

COVID-19

OPERATING GUIDANCE

A GUIDE FOR THE
RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

UPDATED July, 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. And practice appropriate social distancing as required by your local authority.

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. The public may still want reassurance.
- ✓ 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 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 food establishments 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:

- 1.** Training staff with this guidance
- 2.** Encouraging vaccinations for staff
- 3.** Appropriate social distancing
- 4.** Employee health monitoring and personal hygiene
- 5.** Food safety
- 6.** Cleaning and sanitizing
- 7.** Effective ventilation

Combine this guidance with your existing policies as well as our [free ServSafe training videos](#) on COVID-19 Precautions for Delivery, Takeout, and Conflict De-escalation.

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., sanitation 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. Employees must be trained to always follow their employer policies and HIPAA guidelines.

- ✓ 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 sanitizing, 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 presents signs of illness, identify them during a pre-work screening, send the employee home, and ask them to see their health care provider. 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.

✓ CDC now advises that fully vaccinated persons can work without wearing face coverings. However, in situations where appropriate social distancing can't be maintained, CDC still recommends face coverings. And masks are still recommended for customer interactions such as during service.

✓ 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 sanitized.

✓ 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, rules, 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 sanitize entire facility (follow [EPA safety guidelines](#)). Sanitize both high-touch points and seldom-touched surfaces in back-of-house, front-of-house and guest-service areas. When using sanitizers, ensure they're 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. If you need to use a disinfectant due to exposure to COVID-19, the food-contact surface should be washed, rinsed and sanitized after disinfectant use and prior to reuse of the surface.
- ✓ Clean and sanitize restrooms regularly and, when possible, stock them with individual disinfectant wipes.
- ✓ Hand hygiene is critical. Make hand sanitizer readily available and consider touchless hand-sanitizing solutions.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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, including those that use ultraviolet-light disinfection, 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).



OSHA GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING WORKERS

Most employers no longer need to take steps to protect their workers from COVID-19 exposure in workplaces **where all employees are fully vaccinated.**

Employers should still take steps to **protect unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk workers** in their workplaces.

✔ **Grant paid time off for employees to get vaccinated.** Employers with fewer than 500 employees may be eligible for tax credits under the [American Rescue Plan Act](#) if they provide paid time off for employees who decide to receive the vaccine and to recover from any potential side effects from the vaccine. The CDC provides information on the [benefits](#) and safety of vaccinations, including the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine. Some of the population is reluctant to be vaccinated and those concerns should be respected.

✔ **Instruct these workers to stay home:**

- Those who are infected
- Unvaccinated workers who have had close contact with someone who tested positive for SARS-CoV-2
- All workers with COVID-19 symptoms

Ensure that absence policies are nonpunitive. The [ARP](#) tax credits are available to eligible employers that pay sick and family leave for qualified leave from April 1, 2021, through September 30, 2021. More information is available from the [IRS](#).

✔ **Implement physical distancing for unvaccinated and otherwise at-risk workers in all communal work areas.**

Generally, 6 ft. is recommended between them and other unvaccinated people—workers or customers. Employers could also consider implementing flexible work hours, staggering shifts, and remote work.

At fixed workstations where these employees are not able to maintain a 6-ft. distance, appropriate barriers should be used to block face-to-face pathways to prevent direct transmission of respiratory droplets.

✔ **Provide unvaccinated and otherwise at-risk workers with face coverings** or surgical masks.

The CDC provides general [guidance](#) on proper mask use. Under federal anti-discrimination laws, employers may need to provide reasonable accommodation for any workers who are unable to wear or have difficulty wearing certain types of face coverings due to a disability, or who need a religious accommodation under Title VII. When an employer determines that PPE is necessary to protect unvaccinated and otherwise at-risk workers, the employer must provide PPE in accordance with [relevant mandatory OSHA](#) standards and should consider providing PPE in accordance with other industry-specific guidance. Encourage and support voluntary use of PPE.

✔ **Educate and train workers on your COVID-19 policies and procedures using accessible formats and in language they understand.** Communicate supportive workplace policies clearly, frequently, and via multiple methods to promote a safe and healthy workplace. Communications should be in plain language that unvaccinated and otherwise at-risk workers understand (including non-English languages).

✔ **Suggest that unvaccinated customers, visitors, or guests wear face coverings** if there are unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk workers in the workplace who are likely to interact with them.

✔ **Maintain ventilation systems.** Some measures to improve ventilation are discussed in CDC's [Ventilation in Buildings](#) and in the [OSHA Alert: COVID-19 Guidance on Ventilation in the Workplace](#).

✔ **Perform routine cleaning and disinfection.** If someone who has been in the facility within hours is suspected of having or confirmed to have COVID-19, follow the CDC [cleaning and disinfection](#) recommendations.

✔ **Record and report COVID-19 infections and deaths** as required under [OSHA rules](#) in 29 CFR 1904.

✔ **Implement protections from retaliation** and set up an anonymous process for workers to voice concerns about COVID-19-related hazards.

✔ **Follow other applicable mandatory OSHA standards**



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