



Interim Guidance for Bars and Lounges (March 26, 2021)

Guidelines for Conducting Business: Any scenario in which many people gather together poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. All organizations and programs that gather groups of people should create and implement a plan to minimize the opportunity for COVID-19 transmission. The guidance below will help bars reduce the spread of COVID-19.

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
- Communications and Combatting Misinformation
- Water and Ventilation Systems
- Additional Resources

Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure

[Social distancing](#) is an important way to decrease the spread of COVID-19. Social distancing (“physical distancing”) means keeping space between yourself 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.

Bars are **required** to:

- For indoor and outdoor spaces, limit occupancy to 50% of stated fire capacity for each building, room, or other indoor space controlled by the facility-(If there is not a fire capacity number for the room, limit occupancy 12 people per 1,000 square feet) AND ensure sufficient social distancing with guests at least 6 feet apart.
- Establish seating areas for patrons to discourage standing at the bar or in commonly trafficked areas.
- Require that all patrons be seated.

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- Ensure social distancing by arranging tables and seating to achieve at least 6-foot separation between parties.
- Ensure each group of people sitting at a counter are separated by six (6) feet.
- Limit self-service or walk up service if possible to prevent patrons congregating around bar area.
- Designate an ordering area at bar when wait staff are not available to visit each table. The ordering area must be at least 6 feet from other patrons seated at bar.
- For live music or entertainment, ensure that there is at least 6 feet distance between performers and customers.
- Post the reduced “Emergency Maximum Capacity” in a conspicuous place. [Sign templates](#) are available in English and Spanish on NC DHHS COVID-19 response site.
- Post signage at the main entrance that reminds people to stay 6 feet apart.
 - [NC DHHS Know Your Ws](#) provides [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Combined English and Spanish](#) versions of the “Wait” flyer.
- Clearly mark six (6) feet of spacing in lines at high-traffic areas for customers, such as any cash register, ID check, or any place where customers may congregate or wait.

It is recommended that bars:

- Provide service only to seated patrons, or, if not applicable, to patrons in designated areas that are practicing Social Distancing.
- Close any dance floors.
- Clearly mark designated entry and exit points to the extent possible.
- Develop reservation times to the extent possible to help limit wait times and lines.
- Develop and use systems that allow for online, email, or phone transactions.
- 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.
- Place partitions between bartenders/servers and customers when possible. Physical barriers do not replace face coverings.
- Install physical barriers (e.g., plexiglass) to protect security personnel at entrance as they check IDs. Physical barriers do not replace face coverings.
- Allow games, such as pool and darts, to be played only if players maintain 6 feet of distance from other players, game equipment is not shared by players during game play, and equipment is cleaned and disinfected between use. Keep game equipment behind the bar until requested.

Cloth Face Coverings

There is 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.

Bars 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.
- Make good-faith efforts to provide to workers either a one-week supply of reusable face coverings or a new disposable face covering each day.
- New face coverings should be provided during the work day if the worker’s face covering becomes soiled, torn, or wet.

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- 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 bars:

- Provide disposable face coverings to customers to wear while at the establishment.

Cleaning and Hygiene

Washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer (with 60% or more alcohol content) reduces the spread of transmission.

Bars are **required** to:

- Promote frequent use of hand washing and hand sanitizer for staff and individuals. Require handwashing of staff immediately upon reporting to work, after contact with individuals, after performing cleaning and disinfecting activities, and frequently throughout the day.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) at the entrance, and any other areas throughout premises as needed.
- Perform ongoing and routine environmental cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas and shared objects (e.g., dining tables, booths, counters, payment terminals, countertops/bars, receipt trays, condiment holders, and reusable menus) 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.

It is recommended that bars:

- Systematically and frequently check and refill hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol) and assure soap and hand drying materials are available at all sinks.
- Remove soft surfaces and items difficult to disinfect in areas to the extent possible.
- Provide tissues for proper cough and sneeze hygiene.

Monitoring for Symptoms

Staff should be encouraged 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.

Bars are **required** to:

- Have a plan in place for immediately removing employees from work if symptoms develop. 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 or to their healthcare provider.
- Post signage at the main entrance requesting that people who are 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](#)).

It is recommended that bars:

- Establish and enforce sick leave policies to prevent the spread of disease, including:
 - o Requiring employees to staying home if sick.
 - o Encouraging liberal use of sick leave policy.
 - o 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:

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- 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 to discontinue isolation or precautions and employers should not require documentation of a negative test before allowing a worker to return.**

- ❑ [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, assuming they have not subsequently developed symptoms since their positive test.
- ❑ Require symptomatic employees to wear masks until leaving the facility. Cleaning and disinfecting procedure 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)

Bars can consider:

- ❑ Conduct daily [symptom](#) screening (standard interview questionnaire [English](#) | [Spanish](#)) of employees at entrance to workplace with immediately sending symptomatic workers home to [isolate](#).

Protecting Vulnerable Populations

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

It is recommended that bars:

- ❑ Enable staff to self-identify as high risk for severe disease and reassign work to minimize their contact with customers and other employees.

Combating Misinformation

Help ensure that the information your staff 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 bars:

- ❑ 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 Ws: Wear, Wait, Wash](#) and those found [Social Media Toolkit for COVID-19](#).

Water and Ventilation Systems

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

Before opening, it is recommended that bars:

- ❑ Follow the CDC's [Guidance for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown](#) or Reduced Operation to minimize the risk of diseases associated with water.
- ❑ For parts of the indoor business, ensure ventilation systems operate properly and as feasible direct air outside, and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors,

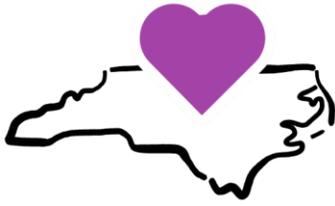
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using fans, or other methods. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety or health risk to people using the facility.

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](#)



#StayStrongNC

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

Learn more at nc.gov/covid19.



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