



**SECTOR SPECIFIC WORKPLACE SAFETY STANDARDS  
FOR RESTAURANTS TO ADDRESS COVID-19  
Updated as of February 4, 2021**

---

**Purpose**

**These workplace safety standards for Restaurants, as defined below, are posted in advance of their effective date to allow Restaurants time to prepare to operate in compliance with these mandatory health and safety standards. Restaurants remain subject to the previously-issued, January 25, 2021 safety standards until these revised workplace safety standards go into effect on February 8, 2021.**

These sector specific COVID-19 workplace safety standards for Restaurants are issued to provide owners, operators, workers, and patrons of restaurants with instructions to help protect against the spread of COVID-19.

These standards are minimum requirements only and are not exclusive or exhaustive. The public health data for disease prevention that inform these guidelines can and does change frequently, and the operator of the restaurant is accountable for adhering to all local, state and federal requirements. The operator of the restaurant is also responsible for staying abreast of any updates to these requirements.

All establishments providing service under a Food Service Establishment Permit, including private clubs and organizations must follow these guidelines.

Violation of these standards may result in civil fines of up to \$500 per violation; provided that each individual instance of non-compliance and each day of a continuing violation may be fined as a separate violation. Each person present over any capacity limit specified below may likewise be fined as a separate violation.

**Standards for Responsible Restaurants in Massachusetts**

“Restaurant” means an establishment that provides food service that is prepared on-site and under a Food Service Establishment Permit, for food service establishments that cook, prepare and serve food, intended for immediate consumption, as permitted and issued by a municipal authority pursuant to 105 CMR 590.000. Potato chips, pretzels, and other similar pre-packaged, shelf stable foods, or other food prepared off-site, do not constitute food “prepared on-site.” A restaurant that also serves alcoholic beverages may only do so when providing seated food service prepared on site as explained below.

Events hosted at restaurants must follow the Indoor and Outdoor Events guidance, including the capacity limitations in that guidance.

No activity in Restaurants can occur without meeting the following sector specific COVID-19 workplace safety standards for restaurants. These standards apply to all restaurants until rescinded or amended by the State. The operator of each restaurant shall be responsible for meeting these standards.

The following workplace specific safety standards are organized around four distinct categories covering Social Distancing, Hygiene Protocols, Staffing and Operations, and Cleaning and Disinfecting.

## **I. Social Distancing and Capacity Limits**

- Require face coverings for all customers and workers at all times, except where an individual is unable to wear a face covering due to medical condition or disability
- Customers may only remove face coverings in the actual act of eating and drinking. Face coverings are required at all other times while seated at tables and when waitstaff are present at tables
- Each business must monitor customer entries and exits and limit occupancy at all times to 40% of the building's maximum permitted seated occupancy as documented in its occupancy permit on record with the municipal building department or other municipal record holder
- All occupant counts and calculations shall include customers, but may exclude staff and other workers
- All occupant counts and calculations shall apply separately to indoor and outdoor seated capacity
- While indoor table service is permitted, restaurants are encouraged to structure operations to operate as much as possible through outdoor table service and to strictly limit indoor table service in order to assure effective compliance with social distancing requirements and to limit activities within confined spaces
- Seated table service must be limited for each party to 90 minutes or less
- Restaurants must comply with the following sector specific social distancing rules for providing dining services in all customer seating areas:
  - Tables must be positioned so to maintain at least a 6 foot distance from all other tables and any high foot traffic areas (e.g., routes to bathrooms, entrances, exits); tables may be positioned closer if separated by protective / non-porous barriers (e.g., structural walls or plexi-glass dividers) not less than 6 feet high installed between tables and high foot traffic areas
  - The size of a party seated at a table cannot exceed 6 persons
- Customers should be encouraged to only dine with members or the same household.
- Bar seating is permitted provided that either:
  - There are no active work areas or working staff behind the bar at least 6 ft away; or
  - There is a physical barrier (e.g. Plexi-glass) separating customers from the bar space that is at least 30 inches high and a gap/opening at the bottom of the barrier is allowed for food and drink service as long as the gap/opening is no more than 8 inches high
  - In addition, parties must be seated at bars (no standing customer service) and parties must be spaced at least 6 ft from other parties
  - Subject to any applicable building and fire code requirements, bar areas may be re-configured to accommodate table seating that complies with all spacing and other requirements in these COVID-19 safety standards. Tables must not be placed within 6 feet of the staffed bartending area.
- All customers must be seated; eat-in service to standing customers (e.g., around bar areas) is prohibited.
- Restaurants may provide carry-out or delivery service, but all safety standards for table separation, size of party, and hygiene must be maintained for any indoor or outdoor table seating that is available to carry-out patrons.
- Recreation amenities which are allowed to open in Step 1 of Phase III (such as arcade games) may be open if adhering to all safety protocols in the Arcades & Other Indoor & Outdoor Game

& Recreation Businesses, including the requirement that active use of pool tables and other games involving patrons not seated at tables is not permitted in areas where food service is provided.

- All other amenities and areas not employed for food and beverage service (e.g., dance floors, playgrounds, etc.) must be closed or removed to prevent gathering of customers.
- Ensure separation of 6 feet or more between all individuals (workers, vendors, and customers) except where this creates a safety hazard due to the nature of the work or the configuration of the workspace
  - Close or reconfigure worker common spaces and high density areas where workers are likely to congregate to allow 6 feet of physical distancing. Employers are encouraged to close break rooms or limit their use. Work stations should be redesigned to ensure physical distancing (e.g., separate tables, stagger workstations on either side of processing lines so workers are not face-to-face, use distance markers to assure spacing including in the kitchen area)
  - Establish directional hallways and passageways for foot traffic if possible, to minimize contact (e.g., one-way entrance and exit to the restaurant). Post clearly visible signage regarding these policies
  - Prohibit lingering in common areas (e.g., waiting areas, bathrooms) and ensure social distancing in common areas by marking 6 feet spacing with tape or paint on the floor and signage
  - All customer-facing workers (e.g., servers, bus staff) must minimize time spent within 6 feet of customers
- Designate assigned working areas to workers where possible to limit movement throughout the restaurant and limit contact between workers (e.g., assigning zones to servers)
- Stagger work schedules and staff meal and break times, regulating maximum number of people in one place and ensuring at least 6 feet of physical distancing
- Minimize the use of confined spaces (e.g., elevators, vehicles) by more than one person at a time
- Valet parking operations should be avoided unless necessary due to physical or geographic constraints or in order to accommodate individual guests with disabling conditions
  - Valets must be provided with hand sanitizer and should use sanitizer before and after parking vehicles

## **II. Hygiene Protocols**

- All workers must wash their hands frequently, and table servers must wash their hands or apply hand sanitizer between each table interaction
- Ensure access to handwashing facilities on site, including soap and running water, and allow sufficient break time for workers to wash hands frequently; alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol may be used as an alternative
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol shall be made available at entrances, exits, and in the dining area
- Supply workers at workplace location with adequate cleaning products (e.g., sanitizer, disinfecting wipes)
- Post visible signage throughout the site to remind workers and customers of hygiene and safety protocols
- Self-serve, unattended buffets, topping bars, drink stations, and other communal serving areas

must remain closed.

- Condiments and similar products (e.g., salt, pepper, and salad dressing) should not be pre-set on tables and should instead only be provided upon request either in single-serving portions (e.g., individual packages or cups) or in serving containers that are sanitized between each use
- Menus must be one of the following: 1) paper, single-use menus disposed after each use, 2) displayed menu (e.g., digital, whiteboard, chalkboard), 3) electronic menus viewed on customers' phones / mobile devices, or 4) laminated reusable menus sanitized between each use
- Utensils and place settings must be either single-use or sanitized after each use; utensils should be rolled or packaged. Tables should not be pre-set to reduce opportunity for exposure
- Tables and chairs must be cleaned and sanitized thoroughly between each seating

### **III. Staffing and Operations**

- When possible, reservations or call ahead seating should be encouraged; managers must ensure that customers waiting for tables do not congregate in common areas or form lines
- When taking reservations and when seating walk-in customers, restaurants should retain a phone number of someone in the party for possible contact tracing
- Encourage use of technological solutions where possible to reduce person-to-person interaction (e.g., contactless payment, mobile ordering, text on arrival for seating)
- Restaurants may not provide customers with buzzers or other devices to provide alerts that seating is available or orders are ready; restaurants should instead use no-touch methods such as audio announcements, text messaging, and notices on fixed video screens or blackboards
- Alcoholic beverages may only be served for on-site consumption if accompanied by food prepared on-site. Potato chips, pretzels, and other pre-packaged shelf stable foods, or other food prepared off-site, do not constitute food "prepared on-site." For each customer, an item of prepared food must be ordered at the same time as an initial alcoholic beverage(s) order. One or more shareable food item(s) may be ordered, as long as it/they would sufficiently serve the number of people at the table.
- Provide training to workers on up-to-date safety information and precautions including hygiene and other measures aimed at reducing disease transmission, including:
  - Social distancing, hand-washing, and requirement and proper use of face coverings
  - Modifying practices for serving in order to minimize time spent within 6 feet of customers
  - Self-screening at home, including temperature or symptom checks
  - Reinforcing that staff shall not come to work if sick
  - When to seek medical attention if symptoms become severe
  - Which underlying health conditions may make individuals more susceptible to contracting and suffering from a severe case of the virus
- Restaurant operators should establish adjusted workplace hours and shifts for workers to minimize contact across workers and reduce congestion at entry points
- Limit visitors and vendors on site; shipping and deliveries should be completed in designated areas
- Workers who are particularly high risk to COVID-19 according to the Centers for Disease Control (e.g., due to age or underlying conditions) are encouraged to stay home or arrange an alternate work assignment
- Restaurants must screen workers at each shift by ensuring the following:
  - Worker is not experiencing any symptoms such as fever (100.0 and above) or chills,

- cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, fatigue, headache, muscle/body aches, runny nose/congestion, new loss of taste or smell, or nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Worker has not had “close contact” with an individual diagnosed with COVID-19. “Close contact” means living in the same household as a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, caring for a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, being within 6 feet of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more, or coming in direct contact with secretions (e.g., sharing utensils, being coughed on) from a person who has tested positive for COVID-19,
- Worker has not been asked to self-isolate or quarantine by their doctor or a local public health official
- Workers who fail to meet the above criteria must be sent home
- Anyone showing signs of illness may be denied entry
- Workers are strongly encouraged to self-identify symptoms or any close contact to a known or suspected COVID-19 case to the employer
- Workers shall not appear for work or complete a shift if feeling ill
- Encourage workers who test positive for COVID-19 to disclose to the employer for purposes of cleaning / disinfecting and contact tracing. If the employer is notified of any positive case at the workplace, the employer must immediately notify the local Board of Health (LBOH) in the city or town where the workplace is located. Employers must assist the LBOH with contact tracing efforts, including advising likely contacts to isolate and self-quarantine. Testing of other workers may be recommended consistent with guidance and / or at the request of the LBOH
- Notify workers that they may not work if they test positive for COVID-19 (they should be isolated at home) or are found to be a close contact of someone with COVID-19 (they should be quarantined at home)
- Post notice to workers and customers of important health information and relevant safety measures as outlined in the Commonwealth’s [Mandatory Safety Standards for Workplace](#)
- Designate the Person in Charge (105 CMR 590) for each shift to oversee implementation of the guidelines in this document
- Restaurants will be allowed to maximize outdoor dining space, including patios and parking lots where available, where municipal approval is obtained
- Additional on-site amenities and services shall only open and operate when those amenities or services would otherwise be authorized to operate under the Commonwealth’s Phased Reopening Plan and then must adhere to all sector-specific safety protocols, available on the [Reopening Plan website](#), applicable to the amenity or service. Examples include:
  - Darts, arcade games, and other indoor games: Must follow the Arcades & Other Indoor & Outdoor Game & Recreation Businesses guidance, including the requirement that active use of pool tables and other games involving patrons not seated at tables is not permitted in areas where food service is provided.
  - Musical and other performances: Are not allowed in indoor or outdoor restaurants.
  - Dance floors: Must remain closed until Phase 4
  - Gift shops: Must follow the latest retail guidance
  - Events hosted at restaurants must follow the Indoor and Outdoor Events guidance, including the capacity limitations in that guidance.

#### **IV. Cleaning and Disinfecting**

- Clean commonly touched surfaces in restrooms (e.g., toilet seats, doorknobs, stall handles, sinks, paper towel dispensers, soap dispensers) frequently and in accordance with CDC

guidelines

- Keep cleaning logs that include date, time, and scope of cleaning
- Conduct frequent disinfecting of heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, elevator buttons, staircases)
- Implement procedures to increase cleaning / disinfecting in the back-of-house. Avoid all food contact surfaces when using disinfectants. Food contact surfaces must be cleaned and sanitized before use with a sanitizer approved for food contact surfaces. Non-food contact surfaces must be frequently cleaned
- In event of a positive case, follow current CDC guidance on cleaning and disinfecting areas when someone has a COVID-19 diagnosis.
- Open windows and doors to increase airflow where possible

**Additional worker safety guidelines and resources (with hyperlinks to web pages) are available below:**

U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA):

[OSHA – COVID-19 Webpage](#)

[OSHA – Enforcement Guidelines Webpage](#)

[OSHA Fact Sheet – Protecting Workers During a Pandemic](#)

U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

[CDC – Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations](#)

[CDC – Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease \(Updated 3/21/20\)](#)

CDC – Decision Tool for Reopening Bars and Restaurants (5/15/20)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/restaurants-and-bars-decision-tool.html>

**Additional Information:**

Massachusetts State Coronavirus (COVID-19) Website  
[mass.gov/covid19](https://mass.gov/covid19)

United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Coronavirus (COVID-19) Website  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>