



## Interim Guidance for Restaurants (March 26, 2021)

Businesses and organizations should follow the guidelines below to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**Guidelines for Restaurants:** Any place where people gather poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. Restaurants should create and implement a plan to minimize that risk. The guidance below will help restaurants reduce the spread of COVID-19 in their communities.

In addition to the requirements below, certain businesses **must follow** Closure Periods or Stay at Home Orders, when they are in effect. For more information on any requirements that are currently in effect and how this applies to your business, please visit [Business Closure Periods and Stay at Home Restrictions](#).

### **This guidance covers the following topics:**

- Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure
- Cloth Face Coverings
- Cleaning and Hygiene
- Monitoring for Symptoms
- Protecting Vulnerable Populations
- Combatting Misinformation
- Water and Ventilation Systems
- Additional Resources

### **Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure**

[Social distancing](#) is a key tool to decrease the spread of COVID-19. Social distancing (“physical distancing”) means keeping space between you and other people outside of your home. Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people; do not gather in groups; stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings.

### **Restaurants are required to:**

- Ensure social distancing by arranging tables and seating to achieve at least 6-foot separation between parties for indoor and outdoor dining.
  - Each group of people sitting at a counter should be separated by six (6) feet.
- For indoor spaces, limit to 75% of stated fire capacity (18 people per 1,000 square feet if there is not a fire code number available) AND ensure sufficient social distancing with at least 6-foot separation between groups or families.

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- ❑ Outdoor spaces can operate up to 100% occupancy (24 people per 1,000 square feet if there is not a fire code number available) AND ensure sufficient social distancing with at least 6-foot separation between individuals or groups or families.
  - i. Limit the number of people in the space so that groups can stay six (6) feet apart.
  - ii. Arrange the restaurant so that customers sitting at a table are not within six (6) feet of any customers sitting at another table. Moreover, each group of customers sitting at a counter should be separated from other groups by six (6) feet.
- ❑ Post the reduced “Emergency Maximum Capacity” in a conspicuous place. [Sign templates](#) are available in English and Spanish on the NC DHHS COVID-19 response site.
- ❑ Post signage reminding people about social distancing (staying at least 6 feet away from others). [Know Your W's](#) sign templates are available in English and Spanish on the NC DHHS COVID-19 response website.
- ❑ Mark six (6) feet of spacing in lines at high-traffic areas for customers, such as any cash register or any place where customers wait to be seated
- ❑ If tents or other enclosed structures are used for outdoor dining areas, air flow and ventilation must be maintained to assist with COVID-19 control. Tents or enclosed structures must meet the following:
  - Maintained with three sides at least 50% open.
  - If mesh is used, the screens should allow free movement of air and be no less than 0.011 gauge with an 18 x 16 mesh count.
  - Tents or enclosed outdoor structures that are not maintained at least 50% open on three sides should have forced air mechanical ventilation to control respiratory particles and placed to minimize air blowing from one person directly at another individual.
- ❑ If individual dining pods are used, they must be designed and implemented to allow adequate air flow. It is required that pods allow for settling of respiratory particles and must be cleaned and disinfected using an [EPA registered disinfectant effective against SARS-CoV-2](#) between uses. Adequate contact time to allow for disinfection must be allowed between users. Follow manufacturer’s directions for use to avoid inhalation hazards that may be associated with cleaners and disinfectants.
  - Individual dining pods are not recommended for use outside of individuals from the same household.
- ❑ Ensure that local fire and building code officials are consulted before installing any outdoor enclosures.
- ❑ Any meeting or function held in a private room in a Restaurant should follow [NCDHHS Interim Guidance for Meeting Rooms and Event Spaces](#)

### **It is recommended that restaurants:**

- ❑ Allow no more than 10 people at a table, unless they are a family from the same household. You do not need to ask whether groups are a family.
- ❑ Don’t use shared tables among multiple parties unless the seats can be arranged to maintain social distancing between parties.
- ❑ Require patrons to wait outside, with markings to ensure 6 feet apart, with floor markings and instructions for social distancing.
- ❑ Provide hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) at the entrance when available.

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- Provide education to employees on how to properly wear, remove, and wash or dispose of face coverings.
- Install physical barriers, such as sneeze guards and partitions at cash registers, or other food pickup areas where maintaining physical separation of 6 feet is difficult.
- Advise all waitstaff to stay 6 feet away from customers to the extent possible.
- Advise all employees to stay 6 feet away from each other to the extent possible.
- Stagger seating times to the extent possible by using reservation systems or other methods; rotate or stagger shifts to limit the number of employees in the workplace at the same time
- Consider alternative options to gathering lots of people in a small area, such as having people wait in their cars and alerting them by phone when their table is ready.
- Staff meetings should be held virtually or provided by written notes instead of congregating.
- Reduce condiments and other items on the table for use between customers; provide condiments by request only; or provide disposable condiment packs.
- Continue to provide take-out, curbside pickup, and delivery options.
- Use rolled utensils and discontinue preset table settings.
- Continue to offer contactless payment options, curbside pickup, and delivery; if possible, use phone app technology to alert patrons when their table is ready to avoid use of pagers or buzzers.
- Use touchless payment options as much as possible. Ask customers and employees to exchange cash or card payments by placing on a receipt tray or on the counter rather than by hand. Wipe any pens, counters, or trays between use and between customers with a disinfecting wipe.
- Designate an ordering area at bars when wait staff are not available to visit each table. The ordering area should be at least 6 feet from other patrons seated at bar.

### Cloth Face Coverings

There is growing evidence that wearing a face covering can help reduce the spread of COVID-19, especially because people may be infected with the virus and not know it.

#### Restaurants are **required** to:

- Have all employees wear a face covering unless the worker states that an exception applies.
- Have all customers wear a face covering at all times unless they are actively eating or drinking, or the customer states that an exception applies.
- Visit NC DHHS [COVID-19 response site](#) for more information about the face covering [guidance](#) and access sign templates that are available in English and Spanish.

#### It is recommended that restaurants:

- Provide cloth face coverings for employees and ask them to properly launder using hot water and a high heat dryer between uses.
- Provide disposable face coverings to customers to wear while in the establishment.

### Cleaning and Hygiene

Washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer reduces the spread of transmission.

**Restaurants are required to:**

- Perform ongoing and routine environmental cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas (e.g., doors, doorknobs, rails) with an [EPA approved disinfectant for SARS-CoV-2](#) (the virus that causes COVID-19), and increase disinfection during peak times or high customer density times and of all shared objects (e.g., payment terminals, tables, countertops/bars, receipt trays, condiment holders) between use.
  - Disinfect dining tables and booths, including condiment containers and reusable menus, between each use, allowing the disinfectant to sit for the necessary contact time recommended by the manufacturer.
- Promote frequent use of hand washing and hand sanitizer for wait/food service staff upon reporting to work and frequently throughout shift. Hand washing is required to at least meet the requirements as specified in the [North Carolina Food Code Manual](#), Sections 2-301.12, 2-301.14, and 2-301.15.

**It is recommended that restaurants:**

- Systematically and frequently check and refill hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol) and assure soap and hand drying materials are available at sinks.
- Use disposable menus, a menu display board, or mobile options, between customers/groups.
- Use single use/disposable linens when possible. If using disposable linens is not possible, sanitize cloth linens after each customer.
- Provide, whenever available, hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) at the entrance and other areas.
- Avoid offering any self-serve food or drink options, such as buffets, salad bars, and drink stands.
- If self-serve is used:
  - Provide an attendant at buffet areas to monitor social distancing and remove any contaminated food or utensils.
  - Change, clean, and sanitize serving utensils (e.g., tongs, bulk food dispenser spoons) every 30 minutes.
  - Have employees plate food for customers or provide increased monitoring of self-service areas.
  - Encourage handwashing and hand sanitizer use among customers before using self-service area. Provide hand sanitizer at the beginning of each service line and post signage requesting use before handling utensils.

## Monitoring for Symptoms

Encourage employees to self-monitor for symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath. If they develop symptoms, they should notify their supervisor and stay home. More information on [how to monitor for symptoms](#) is available from the CDC.

**Restaurants are required to:**

- Post signage at the main entrance requesting that people who have been symptomatic with fever and/or cough not enter, such as [Know Your Ws/Stop if You Have Symptoms](#) flyers (English - [Color](#), [Black & White](#); Spanish - [Color](#), [Black & White](#)).
- Employees who have symptoms when they arrive at work or become sick during the day should immediately be separated from other employees, customers, and visitors and sent home.

**It is recommended that restaurants:**

- Have a plan in place for immediately removing employees from work if symptoms develop.
- Establish and enforce sick leave policies to prevent the spread of disease, including:
  - Enforcing employees staying home if sick.
  - Encouraging liberal use of sick leave policy.
  - Expanding paid leave policies to allow employees to stay home when sick.
- [Per CDC guidelines](#), if an employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is presumed positive by a medical professional due to symptoms, the employee should be excluded from work until:
  - No fever for at least 24 hours since recovery (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) AND
  - Other symptoms have improved (e.g., coughing, shortness of breath) AND
  - At least 10 days have passed since first symptoms

**\*A test-based strategy is no longer recommended discontinue isolation or precautions and employers should not require documentation of a negative test before allowing a worker to return.**

**Restaurants can consider:**

- Conducting daily [symptom](#) screening (use this standard interview questionnaire) ([English](#) | [Spanish](#)) of employees at entrance with immediately sending symptomatic workers home to [isolate](#).
- [Per CDC guidelines](#), if an employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19 but does not have symptoms, they should remain out of work until 10 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test results, assuming they have not subsequently developed symptoms since their positive test.
- Require symptomatic employees to wear masks until leaving the facility. Cleaning and disinfecting procedures should be implemented by designated personnel following [CDC guidelines](#) once sick employee leaves.
- Provide employees with information on help lines to access information or other support in reference to COVID-19, e.g. 211 and Hope4NC Helpline (1-855-587-3463).

## Protecting Vulnerable Populations

Information on who is at higher risk for severe disease is available from the [CDC](#) and [NC DHHS](#).

**It is recommended that restaurants:**

- Designate a specific time for persons at higher risk to access the restaurant without the general population (such as early morning, or late afternoon).
- Enable employees to self-identify as high risk for severe disease and reassign work to minimize face-to-face contact and to allow them to maintain a distance of six feet from others, or to telework if possible.

## Combating Misinformation

Help make sure that the information your employees is getting is coming directly from reliable resources. Use resources from a trusted source like the [CDC](#) or [NCDHHS](#) to promote behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**It is recommended that restaurants:**

- Provide workers with education about COVID-19 strategies, using methods like videos, webinars, or FAQs. Some reliable sources include [NC DHHS COVID-19](#), [Know Your W's: Wear, Wait, Wash](#), [NC DHHS COVID-19 Latest Updates](#), [NC DHHS COVID-19 Materials & Resources](#)
- Promote informational helplines like 211 and Hope4NC and other [Wellness Resources](#).
- Put up signs and posters, such as those found [Know Your W's: Wear, Wait, Wash](#) and those found [Social Media Toolkit for COVID-19](#).
- Message through media and social media.

## Water and Ventilation Systems

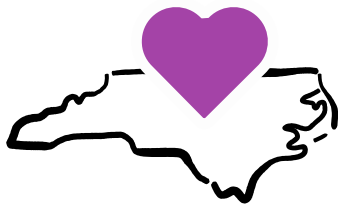
Reduced use of water and ventilation systems can pose their own health hazards. There is increased risk for Legionella and other waterborne pathogens from stagnant or standing water.

**Before reopening, it is recommended that restaurants:**

- Follow the CDC's [Guidance](#) for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation to minimize the risk of diseases associated with water.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety or health risk to people using the facility.

## Additional Resources

- NC DHHS: [North Carolina COVID-19](#)
- CDC: [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)
- CDC: [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)
- CDC: [Reopening Guidance](#)
- EPA: [Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#)
- FDA: [Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- HHS/OSHA: [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)
- DHS: [Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce](#)



**#StayStrongNC**

**Staying apart brings us together.  
Protect your family and neighbors.**

**Learn more at [nc.gov/covid19](https://nc.gov/covid19).**



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