



OPERATIONS

CDC updates guidelines for reopening restaurant dining rooms and bars

COVID-19 contact person should be appointed for each shift

Bret Thorn | May 21, 2020

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued a new set of more detailed guidelines for restaurants, following a more limited guidance released last week

The new directives, which the Atlanta-based federal authority makes clear is supplemental to state and local laws, make clear that minimal interaction with

others remains a crucial part of improving safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Related: CDC releases guidelines for reopening restaurant dining rooms and bars

“The more an individual interacts with others, and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread,” it said.

For that reason, it said foodservice limited to drive-thru, delivery, takeout and curbside pickup carries the lowest risk. Adding outside dining with reduced capacity and tables spaced at least six feet apart carries more risk, and allowing indoor dining, even with six-foot distancing and reduced capacity, is riskier still, but not as risky as dining without reduced capacity and appropriate spacing.

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It said a staff person should be appointed for each shift as point of contact responsible for reporting any COVID-19 concerns, and all staff members should know who that is and how to contact them. It said policies should be in place to have staff report to that person if they have symptoms of COVID-19, test positive for the illness or were exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

The CDC said capacity and layout of restaurants and bars should be changed to allow for parties to remain at least six feet apart, such as by marking tables and stalls that are not in use. It recommended offering takeout, drive-thru and delivery “as applicable” and prioritizing outdoor seating as much as possible.

It suggested asking customers to wait away from the restaurant, such as in their cars, while waiting to be seated or to pick up food, and recommended posting those policies on operators’ web sites as well as on signs. It also recommended use of apps, texts and signs to let them know when food or a table is ready, but not buzzers or other shared objects.

It also suggested restaurants give dine-in customers the option of ordering ahead of time to limit the amount of time spent in the dining rooms.

The CDC recommended against self-serve food and drink stations including buffets and salad bars.

It also recommended installing physical barriers, such as sneeze guards and partitions, “particularly in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain at least six feet apart.” That could include in kitchens as well as at cash registers, host stands and food pickup areas.

Visual guides such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signage indicating people should stay six feet apart should be used. They should be used where lines form as well as in the kitchen and at the bar.

Shared spaces such as break rooms should either be closed, or their usage should be staggered and the spaces cleaned and disinfected between use.

The CDC said options should be offered for employees who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 to limit their risk of exposure, including people aged 65 or older, people with chronic lung, liver or kidney disease, serious heart conditions, diabetes or moderate or severe asthma, immunosuppressed people, and severely obese people with a body mass index of 40 or higher.

Those options could include jobs with less contact with others such as inventory management or carrying out administrative duties while working remotely.

It also recommended staggering or rotating shifts and seatings to limit the number of people in the restaurant at the same time.

It recommended against gatherings or meeting where social distancing could not be maintained. It also suggested encouraging employees not to use mass transit if possible.

The guidelines restated the importance of washing hands, staying home when sick and cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces including door handles, cash registers, work stations, sink handles and bathroom stalls. It recommended establishing routines for cleaning each of those surfaces.

It also advised “actively encouraging employees” who are sick or who have recently been in close contact (within six feet or less for longer than around 15 minutes) with people with COVID-19 to stay home.

The CDC recommended requiring all staff to wear cloth face coverings such as masks and to provide them with adequate supplies of soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol — on every table if possible — paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes, cloth face coverings and no-touch and/or foot pedal trash cans.

The guidance also provides links to signs, which it recommends posting in “highly visible locations” such as entrances and in restrooms, of everyday protection measures, explanations of how to stop the spread of germs, how to wash hands properly and how to wear face coverings.

The CDC advised against sharing food, tools, equipment or supplies. It suggested having adequate supplies so those items don’t need to be shared or to clean and disinfect them between use.

It suggested single-use menus, condiments and food containers as well as disposable utensils, dishes, napkins and tablecloths. If that’s not possible, it recommended handling them with gloves and washing them in a dishwasher or with dish soap and hot water. Employees should wash their hands after removing their gloves.

The CDC also said to avoid using containers or utensils brought in by customers.

For payment, the CDC recommended using touchless options as much as possible. Cash and cards should be placed on a receipt tray or on a counter rather than via

hand-to-hand contact. Pens, counters and other hard surfaces should be disinfected between each use.

In terms of ventilation, the CDC recommended increasing circulation of outdoor as much as possible, such as by opening doors and windows and prioritizing outdoor seating (unless that would endanger people through risk of falling or triggering asthma attacks). Ventilation systems should be checked to make sure they're working properly, the CDC said.

The CDC also advised employers to look after the wellbeing of their employees, including promoting healthy eating, exercise, sufficient sleep “and finding time to unwind.” It also suggested encouraging “employees to talk with people they trust about their concerns and how they are feeling,” and provided the number for the national distress hotline: 800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.

More details, including recognizing symptoms of COVID-19 and suggestions for backup staffing plans, can be found at the CDC's web site .

For our most up-to-date coverage, visit the coronavirus homepage.

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