



Safety First

Protecting Workers and Diners as Restaurants Reopen



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as Restaurants Reopen

FOOD & SOCIETY

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Safety First: From the Director

It's a time of recovery and rebirth. For the country, for restaurants. How best to help workers and diners come back to a life all of us have missed terribly—and come back safely?

As the founding director of the Aspen Institute's [Food and Society Program](#), which improves public health by giving people of all income levels ways to eat better and more healthful diets, I looked for guidance from experts from the [Centers for Disease Control](#), experts from city and state health departments, and restaurant owners to help compile, write, and review an easily accessible, authoritative set of operating procedures for restaurant managers, chefs, and all workers during the age of Covid. We were fortunate to be supported by Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch, the [Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund](#), and Google Food Labs. And we were even luckier to be supported and educated week after week by a stellar, deeply informed and engaged, and wonderfully funny advisory committee, named on our acknowledgments page that follows.

We've fine-tuned *Safety First* to meet the on-the-ground needs of restaurants as they reopen as quickly, economically, and safely as possible—translating the science of health officials and engineering associations into the day-to-day realities of businesses small and large. That's what restaurants told us they needed, and health departments told us too.

We've been joined—uniquely—by the national voices and groups most actively helping restaurants thrive. José Andrés, of course, always sets the worldwide example in global crisis response at [World Central Kitchen](#). [The James Beard Foundation](#) and the [Independent Restaurant Coalition](#) leapt in to support struggling restaurants—and stayed in: the IRC played a major role in securing \$28.6 billion in federal help to restaurants. [One Fair Wage](#) gave us invaluable guidance on how restaurants during Covid can best protect the physical and financial health of all restaurant workers—particularly servers. Resy/Amex distributed our [Diner Code of Conduct](#) and distributed it to all their participating restaurants. [The National Restaurant Association](#), whose [ServSafe](#) program is the gold standard of food safety, also distributed the Diner Code and has been an active reviewer and supporter of our new guidelines.

A great stroke of luck led me to Dr. Sam Dooley, a retired 32-year veteran CDC epidemiologist. His experience in containing tuberculosis and HIV suited him to the task he dug into with infinite patience and wry wit. Dr. Dooley has also written an extremely concise guide to the basics of Covid transmission that every business, and really every person living through the pandemic can learn from quickly and fully.

You'll find here our [Diner Code of Conduct](#) and [Our Covid Pledge](#), which we hope restaurants will send with reservation confirmations and post prominently for both workers and diners to see. We have new ventilation guidelines—both the basics and a full set of operating procedures designed to be affordable and accessible to any small-business owner. By now it should be obvious: always wear a mask!

The other defining characteristic of chefs: they're generous. I thank all of them and welcome all additional thoughts!

Corby Kummer



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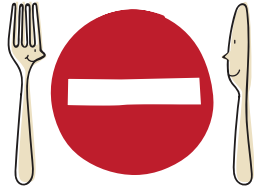
Diner Code of Conduct

We're creating the safest dining experience we can.
And we need your help, too!



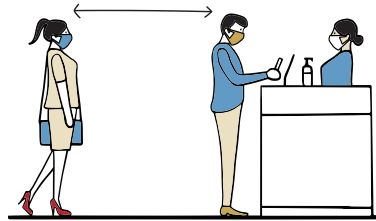
Wear a Mask

When at the restaurant, **I'll wear my mask at all times.** That includes when I'm in any shared space, when I interact with workers, and when I'm at the table and not actively eating or drinking. I'll be just as careful even if I've been vaccinated.



Be Kind

I understand that **mutual kindness is paramount** to good hospitality. I will show respect and appreciation for all those working to serve me and for fellow diners. I also understand that management reserves the right to refuse service to anyone not wearing a mask.



Make Space

I'll maintain physical distance from workers and guests outside my party while I am checking in, waiting to be seated, and waiting for the restroom. You'll show me where I can comfortably wait.



Be Responsible

I'll reschedule my visit if I currently have Covid-19, if I've had a fever or any symptoms of Covid in the past 10 days, or if I've been exposed to someone with Covid in the past two weeks. You'll make it easy and cost-free for me to rebook.



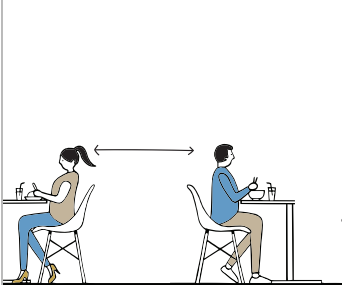
With special thanks to
Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch



Our Covid Pledge

What we do to protect our diners and workers from Covid-19

We will: Make sure all restaurant workers **wear masks at all times**, and all guests wear masks at all times when not eating, especially when interacting with workers



Space tables **at least six feet apart** as measured from chairback to chairback, and stay within local guidance for maximum seating capacity



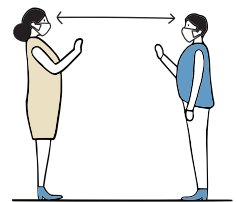
Make sure **ventilation systems** are functioning properly, clean, and operating whenever workers or diners are on the premises; and increase air filtration and fresh air circulation to the maximum possible extent



Screen all restaurant workers for symptoms every day; screen arriving diners and help them make a future reservation if they have had Covid symptoms in the previous 10 days or been exposed to anyone with Covid in the previous two weeks



Make sure all restaurant workers **wash or sanitize their hands** frequently, and frequently clean and sanitize high-touch surfaces and objects



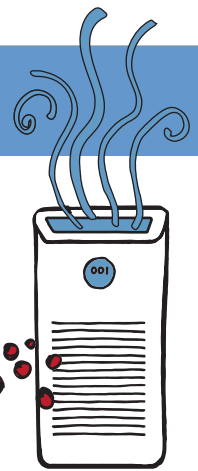
Make sure all restaurant workers maintain a distance of **at least 6 feet from other people** when possible, and all diners maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from people outside their party



With special thanks to Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch



Safety First: Ventilation Basics



VENTILATION BASICS

Supply as much fresh or filtered air as possible; exhaust air to the outside or clean it with high-efficiency filters; control airflow to move air up and away from people: these are three ways ventilation can reduce risk for spread of airborne contagion.

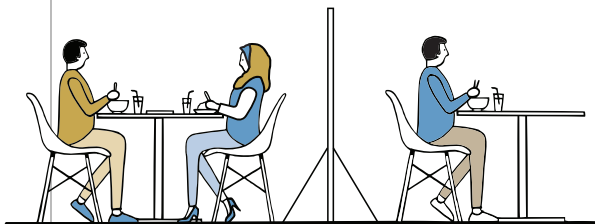
Keep windows open whenever workers and diners are present if this can be done safely. Be sure all **HVAC systems** are **fully operational, performing as designed, and recently serviced and cleaned**. Clean filters if they are a cleanable type, and be sure they are properly fitted and sealed to prevent air from bypassing them. **Optimize the number of air changes per hour** your system is providing; a rate of four to six air changes per hour has been suggested as a reasonable target to reduce risk for spread of airborne infection in restaurants. **Increase the percentage of fresh air your system** supplies to the maximum feasible. **Upgrade to the highest MERV grade filters** your system can handle, preferably at least MERV-13. Consult a qualified, trusted HVAC engineer or contractor to determine air changes and the highest MERV grade filter your system will support.

Portable air purifying units can be used to supplement existing HVAC systems and to compensate for the lack of an HVAC system in situations where one cannot be installed. Look for units that provide **at least four to six air changes per hour** and **discharge air upward** vertically, rather than horizontally. There is **no need to buy costly add-ons** like ultraviolet filter cleaners, titanium di-oxide, ionization, or carbon filters. **What matters most is high-efficiency HEPA filters**. If units are too noisy, you can run them at a lower speed to reduce noise. But be aware that their ratings are based on operation at full speed: anything lower will decrease the number of air changes and therefore their effectiveness.

How many portable air purifying units will you need? As a rough rule of thumb, assuming a 10-foot ceiling, allow one unit operating at 100 cubic feet per minute per table, or one unit operating at 200 cubic feet per minute between every two tables. Set units on the floor venting upward. In practice, the correct number of units should be based on careful calculations: a link to an easy-to-use calculator can be found [here](#). Calculations must be based on the airflow produced at the fan speed you will use day to day, not the maximum airflow the unit can produce at the highest fan speed.

Properly designed and installed **upper-room ultraviolet germicidal irradiation** may also be considered in situations where an existing ventilation system is inadequate and cannot easily or affordably be upgraded, or where there is no existing ventilation system.

Portable, movable Plexiglass or polycarbonate cough and sneeze barriers can be used to block horizontal airflow between tables and divert airflow upward. Their lower edge should be below table or waist level—about 18 inches above the floor—and their upper edge should be at least 5 feet above the floor. Install as many barriers as possible between tables. It is especially important to **interrupt airflow that is moving horizontally** toward a wall-mounted return air grille. This will reduce the likelihood that airborne contaminants will be carried from one table to another. A qualified and trusted HVAC engineer, architect, or environmental engineer can help you place barriers to be sure you don't inadvertently worsen the problem.



Safety First: Six Steps to Safety

Experts believe that most Covid infections are caused when the virus spreads directly from one person who is infected—but may not even have any symptoms—to another person who is not infected. Covid can also be spread through contact with a contaminated surface or object, although this is not thought to be a common mode of transmission. The risk for becoming infected will be much lower if everyone in the restaurant, workers and diners—*whether or not they have been vaccinated*—just follows these six rules, and restaurant management strictly enforces them:

Six Steps to Safety

- 1** **Anyone who has Covid, has a fever or any other symptoms of Covid—or has no symptoms but tests positive for Covid—stays away from the restaurant** and isolates themselves from other people until testing determines that they do not have Covid or until they are no longer contagious
- 2** **Anyone who has had recent close contact with someone who has Covid stays away from the restaurant** and quarantines themselves until they are determined not to be infected or, if they are determined to have Covid, are no longer contagious
- 3** **Everyone—workers and diners—wears a mask at all times** when in the restaurant except when actively eating or drinking
- 4** **Everyone maintains a distance of at least six feet from any other person**—for diners, from anyone outside their party—as much of the time as possible, even when both are wearing a mask
- 5** **All workers in the restaurant frequently wash their hands with soap and water** for at least 20 seconds or sanitize them with alcohol-based hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol. If required to wear gloves, workers should change them frequently, washing hands after removing one pair and before donning a new one (see “Gloves and Covid”)
- 6** All workers in the restaurant ensure that **frequently touched objects and surfaces are routinely cleaned and sanitized or disinfected**

The most important rule in infection control is this: **Control the source of infection!** That’s why it’s so important for people to **stay home and away from the restaurant** if they have Covid, have a fever or any other symptoms of Covid, have no symptoms but test positive for Covid, or have recently been exposed to someone with Covid

Safety First: Acknowledgements

These guidelines are the results of intensive work since restaurants first began to open in the summer of 2020, and weekly meetings and streams of late-night emails from our extremely hardworking Safety First Executive Committee and Advisors. Their combined insights and national and international experience inform every page and section, and Food & Society at the Aspen Institute is extremely grateful for their time and help.

SAFETY FIRST EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Mitchell Davis, *Founder and Principal, Kitchen Sense, LLC*

Dr. Sam Dooley, *Principal Author, Safety First*

Russell Jackson, *Chef-Owner, Reverence, Advisor, Independent Restaurant Coalition*

Frank Lavey, *VP Global Operations, Hyatt Hotels Corporation*

Jenny Lucas, *Senior VP, Operations, Loews Hotels & Co*

Doug Mass, *President, Cosentini*

Wayne Melichar, *Managing Director of Food Safety, Feeding America*

Gita Rampersad, *VP of Healthcare Partnerships & Nutrition, Feeding America*

David Rockwell, *Founder & President, Rockwell Group*

SAFETY FIRST ADVISORS

James Biber, *Biber Architects*

Michael Bierut, *Pentagram*

Tracy Chang, *Chef-Owner, Pagu Restaurant, Cambridge, Massachusetts*

Richard Coraine, *Senior Advisor, Union Square Hospitality Group*

Jeanie Chun, *National Engagement Director, One Fair Wage*

Garret Harker, *Restaurateur, Eastern Standard*

Larry Lynch, *Senior VP of Certification & Operations, National Restaurant Association*

Molly Poes, *Graphics and Communications Manager, Cosentini*

Carlos Suarez, *Founder and Chef, Casa Nela Hospitality Company*

Vaughn Tan, *Strategy Consultant, Author & Professor*

Joe Thomas, *VP of Engineering, Loews Hotels*

Colleen Vincent, *Director of Culinary Community Initiatives, James Beard Foundation*

Jimi Yui, *Founding Principal, Yui Design*