash their hands after removing their gloves or after directly handling used foodservice items.

✓ Use gloves when handling and disposing of trash, dispose of gloves immediately after and wash hands.

✓ Avoid using food and beverage containers or utensils brought in by customers.

✓ Take steps to ensure that all water systems and features (drinking fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown to minimize the risk of Legionnaires' disease and other diseases associated with water.



GUIDANCE ON PREPARING WORKPLACES FOR COVID-19

Ventilation

The scientific community continues to study indoor air circulation as it relates to aerosol transmission of the virus. While the issue is not settled, the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers ([ASHRAE](#)) as well as the EPA and OSHA provide a series of recommendations that restaurant operators can use to maintain good restaurant ventilation.

- ✓ According to the [EPA](#), air cleaners and HVAC filters can help reduce airborne contaminants including viruses in a building or small space. Air cleaning or filtration on its own is not enough to protect people from exposure to the coronavirus.
- ✓ When used along with other best practices—recommended by CDC and others—filtration can be part of a plan to reduce the potential for airborne transmission of COVID-19 indoors.
- ✓ Air cleaners and HVAC filters are designed to filter pollutants or contaminants out of the air as it passes through them. Air cleaning and filtration can help reduce airborne contaminants.
- ✓ Portable air cleaners (also known as air purifiers) can be helpful when operations can't ventilate with outdoor air without compromising indoor comfort, or when outdoor air pollution is high.
- ✓ HVAC systems of large buildings typically filter air before it distributes throughout a building, so consider upgrading HVAC filters appropriate to your specific building and HVAC system (consult an HVAC professional).

GUIDANCE ON PREPARING WORKPLACES FOR COVID-19



Ventilation (continued)

- ✓ The variety and complexity of HVAC systems in large buildings requires professional interpretation of technical guidelines, such as those provided by ASHRAE and CDC. They typically recommend upgrading air filters to the highest efficiency possible compatible with the system and checking the filter fit to minimize filter air-bypass.
- ✓ Consider using portable air cleaners to supplement increased HVAC system ventilation and filtration, especially in areas where adequate ventilation is hard to achieve. Direct the airflow so that it doesn't blow directly from one person to another.

OSHA recommends that businesses:

- ✓ Ensure all HVAC systems are fully functional, especially in restaurants that were closed or are operating at reduced capacity.
- ✓ Remove or redirect portable fans to prevent blowing air from one worker to another.
- ✓ Use HVAC system filters with a Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) rating of 13 or higher, where feasible.
- ✓ Increase the HVAC system's outdoor air intake. Open windows or other sources of fresh air when possible.
- ✓ Don't let HVAC air intakes or open windows pull exhaust air back into the building.
- ✓ Consider using portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) fan/filtration systems to increase clean air circulation.
- ✓ Wear personal protective equipment when you change filters. ASHRAE recommends N95 respirators, eye protection (safety glasses, goggles, or face shields), and disposable gloves.
- ✓ Make sure exhaust fans in restrooms are working at maximum capacity, and are set to stay on.

Layouts

Consider modifying layouts, adding physical barriers and procedures for social distancing (sneeze guards and partitions, particularly in areas where it's difficult for individuals to remain apart), and physical guides (including tape on floors or sidewalks, and signage).



GUIDANCE

ON SOCIAL DISTANCING

✓ Adjust your capacity/interior layouts in keeping with your state and local authorities' requirements (often based on infection rates in the area). In addition to social distancing, proper ventilation that draws air up and out of your restaurant is important for indoor dining. As you adjust layouts, continue to consider using physical barriers and procedures that support social distancing.

✓ According to the CDC, face coverings over the nose and mouth continue to be the most effective tools to reduce virus transmission. But in the [CDC's newest guidance](#), it states that vaccinated people can safely dine indoors and outdoors without face coverings.

✓ [OSHA](#), however, still requires that employers protect their employees from exposure to the virus.

✓ Asking people to prove they have been vaccinated could lead to confrontations and could potentially violate HIPAA laws. Consider using signage to ask people who have not been fully vaccinated to continue to wear a mask.

✓ Despite the CDC's latest guidance, always defer to state and local health requirements related to the virus as they may not be in sync with the CDC's recommendation updates. Knowing that there is now more freedom for vaccinated customers to gather without face coverings is a good opportunity to

encourage and support vaccination for your staff.

✓ Any social distancing measures based on square footage should take into account service areas as well as guest areas.

✓ Remind third-party delivery drivers and any suppliers that you have internal distancing requirements.

✓ Post signage at the entrance that states that no one with a fever or symptoms of COVID-19 is to be permitted in the restaurant.

✓ Limit contact between waitstaff and guests. Where face coverings are not mandated, consider requiring waitstaff to wear face coverings (as recommended by the CDC) if they have direct contact with guests.

✓ Encourage guests to wear face coverings everywhere on premises except when eating and drinking, especially when they have contact with restaurant staff.

✓ Guests' acceptance of mask-wearing in public spaces varies, and your employees may find themselves in tense situations when trying to convey your restaurant's mask policy. Some situations escalate unpleasantly. The Association's free training video, [ServSafe Conflict De-escalation: COVID-19 Precautions](#), can

help them handle these situations.

✓ Use technology solutions where possible to reduce person-to-person interaction: mobile ordering and menu tablets; text on arrival for seating; contactless payment options.

✓ Consider options for dine-in customers to order ahead of time to limit the amount of time spent in the establishment.

✓ Provide hand sanitizer for guests to use, including contactless hand sanitizing stations, and post signs reminding guests about social distancing. Thank them for their patience as you work to ensure their safety.

✓ Try not to allow guests to congregate in waiting areas or bar areas.

✓ Where possible, stagger workstations so employees avoid standing directly opposite or next to each other. Where 6 feet of separation is not possible, consider other options (e.g., face coverings) and increase the frequency of surface cleaning and sanitizing.

✓ Limit the number of employees allowed simultaneously in break rooms.

✓ Train all employees in the above safety actions.

BEST PRACTICES

FOR RETAIL FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOOD SAFETY CHECKLIST

FDA is providing a food safety checklist for previously closed retail food establishments or those that have been open with limited service related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This checklist addresses key food safety practices for retail food establishments to consider as they return to on-premises dining.

This addresses key considerations for how foods offered can be safely handled and delivered to the public. This is not a comprehensive list. FDA encourages consulting the references and links provided below (by CDC, FDA, EPA, and OSHA) for more detailed information. This will be updated as FDA receives further information and inquiries.

- [Managing Employee Health \(Including Contracted Workers\)](#)
- [Personal Hygiene for Employees](#)
- [Managing Operations in a Foodservice Establishment or Retail Food Store](#)
- [Managing Food Pick-Up and Delivery](#)

BE HEALTHY, BE CLEAN



- Employees - Stay home or leave work if sick; consult doctor if sick, and contact supervisor
- Employers - Instruct sick employees to stay home and send home immediately if sick
- Employers - Pre-screen employees exposed to COVID-19 for temperature and other symptoms



- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- If soap and water are not available, use a 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer per CDC
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Wear mask/face covering per [CDC](#) & [FDA](#)



- Never touch Ready-to-Eat foods with bare hands
- Use single service gloves, deli tissue, or suitable utensils
- Wrap food containers to prevent cross contamination
- Follow 4 steps to food safety [Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill](#)

CLEAN & DISINFECT



- Train employees on cleaning and disinfecting procedures, and protective measures, per CDC and FDA
- Have and use cleaning products and supplies
- Follow protective measures



- Disinfect high-touch surfaces frequently
- Use EPA-registered disinfectant
- Ensure food containers and utensils are cleaned and sanitized



- Prepare and use sanitizers according to label instructions
- Offer sanitizers and wipes to customers to clean grocery cart/basket handles, or utilize store personnel to conduct cleaning/sanitizing

SOCIAL DISTANCE



- Help educate employees and customers on importance of social distancing:
 - Signs
 - Audio messages
 - Consider using every other check-out lane to aid in distancing



- Avoid displays that may result in customer gatherings; discontinue self-serve buffets and salad bars; discourage employee gatherings
- Place floor markings and signs to encourage social distancing



- Shorten customer time in store by encouraging them to:
 - Use shopping lists
 - Order ahead of time, if offered
- Set up designated pick-up areas inside or outside retail establishments

PICK-UP & DELIVERY



- If offering delivery options:
 - Ensure coolers and transport containers are cleaned and sanitized
 - Maintain time and temperature controls
 - Avoid cross contamination; for example, wrap food during transport



- Encourage customers to use "no touch" deliveries
- Notify customers as the delivery is arriving by text message or phone call



- Establish designated pick-up zones for customers
- Offer curb-side pick-up
- Practice social distancing by offering to place orders in vehicle trunks



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