



# COVID-19 INDUSTRY GUIDANCE: Restaurants

**November 24, 2020**

---

*This guidance is designed to address sectors and activities opening statewide. However, local health officers may implement more stringent rules tailored to local epidemiological conditions, so employers should also confirm relevant local opening policies.*



# OVERVIEW

On March 19, 2020, the State Public Health Officer and Director of the California Department of Public Health issued an order requiring most Californians to stay at home to disrupt the spread of COVID-19 among the population.

The impact of COVID-19 on the health of Californians is not yet fully known. Reported illness ranges from very mild (some people have no symptoms) to severe illness that may result in death. Certain groups, including people aged 65 or older and those with serious underlying medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease or diabetes, are at higher risk of hospitalization and serious complications. Transmission is most likely when people are in close contact or in a poorly ventilated area with an infected person, even if that person does not have any symptoms or has not yet developed symptoms.

Precise information about the number and rates of COVID-19 by industry or occupational groups, including among critical infrastructure workers, is not available at this time. There have been multiple outbreaks in a range of workplaces, indicating that workers are at risk of acquiring or transmitting COVID-19 infection. Examples of these workplaces include hospitals, long-term care facilities, prisons, food production, warehouses, meat processing plants, restaurants, and grocery stores.

As stay-at-home orders are modified, it is essential that all possible steps be taken to ensure the safety of workers and the public.

Key prevention practices include:

- ✓ ensuring adequate ventilation in all spaces,
- ✓ physical distancing to the maximum extent possible,
- ✓ use of face coverings by workers (where respiratory protection is not required) and customers/clients,
- ✓ frequent handwashing and regular cleaning and disinfection,
- ✓ training workers on these and other elements of the COVID-19 prevention plan.

In addition, it will be critical to have in place appropriate processes to identify new cases of illness in workplaces and, when they are identified, to intervene quickly and work with public health authorities to halt the spread of the virus.

# PURPOSE

This document provides guidance for restaurants to support a safe, clean environment for workers and customers. Businesses must identify and monitor the County Risk Level for the county the business is operating in and make required adjustments to their operations:

- **Purple – Widespread – Tier 1:** Outdoor operations are permitted and must continue to follow the modifications in this guidance. Performers must maintain physical distancing from spectators and other performers. Performers who are singing, shouting, playing a wind instrument, or engaging in similar activities without a face covering must maintain at least twelve feet of distance from spectators. Additional modifications for performances may be required by the forthcoming Live Performances guidance.
- **Red – Substantial – Tier 2:** Indoor operations are permitted but must be limited to 25% capacity or 100 people, whichever is fewer, and continue to follow the modifications in this guidance. For indoor performances, performers must wear face coverings at all times and maintain physical distancing from spectators and other performers. Performers are counted toward the occupancy capacity limit. Additional modifications for performances may be required by the forthcoming Live Performances guidance.
- **Orange – Moderate – Tier 3:** Indoor operations are permitted but must be limited to 50% capacity or 200 people, whichever is fewer, and continue to follow the modifications in this guidance. For indoor performances, performers must wear face coverings and observe all other required modifications consistent with the forthcoming Live Performance guidance. In the interim, performers must wear face coverings at all times and maintain physical distancing from spectators and other performers. Performers are counted toward the occupancy capacity limit.
- **Yellow – Minimal – Tier 4:** Indoor operations are permitted at 50% capacity and must continue to follow the modifications in this guidance. For indoor performances, performers must wear face coverings and observe all other required modifications consistent with the forthcoming Live Performance guidance. In the interim, performers must wear face coverings at all times and maintain physical distancing from spectators and other performers. Performers are counted toward the occupancy capacity limit.

For the most updated information on county tier status, visit [Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#). Please note that local health departments can have more restrictive criteria and different closures. Find [your county's local information](#).

**NOTE:** Restaurants should continue to encourage takeout and delivery service whenever possible. Restaurants providing takeout, drive-through pick-up, and delivery may only sell unsealed containers of alcoholic beverages (such as cocktails) when purchased in the same transaction [as a meal](#). A meal is not required for the sale or delivery of alcoholic beverages in manufacturer-sealed containers. Restaurants should

refer to [COVID-19 guidance](#) from the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control. Restaurants may also have other operational aspects and service offerings covered in other guidance, which are available on the [Industry Guidance to Reduce Risk](#) website. Restaurants may not open those operations until permitted by the Blueprint and when doing so must review this guidance to apply the appropriate protocols to all aspects of operations, including:

- Takeout and delivery (Delivery Services guidance)
- Bars and breweries (Bars, Breweries, and Distilleries guidance)
- Wineries and tasting rooms (Wineries and Tasting Rooms guidance)
- Offices (Office guidance)
- Game operations, such as bowling alleys, pool tables, etc. (Family Entertainment Centers guidance)
- Maintenance and custodial work (Limited Services guidance)

This guidance is not intended for concert, performance, or entertainment venues. Those types of establishments should remain closed until they are allowed to resume modified or full operation through a specific reopening order or guidance.

The guidance is not intended to revoke or repeal any worker rights, either statutory, regulatory or collectively bargained, and is not exhaustive, as it does not include county health orders, nor is it a substitute for any existing or newly created safety and health-related regulatory requirements such as those of Cal/OSHA, including a pending [Emergency Temporary Standard](#) expected to go into effect soon.<sup>1</sup> Stay current on changes to public health guidance and state/local orders as the COVID-19 situation continues. Cal/OSHA has more comprehensive guidance on their [Cal/OSHA General Guidelines on Protecting Workers from COVID-19 webpage](#). The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has [guidance for restaurants](#) and the CDC has additional requirements in their [guidance](#) for businesses and employers.

## Required Use of Face Coverings

Consult the [CDPH Guidance on the Use of Face Coverings](#), which broadly requires the use of face coverings for both members of the public and workers in all public and workplace settings outside the home. Complete details, including all requirements and exemptions to these rules, can be found in the [guidance, which should be checked periodically for updates.](#)

For the most updated information on county status, visit [Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#). Please note that local health departments can have more restrictive criteria and different closures. Find [your county's local information](#).



## Workplace Specific Plan

- Establish a written, workplace-specific COVID-19 prevention plan at every location, perform a comprehensive risk assessment of all work areas and work tasks, and designate a person at each establishment to implement the plan.
- Incorporate the [CDPH Face Covering Guidance](#) into the Workplace Specific Plan and include a policy for handling exemptions.
- Identify contact information for the local health department where the restaurant is located for communicating information about COVID-19 outbreaks among workers or customers.
- Train and communicate with workers and worker representatives on the plan and make the plan available to workers and their representatives.
- Regularly evaluate the establishment for compliance with the plan and document and correct deficiencies identified.
- Investigate any COVID-19 illness and determine if any work-related factors could have contributed to risk of infection. Update the plan as needed to prevent further cases.
- Implement the necessary processes and protocols when a workplace has an outbreak, in accordance with [CDPH guidelines](#) and orders or guidance from the local health department.
- Identify close contacts (within six feet for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period) of an infected person and take steps to isolate COVID-19 positive worker(s) and close contacts.
- Notify all employees in writing, and employers of subcontracted employees, who may have been exposed to COVID-19 and report workplace outbreaks to the local health department. For additional information on employer responsibilities under [AB 685](#) (Chapter 84, Statutes of 2020), refer to the [Enhanced Enforcement and Employer Reporting Requirements](#) from Cal/OSHA and the [Employer Questions about AB 685](#) from CDPH.
- **For outdoor operations:** Establish an effective heat illness prevention plan with written procedures in both English and the language understood by the majority of the employees. The plan must be available to employees at the worksite. See the [Cal/OSHA heat illness prevention page](#) for resources, including FAQs, a webinar, and a sample written plan. Elements of a heat illness prevent plan must include:
  - Access to potable drinking water

- Access to shade
- Cool down breaks
- Emergency procedures for heat illness cases
- High heat procedures when the temperature exceeds 95 degrees
- Monitoring of employees who are acclimatizing during a heat wave
- Training on heat illness prevention and symptoms
- Adhere to the guidelines below. Failure to do so could result in workplace illnesses that may cause operations to be temporarily closed or limited.



## Topics for Worker Training

- Information on [COVID-19](#), how to prevent it from spreading, and which [people are at higher risk](#) for severe illness or death.
- Self-screening at home, including temperature and/or symptom checks using [CDC guidelines](#).
- The importance of not coming to work:
  - If a worker has symptoms of COVID-19 as [described by the CDC](#), such as a fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea, OR
  - If a worker was diagnosed with COVID-19 and has not yet been released from isolation, OR
  - If, within the past 14 days, a worker has had contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and is considered potentially infectious (i.e. still on isolation).
- To return to work after a worker receives a COVID-19 diagnosis only after meeting [CDPH Guidance on Returning to Work or School Following COVID-19 Diagnosis](#).
- To seek medical attention if their symptoms become severe, including persistent pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, or bluish lips or face. Updates and further details are available on [CDC's webpage](#).
- The importance of frequent handwashing with soap and water, including scrubbing with soap for 20 seconds (or using hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol when workers cannot get to a sink or handwashing station, per [CDC guidelines](#)). Never use hand sanitizers with [methanol](#) due to its high toxicity to both children and adults.

- The importance of physical distancing, both at work and off work time (see Physical Distancing section below).
- Proper use of face coverings, including:
  - Face coverings provide some protection to the wearer but are not designed to meet standards for filtering virus-containing particles.
  - Face coverings do not replace the need for physical distancing and frequent handwashing.
  - Face coverings must cover the nose and mouth.
  - Workers should wash or sanitize hands before and after using or adjusting face coverings.
  - Avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth.
  - Face coverings must not be shared and should be washed or discarded after each shift.
- Information contained in the [CDPH Face Covering Guidance](#), which mandates the circumstances in which face coverings must be worn and the exemptions, as well as any policies, work rules, and practices the employer has adopted to ensure the use of face coverings. Training should also include the employer's policies on how people who are exempted from wearing a face covering will be handled.
- Ensure any independent contractors, temporary or contract workers, and volunteers at the facility are also properly trained in COVID-19 prevention policies and have necessary supplies and PPE. Discuss these responsibilities ahead of time with organizations supplying temporary and/or contract workers.
- Information on paid leave benefits the worker may be entitled to receive that would make it financially easier to stay at home. See additional information on [government programs supporting sick leave and workers' compensation for COVID-19](#), including workers' sick leave rights under the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#).



## Individual Control Measures and Screening

- Provide temperature and/or symptom screenings for all workers at the beginning of their shift and any vendors, contractors, or other workers entering the establishment. Make sure the temperature/symptom screener avoids close contact with workers to the extent possible.
- If requiring self-screening at home, which is an appropriate alternative to providing it at the establishment, ensure that screening was performed prior to the worker leaving the home for their shift and follows [CDC guidelines](#), as described in the Topics for Worker Training section above.
- Encourage workers who are sick or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 to stay home.
- Employers must provide and ensure workers use all required protective equipment, including face coverings and gloves where necessary.
- Employers should consider where disposable glove use may be helpful to supplement frequent handwashing or use of hand sanitizer; examples are for workers who are screening others for symptoms or handling commonly touched items. Workers should wear gloves when handling items contaminated by body fluids.
- Servers, bussers, and other workers moving items used by customers (dirty cups, plates, napkins, etc.) or handling trash bags should use disposable gloves (and wash hands before putting them on and after removing them) and provide aprons and change frequently.
- Dishwashers should use equipment to protect the eyes, nose, and mouth from contaminant splash using protective glasses, goggles, or a face shield in addition to a face covering. Dishwashers must be provided impermeable aprons and change frequently. Reusable protective equipment, such as shields and glasses, should be properly disinfected between uses.
- Employers must ensure workers maintain six feet of distance from others whenever possible. When it is not possible, the length and frequency of interaction should be kept to a minimum. Where job duties require regular interaction (e.g. wait staff), employers should offer a secondary barrier (i.e. face shields or safety goggles) for use by workers who wish to use one and permit workers to use their own if they prefer.
- Employers must take reasonable measures, including public address announcements, posting signage in strategic and highly-visible locations, and in reservation confirmations, to remind the public that they must use face coverings whenever not eating or drinking (unless exempted per

the [CDPH Face Covering Guidance](#)), practice physical distancing, not touch their face, frequently wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and use hand sanitizer.

- Remind guests in advance to bring a face covering and make them available to anyone who arrives without one, otherwise they should not be allowed to enter the premises (unless exempted per the [CDPH Face Covering Guidance](#)).
- Guests should be temperature and/or symptom screened upon arrival, asked to use hand sanitizer, and must bring and wear a face covering when not eating or drinking if not exempted per the [CDPH Face Covering Guidance](#). Employers have the right to cancel reservations for individuals/parties with symptomatic guests and refuse entry.
- Display a set of clearly visible rules for customers and restaurant personnel at the restaurant entrance(s) that are to be a condition of entry. The rules could include instructions to use hand sanitizer, maintain physical distance from other customers, avoid unnecessary touching of restaurant surfaces, contact information for the local health department, and changes to restaurant services. Whenever possible, the rules should be available digitally, include pictograms, and included on/with menus.



## Ventilation, Cleaning, and Disinfecting Protocols

- Restaurants should increase fresh air circulation by opening windows or doors, if possible, and in accordance with security and safety protocols.
- Position tables indoors near windows and doors to maximize air exchange and ventilation but avoid having air flow from where one party is seated directly toward another party.
- For indoor locations, maximize the amount of outdoor air supplied by ventilation systems. Install the highest efficiency filters compatible with the ventilation system.
- Where possible, install portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrade the building's air filters to the highest efficiency possible, and make other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in all working areas.
- Check the [CDPH website](#) periodically for updates on indoor air quality and ventilation guidance for airborne diseases in indoor settings.

- Perform thorough cleaning in high traffic areas, such as customer waiting areas and lobbies, break rooms, lunch areas and areas of ingress and egress including host stands, entry ways, stairways, stairwells, escalators, handrails, and elevator controls. Frequently disinfect commonly used surfaces including doors, door handles, crash bars, light switches, waiting area chairs, credit card terminals, ATM PIN pads, receipt trays, bus tubs, serving trays, phones, toilets, and handwashing facilities.
- Frequently clean items touched by patrons, especially those that might attract contact from children including candy and toy vending machines, display cases, decorative fountains, etc.
- Clean touchable surfaces between shifts or between users, whichever is more frequent, including but not limited to working surfaces, phones, registers, touchpads/touchscreens, tablets, timeclocks, appliances, kitchen and bar utensils and implements, oven doors, grill and range knobs, carts and trolleys, keys, etc.
- Avoid sharing audio equipment, phones, tablets, laptops, desks, pens, and other work supplies wherever possible. Never share PPE.
- Discontinue shared use of audio headsets and other equipment between workers unless the equipment can be properly disinfected after use. Consult equipment manufacturers to determine appropriate disinfection steps, particularly for soft, porous surfaces such as foam earmuffs.
- Provide time for workers to implement cleaning practices during their shift. Assign cleaning assignments during working hours as part of the employee's job duties. Procure options for third-party cleaning companies to assist with the increased cleaning demand, as needed.
- Procure options for third-party cleaning companies to assist with the increased cleaning demand, as needed.
- Equip spaces such as dining rooms, bar areas, host stands, and kitchens with proper sanitation products, including hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes to all staff directly assisting customers.
- Ensure that sanitary facilities stay operational and stocked at all times and provide additional soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer when needed.
- When choosing disinfecting chemicals, use products approved for use against COVID-19 on the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)-approved](#) list and follow product instructions. Use disinfectants labeled to be effective against emerging viral pathogens, diluted household bleach solutions (5 tablespoons per gallon of water), or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol that are appropriate for the surface. Provide workers training on the chemical hazards, manufacturer's directions, ventilation

requirements, and Cal/OSHA requirements for safe use. Workers using cleaners or disinfectants must wear gloves and other protective equipment as required by the product instructions. Follow the [asthma-safer cleaning methods](#) recommended by the California Department of Public Health and ensure proper ventilation.

- Continue to follow existing codes regarding requirements for sanitizing (rather than disinfecting) food contact surfaces.
- To minimize the risk of [Legionnaires' disease](#) and other diseases associated with water, [take steps](#) to ensure that all water systems and features are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown.
- Where possible, do not clean floors by sweeping or other methods that can disperse pathogens into the air unless all persons in the area have appropriate PPE. Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter wherever possible.
- Provide disposable menus to guests and make menus available digitally so that customers can view on a personal electronic device, if possible. If disposable menus cannot be provided, properly disinfect menus before and after customer use. Consider options for customers to order ahead of time.
- Discontinue pre-setting tables with napkins, cutlery, glassware, food ware, etc. These should be supplied individually to customers as needed. Do not leave card stands, flyers, napkin holders, or other items on tables.
- Suspend use of shared food items such as condiment bottles, salt and pepper shakers, etc. and provide these foods in single serve containers, if possible. Where this is not possible, shared items such as condiment bottles, shakers, etc., should be supplied as needed to customers and disinfected after each use.
- Pre-roll utensils in napkins prior to use by customers. Workers must wash hands before pre-rolling utensils in napkins. The pre-roll should then be stored in a clean container. After customers are seated, the pre-roll should be put on the table by a worker who recently washed their hands.
- Reusable customer items including utensils, food ware, breadbaskets, etc., must be properly washed, rinsed, and sanitized. Cleaned flatware, stemware, dishware, etc., must be properly stored away from customers and personnel until ready for use. Use disposable items if proper cleaning of reusable items is infeasible.
- Takeout containers for leftovers must be filled by customers and available only upon request.
- Dirty linens used at dining tables such as tablecloths and napkins should be removed after each customer use and transported from dining areas in sealed bags. Workers should wear gloves when handling dirty linens.

- Thoroughly clean each customer dining location after every use. This will include disinfecting tables, chairs, booster seats, highchairs, booths, etc. and allowing adequate time for proper disinfection, following product instructions. Many EPA-approved disinfectants require minimal contact time (seconds to one minute) against human coronavirus.
- Close areas where customers may congregate or touch food or food ware items that other guests may use. Modify delivery of these items by providing items to guests individually, converting to cafeteria-style service, etc. Discard or clean, disinfect, or sanitize shared items after each use, as appropriate. The areas that should be closed include but are not limited to:
  - Self-service areas with condiment caddies, utensil caddies, napkins, lids, straws, water pitchers, to-go containers, etc.
  - Self-service machines including ice, soda, frozen yogurt dispensers, etc.
  - Self-service food areas such as buffets, salsa bars, salad bars, etc.
- Discontinue tableside food preparation, e.g. guacamole preparation, and presentation of uncovered food items on selection carts and conveyor belts. Carts and conveyor belts can be used only if the food is fully covered in covers that are adequately cleaned and disinfected after each use or are disposable and immediately discarded after use.
- Do not leave out after-meal mints, candies, snacks, or toothpicks for customers. Offer them with the check or provide only on request.
- Install hand sanitizer dispensers, touchless if possible, at guest and worker entrances and contact areas such as driveways, reception areas, in dining rooms, near elevator landings, etc.



## Physical Distancing Guidelines

- **WARNING:** physical distancing alone is insufficient to prevent transmission of COVID-19.
- Prioritize outdoor seating and curbside pickup to minimize cross flow of customers in enclosed environments. Restaurants can expand their outdoor seating, and alcohol offerings in those areas, if they comply with local laws and regulations.
- Provide takeout, delivery, and drive through options for customers when possible. Takeout items should be made available using contactless pick-up and delivery protocols.

- Eliminate person-to-person contact for delivery of goods whenever possible. Designate drop-off locations to receive deliveries away from high traffic areas. Maintain physical distance of at least six feet with delivery drivers.
- Encourage reservations to allow for time to disinfect restaurant areas and provide guidance via digital platforms, if possible, to customers for physical distancing while at the restaurant.
- Consider allowing dine-in customers to order ahead of time to limit the amount of time spent in the establishment. Ask customers to wait in their cars or away from the establishment while waiting to be seated. If possible, alert patrons through their mobile phones when their table is ready to avoid touching and use of “buzzers.”
- Indoor and outdoor dining service tables must be at least six feet apart, measured from the back of the chair at one table to the back of the chair at the adjacent table while diners are seated. Maximize the distance between indoor service tables beyond the required six feet wherever possible, to minimize the risks from customers eating indoors without face coverings.
- Limit the number of patrons at a single table to a household unit or patrons who have asked to be seated together. People in the same party seated at the same table do not have to be six feet apart. All members of the party must be present before seating and hosts must bring the entire party to the table at one time.
- Implement measures to ensure physical distancing of at least six feet between workers and customers. This can include use of physical partitions or visual cues (e.g., floor markings or signs to indicate to where workers and/or guests should stand).
- Install physical barriers or partitions at cash registers, bars, host stands, and other areas where maintaining physical distance of six feet is difficult.
- Any area where guests or workers queue should also be clearly marked for appropriate physical distancing. This includes check-stands and terminals, deli counters and lines, restrooms, elevator lobbies, host stands and waiting areas, valet drop off and pickup, and any other area where customers congregate.
- Physical distancing protocols should be used in any office areas, kitchens, pantries, walk-in freezers, or other high-density, high-traffic work areas, where possible.
- Worker pre-shift meetings and trainings should be conducted virtually or in areas that allow for appropriate physical distancing between workers. Food, beverages, food ware, etc., must not be shared.

- Stagger worker breaks, in compliance with wage and hour regulations, to maintain physical distancing protocols.
- Consider offering workers who request modified duties options that minimize their contact with customers and other workers (e.g., managing inventory rather than working as a cashier or managing administrative needs through telework).
- Reconfigure office spaces, lobbies, beverage bars, kitchens and workstations, host stand areas, and other spaces wherever possible to allow for at least six feet of distance between people dining, working, and passing through areas for entry and exit.
- Remove tables and chairs from dining areas so that six feet of physical distance can be maintained for customers and workers. If tables, chairs, booths, etc., cannot be moved, use visual cues to show that they are not available for use.
- Discontinue seating of customers where customers cannot maintain six feet of distance from workers, work areas, and food and drink preparation areas.
- Limit the number of workers serving individual parties, in compliance with wage and hour regulations.
- All restaurant workers should minimize the amount of time spent within six feet of guests.
- Ensure workers can maintain physical distance in breakrooms, using barriers, increasing distance between tables/chairs to separate workers, etc. Where possible, create outdoor break areas with shade coverings and seating arrangements that ensures physical distancing. Discourage workers from congregating during breaks and ensure they are not eating or drinking without face coverings within six feet of each other.
- Reconfigure kitchens to maintain physical distancing in those areas where practical and, if not practical, stagger shifts, if possible, to do work ahead of time.
- Discourage food preparation workers from changing or entering others' workstations during shifts.
- Discourage people from congregating in high traffic areas such as bathrooms, hallways, bar areas, reservation and credit card terminals, etc.
- Establish directional hallways and passageways for foot traffic, if possible, to eliminate workers from passing by one another.
- Require workers to not use handshakes, fist or elbow bumps, hugs, and similar greetings or other behaviors that break physical distance.

- Guests should enter through doors that are propped open or automated, if possible. Hand sanitizer should be available for guests who must touch door handles.
- Adjust music volume so that workers can maintain distance from customers to hear orders and people can avoid speaking loudly or shouting.
- Implement peak period queueing procedures, including a host to remind guests to queue with at least six feet of distance between parties outside or in waiting areas.
- Avoid touching others' pens and clipboards. If possible, install transfer-aiding materials, such as shelving and bulletin boards, to reduce person-to-person hand-offs.

---

<sup>1</sup>Additional requirements must be considered for vulnerable populations. Restaurants must comply with all [Cal/OSHA](#) standards and be prepared to adhere to its guidance as well as guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and the [California Department of Public Health \(CDPH\)](#). Additionally, employers should be prepared to alter their operations as those guidelines change.

