



*Published: July 20, 2020*

*Updated: July 29, 2020*

## How to Reopen Your Restaurant During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Anne Shaw

**COVID-19** (<https://Sba.Thehartford.Com/Tag/Covid-19/>)

**Industry** (<https://Sba.Thehartford.Com/Tag/Industry/>)

Businesses of all types and sizes have faced big obstacles during COVID-19, but some of the most affected businesses were small restaurants. As some states and municipalities begin to reopen, restaurant owners must stay on top of the new information to make sure they're adhering to the safety guidelines and doing their part in slowing the spread. If you're wondering how to successfully and safely reopen your restaurant during these times, consider and plan around two main factors:

1. Promoting the safety of your employees and your customers
2. Updating how you market your restaurant during these times

Use this guide to cover both factors as you create a plan for reopening your restaurant.

### Health and Safety Measures for Reopening Your Restaurant

Feedback

Before we jump into ideas for a reopening plan for your restaurant, it's important to keep in mind that your strategy will depend highly on your location. Guidelines can vary by state or even by city, so read both national *and* local guidelines before reopening. We've included three national resources below. For localized information, look to your local government, trade associations, health officials and/or Chamber of Commerce.

### **Food & Drug Administration Reopening Checklist**

(<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/best-practices-re-opening-retail-food-establishments-during-covid-19-pandemic>)

The FDA has created this web-based and downloadable food safety checklist for restaurant owners to reference while reopening. The checklist covers facility operations, non-food contact surfaces, hand washing stations, social distancing, employee health screening and more.

### **Center for Disease Control Guide for Restaurants and Bars**

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/business-employers/bars-restaurants.html>)

The CDC has created and published a list of considerations for restaurants that are reopening during the pandemic. The document's goal is to help restaurant operators slow the spread of COVID-19 while protecting their "employees, customers and communities." In it, the CDC offers guiding principles, suggestions to best prevent further spread of the virus, tips on creating healthy environments and operations, how to handle employee health and more.

### **National Restaurant Association's COVID-19 Reopening Guide**

(<https://go.restaurant.org/covid19-reopening-guide>)

This downloadable guide pulls from both the CDC and the FDA's resources, incorporating guidelines, information and best practices from each. The Association's goal for this guide is "to help restaurants open safely." To do so, they provide recommendations on cleaning and sanitation, personal hygiene, social distancing and health monitoring.

**Restaurants should be taking health and safety measures seriously. While reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic, try to:**

- Offer touchless transactions via mobile order and pay apps
- Remove or “tape off” every other table in the dining room
- Utilize outdoor seating as much as possible
- Define and visually mark desired traffic patterns and/or line spacing for employees and customers
- Designate separate areas for takeout pickup
- Provide new safety attire to all staff members and train them how to properly wear them (e.g. masks must cover nose and mouth, gloves should be replaced after touching certain surfaces, etc.)
- Remove communal condiments (e.g. napkin dispensers, ketchup, salt and pepper shakers, etc.) and instruct staff to provide individual portions upon request
- Call or text patrons when their table is ready
- Set up a mobile wait list feature, like those available via Resy and Yelp
- Check each employees’ temperature before their shift
- Limit group sizes
- Offer hand sanitizer at each table or in convenient locations around the dining room

## **7 Steps to Create a Strategy for Reopening Your Restaurant**

If you’re ready to begin planning for your restaurant’s reopening, follow the below steps to ensure that you are well-prepared to not only protect everyone’s health, but also to succeed.

### **1. Read national and local reopening guidelines for the restaurant industry.**

In addition to the national resources listed above, seek out local guidelines as well. As you read through materials from both national and local sources, begin recording a list of all recommended changes or new procedures that restaurants should implement to maintain a healthy environment.

### **2. Decide which safety measures and new protocols you should implement to best protect your customers and employees.**

Review the above list and decide if enough safety measures are feasible to foster a safe environment. If you feel confident that you can make updates to address most of the guidelines, then it’s likely that your restaurant is a good candidate for

reopening. Begin creating a new checklist of exactly which steps you need to take to implement new safety measures.

### **3. Train your staff on how to create and maintain a healthy and safe environment.**

Once you have a clearly defined plan, take care of everything you can before training your staff on the changes. You might choose to create various inspection checklists for opening and closing the restaurant. This may help ensure your restaurant stays as clean as possible, because your staff can use this at every table before seating each new dining party. As you train your team, remind them to be friendly and inviting, while showing customers that your restaurant is taking their health seriously. Be ready to address concerns if customers question your policies.

### **4. Proactively communicate new safety protocols to customers.**

If you plan to invite guests back via email or social media (<https://sba.thehartford.com/business-management/marketing/social-media-marketing-basics/>), be sure to share a clear and comprehensive list of the safety measures that you have implemented. This will help them feel comfortable in knowing their health is a priority to you. Let them know what to expect by including any new dining rules you may have temporarily implemented, like a group size limit or a request to wear masks until food arrives. Train your hosts to share safety information with guests as they arrive. This could include pointing out marked traffic patterns on the way to the restroom, or waiting outside for their table. You may also consider printing signs with important health and safety information to post at your doors.

### **5. Offer specials to get people back in the door.**

Consider novel culinary experiences or unique ways you can partner with local artists and musicians that go beyond just serving your customers their meal. These are great opportunities to build excitement and buzz around your reopening. Now may also be a good time to work with a marketing consultant (<https://sba.thehartford.com/home/everything-you-need-to-know-about-hiring-marketing-consultants/>) who can offer some fresh ideas to inspire customers to return to your restaurant. For instance, some places have started to offer take-home specials that customers who dine in can add to their order.

## **6. Find ways to personally thank customers for returning.**

Without customers, your reopening can't be successful. Be sure to thank the ones who do come in and who continue to order take out. For in-person diners, make a personal visit to their table to sincerely show them your appreciation face-to-face for their support. Consider including a personal note of thanks to all takeout orders. In both cases, you can encourage patrons to return for more by offering them discounts on their next orders within a certain time frame.

## **7. Continue exploring new menu items and other ways to make food available to customers who aren't yet comfortable dining in.**

Not all your customers will be ready to venture out yet, but that doesn't mean they don't want to support your restaurant. Consider how you can best take care of this group of patrons. For instance, is there a safer way to take their orders? Whether it's old-fashioned phone ordering or modern mobile ordering, communicate how they can safely get their food. Additionally, explore whether you can offer new types of menu items for those who want to stay home, including make-at-home meal kits, grocery kits and other types of family-style take out. Some restaurants have even offered cocktails by the gallon! When it comes to safely getting orders to these customers, consider setting up convenient pickup locations, allowing curbside pickups or even offering a delivery service.

As you reopen, keep in mind that it's best to have a flexible mindset and a fluid plan in place. Depending on local case numbers, guidelines and restrictions will likely change as communities gradually reopen. By creating a strategy that includes options for customers who aren't yet ready to dine in, you're training your staff and your customers on how to handle future ordering in the case of potential reclosures. These new habits will serve you well, delivering preparation you didn't have the last time. And, of course, if you didn't have an insurance plan that protected your business before, then you likely remember the sting. Make an effort to ensure you have the right business insurance (<https://www.thehartford.com/business-insurance/restaurant>) in place for your restaurant.

**Next Steps:** Want to learn more? Sign up for the Small Biz Ahead newsletter (<https://www.thehartford.com/business-insurance/sba-subscribe>) to receive a weekly roundup of the latest tools, trends, and resources.

---

## Leave a Reply

*Disclaimer: Comments are subject to moderation and removal without cause or justification and may take up to 24 hours to be seen in comments. Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \* Please do not include personal policy information; if you have questions or concerns regarding your policy with The Hartford, please log into your account or you can speak directly to a Customer Service Representative (<https://www.thehartford.com/contact-the-hartford>).*

**Name \***

**Email \***

**Notify me of follow-up comments by email.**

**Notify me of new posts by email.**

**Comment**

**Post Comment**