

# COVID-19 REOPENING GUIDANCE RESTAURANT RESPONSE

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## INITIAL SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT TEAM

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The restaurant industry has a history of focus on creating a safe experience for guests and employees alike.

At the heart of that food safety culture is the FDA's own Food Code which has, for decades, directed restaurant operating procedures related to food safety. While the Food Code's purpose is to prevent and reduce the incidence of foodborne illness, the requirements of the code related to sanitation and personal hygiene form a base to combat the risks related to the spread of COVID-19.

The Food Code becomes the basis for local, state and federal regulators to develop their own rules to ensure consistency with national food regulatory policy.

Among the requirements of the Food Code that apply today are:

- Prohibiting sick employees in the workplace
- Strict handwashing practices that include how and when to wash hands
- Strong procedures and practices to clean and sanitize surfaces
- The person in charge of a food service facility must be a certified food safety manager
- The person in charge must be onsite at all times during operating hours

For over 30 years the National Restaurant Association's ServSafe program has provided training in safe food management practices for both managers and food handlers.

In addition, ServSafe provides an independently developed certification examination for food safety managers following standards adopted by the Conference for Food Protection. The Conference for Food Protection is one of the recognized organizations that collaborates with the FDA in the development of the Food Code.

The purpose of this guidance is to build on the already established best practices and requirements to address specific health and safety concerns related to the spread of COVID-19 and the planned opening of communities according to rules to be determined by state and local officials.

Operators should address this guidance as it relates to their existing policies and procedures as they received instructions on what will be permitted during their phase of opening.

## ONGOING GUIDANCE | EMPLOYERS

- State and local officials may need to tailor the application of opening criteria to local circumstances (e.g., metropolitan areas that have suffered severe COVID outbreaks, rural and suburban areas where outbreaks have not occurred or have been mild).
- To prepare for compliance to opening procedures, operators should update existing policies and operating procedures in accordance with CDC/FDA/EPA guidance in accordance with local and state officials regarding:
  - Social distancing and protective equipment
  - Employee Health
  - Cleaning/Sanitizing/Disinfecting
- This document will serve to provide minimum basic guidance for use by operators to modify their policies and procedures. Guidance is designed to provide you with a summary of recommended business practices that can be used to mitigate exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Using your existing policies gleaned from the Food Code, ServSafe training as well as partnerships with local health officials now combined with this base guidance to build additional policies will serve as a path forward to opening safely.

## OPENING | OPERATING GUIDANCE

### FOOD SAFETY

- Discard all food items that are out of date.
- Where salad bars and buffets are permitted by local/state officials, they must have sneeze guards in place, utensils changed, washed and sanitized frequently and appropriate barriers in place to open areas. Alternatively, cafeteria style {worker served} is permissible with appropriate barriers in place.
- If providing a “grab and go” service, stock coolers to no more than minimum levels.
- Ensure the ServSafe certification of the person in charge is up-to-date and provide food handler training to refresh employees.

### CLEANING AND SANITIZING

- Thoroughly detail clean and sanitize entire facility, especially if it has been closed. Focus on high contact areas that would be touched by both employees and guests. Do not overlook seldom-touched surfaces. Follow sanitizing material guidance to ensure effective cleaning and to protect surfaces.
- Avoid all food contact surfaces when using disinfectants
- Between diners, clean/sanitize table condiments, digital ordering devices, check presenters, self-service areas, tabletops and common touch areas. Single use items should be discarded. Consider rolled silverware and eliminating table presets.
- Remove lemons and unwrapped straws from self-service drink stations
- Clean and sanitize reusable menus. If paper menus are in use, they should be discarded after each customer use.
- Implement procedures to increase cleaning and sanitizing frequency of surfaces in the back-of-house. Avoid all food contact surfaces when using disinfectants.
- Check restrooms regularly and clean and sanitize based on frequency of use.
- Make hand sanitizer readily available to guests. Consider touchless hand sanitizing solutions.

## **MONITOR EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND PERSONAL HYGIENE**

- Per existing FDA Food Code requirements, employees who are sick should remain home.
- If an employee should become ill or present signs of illness the operator should identify that during a pre-work screening and follow their established policies on when they are allowed to return to work. At a minimum to follow, CDC guidelines: self-isolate for seven days from the onset of symptoms and be symptom free for 3 days without medication.
- Taking employees' temperatures is at the operators' discretion. The CDC has not mandated taking an employee's temperature and any operator who chooses to do so should engage health officials first and adopt policies aligned with proper procedures. CDC guidance on a minimum temperature indicative for fever is 100° F.
- Per CDC recommendations, face coverings have been shown as an effective tool to mitigate risk from both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals. This mitigation is especially critical in close environments where establishments have challenges maintaining a 3 to 6-foot clearance. In some states and local jurisdictions face coverings are required by government officials. In all cases, those coverings worn by employees should be kept clean in accordance with CDC guidance. CDC provides overall cleaning guidance [HERE](#). Employers requiring face coverings should develop a policy based on CDC guidance.
- Train all employees on the importance and expectation of increased frequency of hand washing, the use of hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol, and, clear instruction to avoid touching hands to face.

## **MONITOR SOCIAL DISTANCING**

- Update floor plans for common dining areas, redesigning seating arrangement to ensure at least 6-feet of separation from seating to seating. Limit party size at tables to no more than the established guideline maximums approved recommended by CDC or approved by local and state government. Where practical, especially in booth seating, physical barriers are acceptable. Consider a reservations-only business model or call-ahead seating to better space diners.
- Where the volume of people in an operation (guest and employee) is directed by government on the size of the establishment, the total square footage of the facility should be used to determine the total area, both front and back of house.
- Remind third-party delivery drivers and any suppliers of your internal distancing requirements.
- Post signage on entrance door that no one with a fever or symptoms of COVID-19 is to be permitted in the restaurant.

## MONITOR SOCIAL DISTANCING (CONTINUED)

- Limit contact between wait staff and guests and, where face coverings are not mandated, consider requiring wait staff with direct customer contact to wear face coverings as recommended by the CDC.
- If practical, physical barriers such as partitions or Plexiglas barriers at registers are acceptable.
- Use technological solutions where possible to reduce person-to-person interaction: mobile ordering; mobile access to menus to plan-in-advance; text on arrival for seating; contactless payment options.
- Provide hand sanitizer for use by guests including contactless hand sanitizing stations and post signage reminding guests about social distancing and thanking them for their patience as you work to ensure their safety.
- Do not allow guests to congregate in waiting areas or bar areas. Design a process to ensure guest separation while waiting to be seated. This can include floor markings, outdoor distancing, waiting in cars, etc. Consider an exit from the facility separate from the entrance. Determine ingress/egress to and from restrooms to establish paths that mitigates proximity for guests and staff.
- Where possible, workstations should be staggered to avoid employees standing directly opposite one another or next to each other. Where six feet of separation is not possible, consider spacing options that include other mitigation efforts (e.g., face coverings) with increased frequency of cleaning and sanitizing surfaces.
  - Note: Face coverings may be required by government officials and/or restaurant operators to mitigate the distancing gap. If not mandated, face coverings are recommended by CDC and when worn they should be cleaned daily according to CDC guidance cited above.
- Establish limit numbers to reduce contact in employee break rooms.
- With larger staffs, use communication boards to or digital messaging to convey pre-shift meeting information.

### SOURCES:

<https://restaurant.org/Covid19>

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/#criteria>

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cleaning-disinfection.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/cleaning-disinfection.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cleaning-disinfection.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/cleaning-disinfection.html)