

ESTABLISHING YOUR
NEW NORMAL:
A COMPREHENSIVE
GUIDE TO NAVIGATING
FOODSERVICE
DURING COVID-19



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INTRODUCTION

Professionals in the foodservice industry are used to working in challenging environments, but this? This is something completely different.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hampered the efforts of foodservice workers in every facet of the industry and brought some segments to utter standstills. And now, as quarantines relax and businesses open, the objective turns toward returning to a new normal in as safe a fashion as possible.

It's a tall task and one this eBook aims to help with. By breaking down key considerations for different business segments and providing overall guidance, this eBook can be your guide to navigating a safer, more effective new normal.*

** Nothing herein constitutes legal advice or other formal direction or guidance of any kind. The information herein is offered for general information purposes only.*



A person wearing a light blue button-down shirt, a black face mask, and black gloves is disinfecting a dark wooden table. They are holding a blue spray bottle with a white nozzle and a red trigger. The background shows an outdoor patio area with other tables and potted plants.

SUPPORTING OVERALL HEALTH AND SAFETY PRACTICES

You're already implementing a stringent cleaning/disinfecting regimen to keep your customers and your employees safe, but there are several other things you can do to ward against potential COVID-19 infection.

COMMUNICATE YOUR NEW NORMAL

Whatever changes you've made to your business in the wake of COVID-19, make sure they are displayed prominently for your customers. In addition to signage on the front door, update your website with your new COVID-19 guidelines and do so on your social media channels as well. You can also send messaging through email to your targets and vendors letting them know any new guidelines around doing business at your establishment.

REDUCE THIRD-PARTY DELIVERY SERVICES

Depending on the size and nature of your business, delivery trucks could arrive multiple times a day. Now is the time to reduce those deliveries as much as possible. You can do this by:

- **Making larger, more infrequent orders.** This can reduce your interactions with delivery drivers, though it may require your storage areas to be more packed than normal.
- **Consolidate vendors.** In the past you may have ordered products from multiple suppliers based on metrics like price or freshness. Now your business could benefit from consolidating as many items as possible into a single order. This may result in you paying more for a given item or not shopping locally, but the minimized vendor interaction is worth the risk.



APPOINT DESIGNATED SANITATION WORKERS

Cleaning is everyone's job, but your business may benefit from designated sanitation workers. Whether you staff an employee every shift to do nothing but follow sanitation protocols or you increase the frequency of professional cleaners, it's a worthwhile investment. You could consider adding both to really improve peace of mind for you and your staff.



SET ALCOHOL-BASED HAND SANITIZING STATIONS EVERYWHERE

The front door, at the register, the host stand and outside the bathrooms are ideal areas for hand sanitizing stations for use by employees and guests alike. This move will bring an added cost, but guests and employees will appreciate your efforts to slow contamination.

ELIMINATE PRODUCT SAMPLING AND SELF-SERVE FOOD

Yes, the buffet should go away, at least for the time being. So too should the product sampling stations your grocery store routinely offers. Eliminating these interactions can reduce the potential spread of COVID-19 and protect your employees as well.

CONSIDER PREPACKAGED FOOD OPTIONS

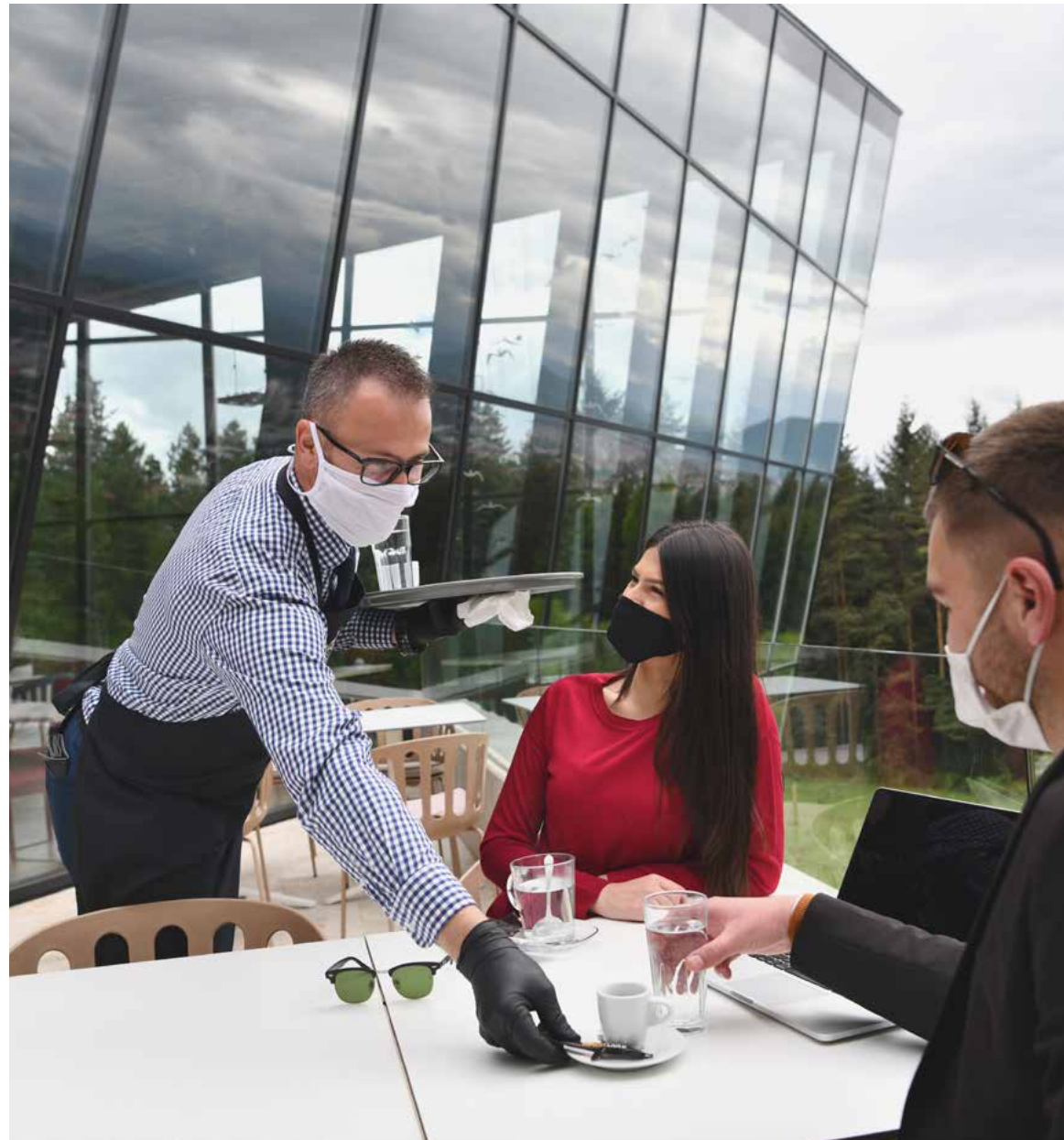
While the conventional continental breakfast may not work in this moment, you can still offer students and guests value by investing in a wider assortment of prepackaged foods. Keep the area stocked and allow everyone to grab items based on their taste and comfort preferences.

OFFER DESIGNATED SHOPPING HOURS FOR HIGH-RISK CUSTOMERS

Patrons over the age of 60 who are at high risk of developing COVID-19 could greatly benefit from shopping periods that minimize their risk. Set your cleaning and sanitation teams to work before their shopping time period begins and you'll make the experience as safe as possible for them.

COMMIT TO REDUCED CAPACITY

In the casual dining environment this means reduced head count at tables, oftentimes roughly 50%, though capacity requirements in your state may vary. In hotels it's a lessened occupancy and in grocery stores it's reduced foot traffic. A reduced number of customers is the only way to ensure social distancing, and you can help counteract this lost revenue by lessening the number of staff you have on hand at any time. Be ready to pick up more of the work yourself until this new normal subsides.





PROTECTING AND SUPPORTING YOUR EMPLOYEES

Your employees are your business's greatest asset, and with some studies showing as much as 10% of staff don't want to return to work¹, it's time to look at additional ways you can protect them during COVID-19.

MAKE MASKS MANDATORY IN YOUR BUSINESS

Some states have already adopted this policy, but if your state has not done so, making masks mandatory is a great way to show your employees you're doing everything in your power to keep them safe. Communicating this mandate to customers through your website, front door, email and social channels is also a good idea to avoid any misunderstandings.

LIMIT STAFF EXPOSURE TO CUSTOMERS

The face of customer service must change during COVID-19. While you want your staff to be available to your customers, there are interactions that can be removed from their day. Automated checkouts or pay-at-the-table stations and discouraging cash payments are just a couple of ways to limit staff exposure. You should also consider adding protective shields in areas where interactions are common, such as your front desk or host stand, if you haven't already.

Finally, encourage your staff to notify you immediately of any customer or student who seems to be exhibiting signs of illness.



INCLUDE SANITATION AND HYGIENE IN YOUR TRAINING REGIMEN

High touch points such as doors, handrails and shopping carts should be sanitized consistently throughout the day and your sanitizer solution should be replaced at least every four hours. Make sure staff are continually washing and sanitizing their hands and consider closing off areas such as break rooms or at least limiting the number of people allowed in the area to follow social distancing guidelines.

SEND EMPLOYEES HOME WHO ARE DISPLAYING SYMPTOMS

If you have an employee who is displaying symptoms of a possible COVID-19 infection — including fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, headache and more — health experts recommend sending them home immediately or telling them to stay home. In addition, you can also conduct training with your staff to make sure everyone is aware of all the potential symptoms of COVID-19. This will enable your employees to be proactive in protecting fellow crew members and staying home if they display any symptoms.





MAKING TOUGH FINANCIAL DECISIONS

The pandemic's impact on the financial health of the foodservice industry has been severe, and many businesses are looking for ways to cut costs wherever possible to stay solvent until things improve. Here are a few ideas you can begin employing in your business today.

AUTOMATE WHENEVER POSSIBLE

If a machine can be used to accomplish a task, you reduce an employee's risk of contamination. This could mean automating your payment systems and your cleaning practices as well. Automated cleaning solutions like [AutoMist](#) and [Total Oil Management](#) from [Restaurant Technologies](#) remove the need for your staff to perform these tasks, reducing their exposure and allowing them to focus the time they do spend in your business on obligations that require a human touch.

MONITOR YOUR ONLINE INVENTORY CONTINUOUSLY

You can't afford to have excess inventory sitting about. As products sell, consider adjusting your reordering, particularly on slower sellers, to carry 50% of the capacity you would normally hold. This may allow you to reduce your overhead costs and can also leave you more space for the fewer-but-larger order strategy we discussed at the beginning of this eBook.

PLACE PURCHASING LIMITS ON HIGH-DEMAND ITEMS

Another way you can control your inventory is to place purchasing limits on high-demand items. As we saw early in the pandemic with toilet paper (up 207%) and hand sanitizer/wipes (up more than 5,000%)² the perceived need for certain items can swing dramatically, and placing purchasing limits on items can enable you to sell to more customers and protect your inventory longer should restocks be long in coming.

REDUCE YOUR INVENTORY

This can be another effective way to cut costs without hindering the customer experience, particularly if you make inventory cuts focused on lesser selling items. Remember that as you navigate a world of 50% capacity, you'll utilize your inventory at a slower pace. This makes reducing inventory a potential solution. Consider shifting to a new normal product offering until things return to what they were.

PARTNER WITH OTHER BUSINESSES

Customers are understandably hesitant to leave their homes, and partnering with other businesses can make their trip more appealing. If you're a hotel, consider allowing food trucks to park in your parking lot. If you're a restaurant, team up with a spa to offer a date night deal. Offer unexpected value and you'll stand a better chance of drawing customers out to your business.

CLOSE UNPOPULATED AREAS OF YOUR BUSINESS

An unused area still costs you money unless you treat it as such. Closing these sections may save on your utility costs as well as staffing expenses to keep the area operational. Consolidate your efforts as much as you can while socially distancing, and close off areas you don't need.



WORKING THROUGH THIS TOGETHER

The challenges COVID-19 poses for the foodservice industry are like none the market has ever seen, and while the obstacles seem overwhelming, there are reasons to be optimistic. The continual reopening of businesses signals that normal life is on its way back even if we have to work through this new normal for a while longer. We hope the ideas presented in this eBook are relevant to your business and help to support you during this unprecedented time. It is by working together with partner businesses and others that we'll see this pandemic through to its end.

¹ <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/why-we-need-to-protect-grocery-workers-health-protection-during-covid19>

² <https://www.mercatus.com/blog/covid-19-and-grocery-retail-what-grocers-can-do-right-now/>

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