

Guidance on Best Practices for Restaurant and Foodservice Operators: Preparing for When North Carolina Begins to Reopen from COVID-19 Stay-at-Home Orders

North Carolina's restaurant, foodservice, and lodging businesses have always been fully committed to food safety, customer safety, and employee safety. When North Carolina begins to emerge from the COVID-19 public health crisis and reopen more fully from stay-at-home orders, restaurants and hotels across the state remain committed to sustaining their leadership role in keeping employees, customers, and guests safe.

Given the social distancing requirements that have been in place for quite some time, some consumers and guests may have a heightened awareness of safety and social distancing protocol following this crisis.

Due to this heightened awareness, it is critical for the success of every restaurant, foodservice, and lodging facility that every employee follow all health and safety best practices. Further, make it crystal clear to your customers what measures your organization is taking to ensure the safety of your dining guests and the general public. This includes, but is not limited to, prominently posting your health and safety measures in your facility, on your website, and on your social media channels.

While we expect guidance will be released in the coming weeks by the Office of the Governor and/or the NC Department of Health and Human Services, NCRLA recommends that hospitality businesses review the following steps and begin preparing now for reopening. These measures are intended to help you demonstrate a commitment to health and safety as NC emerges from stay at home orders, with an awareness that social distancing measures are likely to remain in place for some period of time:

- If your facility has been closed and you are planning to reopen, communicate with your local health department prior to reopening and restocking your facility. While North Carolina does not require an inspection for a restaurant or foodservice facility to reopen after a closure under this circumstance, communication with your local health department is highly encouraged. Formulate a plan to ensure the safety of your facility and the food you serve, including updated training for employees who have been out of work and for new hires. Examples of some resources include:
 - [Update your food safety certification](#) – note there will be a grace period to get this completed if your certifications have lapsed during the pandemic.
 - [NCRLA's Health Department Resource Page](#)
 - [Foodservice re-opening checklist](#) (example from Chatham County)
- Continue to follow the high food safety standards required to operate a food service business in North Carolina, but also pursue additional ServSafe® training online courses. These courses are always available online, providing guidance for restaurant and foodservice team members to make sure they fully understand required safety and

hygiene practices. While not all courses are required by the health department(s), you may want to require each staff member attend at least minimum training as a way to show your commitment to the highest standards of food safety

- Create, execute and post publicly a full scale “ready for dine-in” cleaning and sanitizing protocol in preparation for welcoming customers.
- Continue to monitor your employees’ health, including a screening at the start of their shift that where possible includes a temperature screening, quickly excusing from work any employee who exhibits symptoms. Actively encourage sick employees to stay home until they are free of fever (without the use of medication) for at least 72 hours (three full days) AND symptoms have improved for at least 72 hours AND at least seven days have passed since symptoms first began. Do not require a healthcare provider’s note to validate the illness or return to work of employee’s sick with acute respiratory illness.
 - Create an operating plan for any instance of an employee with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.
- Consider creating one-time use, disposable paper menus, chalkboard menus, digital menus that can be accessed by personal devices to minimize repeat handling of menus as it will be very hard to properly sanitize menus between guests.
- Consider removing condiments and salt/pepper shakers from the tables and provide by request and sanitizing when the tables change over – you may consider single use condiment containers, but note that reusable containers must be sanitized between customers.
- Consider converting to paper napkins or reducing the use of table linens to reduce the handling and transport of linen products to be laundered. If not possible, create a plan for safely handling, storing and transporting linens.
- Create a scheduled sanitizing procedure for all high-touch surfaces, including, but not limited to doorknobs, hand rails, bathroom fixtures, customer payment items, etc.
- Have hand sanitizer and sanitizing products readily available for employees and customers.
- Each business should determine, post and enforce a maximum number of customers allowed in a location at one time - based on factors such as square footage and layout of dine-in area (perhaps leaning on some ratio of your fire occupancy number) and what the current social distancing rules are. This determination should also be used for dine-out or patio seating areas. This number can be modified as the Governor’s gathering number and other social distancing rules change over time.

- Post this conspicuously on your website and at your entrance so your customers know what to expect. Train your staff well on the best way to communicate this to your guests, especially those who may be disappointed when your determined capacity is reached.
- Allow appropriate social distancing between tables/groups of 6 feet.
 - We suggest where possible removing tables to make your dining area as clear as possible for social distancing appropriate movement. Where that is not possible, clearly mark which tables are not available for seating. Communicate this clearly to staff and customers.
 - Designate with signage, tape, or by other means appropriate social distancing spacing for employees and customers. This should include to the highest degree possible waiting areas, kitchen, prep areas.
- Consider plexiglass partitions in seating, back of the house, and service areas.
- If you are likely to have customers waiting to enter your establishment, designate social distancing appropriate spacing outside.
- Make your guests as comfortable with the new norms of waiting as possible. Having a text system to alert guests of available seating is more important now than ever.
- Continue to follow best social distancing and minimal contact procedures for carry out and delivery.
 - Have a plan in place to continue to have a strong carry out and delivery business, even while ramping up your facility's dine in process and business.
 - Some customers will be eager to venture out to the greatest degree allowed, while others will remain nervous. Acknowledging and accommodating both groups is important at this time.
- Allow your employees to wear masks or face coverings. If possible, procure a supply to make available to your staff.
- Allow customers to wear personal protective equipment such as masks or gloves within your facility, making them feel welcome and as safe as possible.
- Make sure your online presence is robust and acknowledges fully all you are doing to operate safely.
- Keep regular operating hours and post them, make it clear when your facility is open for dine in, carry out, delivery.

- Communicate, Train, Communicate – then do it all over again.
 - o The way you welcome your staff back and meet them where they are in relation to potential anxiety over the current societal circumstances or any other issues they are having will go a long way toward ensuring your long term success.
 - o The same is true of your customers.
 - o Training your staff how to communicate to your customers completes this circle.