

## **Restaurant Association of Maryland**

### *Recommendations and Guidelines for Reopening for Dine-In Customers*

*May 15, 2020*

*Updated May 21, 2020*

The Restaurant Association of Maryland (RAM) is the only trade association that represents every segment of the foodservice industry in Maryland. Restaurants & Bars understand the need to take public safety seriously. The safety of employees and the public will continue to be a priority as we move through the phases of reopening fully. Thorough consideration was given to the economic, medical and societal impact of each of the recommendations. References to restaurants and bars throughout this document is intended to include all foodservice operations.

## **OPERATIONAL PRACTICES**

### Restaurant & Bar Best Practices and Guidance

The National Restaurant Association has published a COVID-19 Reopening Guidance document that addresses the ongoing best practices for restaurants and bars as a result of COVID-19. This document contains information that is currently being utilized by businesses that are currently open for curbside pickup, takeout and delivery. This information will also be used when businesses are permitted to reopen for dine-in customers.

This document was created in consultation with officials from the Food and Drug Administration and University Food Science Representatives. It outlines guidance in the following areas:

- Food Safety
- Cleaning and Sanitizing
- Employee Health Monitoring
- Social and Physical Distancing

### Phase 1 - Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery

The Restaurant Association of Maryland asked the Governor to consider allowing outdoor seating at restaurants and bars during Phase One. To date, the Governor has not addressed our recommendation and has only stated that restaurants and bars are scheduled to reopen under phase two of his Roadmap to Recovery plan.

### Phase 2 - Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery

Phase Two allows for restaurants and bars to reopen with some restrictions. The Restaurant Association of Maryland would like to offer the following conditions for reopen:

- Maintain the current order allowing for restaurants and bars to offer carryout and delivery

including alcohol.

- Restaurants and bars will adhere to the guidelines and best practices from the CDC, the FDA and the National Restaurant Association COVID-19 Reopening Guidance document.
- All employees will complete a health screening prior to their shift.
- Hand sanitizer will be available upon entry and exit for customers and employees, or hand washing stations facilities will be readily available.
- Employees interacting with customers will be required to wear face coverings or utilize other protective equipment, such as plexiglass barriers, in keeping with public health guidelines relating to COVID-19.
- Physical distancing of at least 6 feet between tables for customers shall be maintained. Businesses shall design their seating areas to accommodate these minimum specifications. If possible, tables should be removed or clearly marked as not available for service to ensure they are not used.
- Seating with physical barriers between guests, such as in booths or portable walls, may be utilized without the 6 feet distance requirement provided that the physical distancing intent is maintained, and the physical barrier prevents guests from coming into contact with one another.
- RAM is asking the Governor for an Executive Order allowing for restaurants and bars to expand their dine-in seating to existing outdoor areas, such as parking lots or other usable space, without the current restrictions from zoning boards, health departments, liquor boards and other agencies. A permissible expansion of seating will allow businesses to offer more space for proper physical distancing among guests and the opportunity to operate at a capacity that will incentivize opening rather than remaining closed.
- Operations that have self-serve buffets will continue to utilize protective barriers and shall provide and require all customers to use hand sanitizer or protective gloves before serving themselves and touching utensils. Signage of this customer requirement shall also be posted at each buffet table or station. Directional signage, ropes or stanchions will be required to manage the flow of customers through the buffet lines that ensure proper physical distancing. A dedicated employee(s) will be assigned to ensure compliance and monitor, manage and control the flow of customers.
- The maximum number of customers at any one table setting shall be 10 people. Ten people allows for large families to sit together, but also helps avoid large gatherings.
- While waiting to be seated, appropriate physical distancing guidelines will be maintained. If space does not allow for appropriate physical distancing, customer will be asked to wait in their cars or other off-premise area.
- Child play areas located inside and outside of restaurants shall remain closed.
- Bar seating located within establishments that serve food may be utilized provided that customers are seated and comply with the appropriate physical distancing guideline of at least 6 feet or physical barriers between guests. Standing in a bar area will not be permitted. A maximum of four customers that have a common relationship may sit together at the bar, while adhering to the physical distancing guidelines or barriers between other customers.

### Phase 3 - Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery

Phase Three allows for all businesses to reopen without restrictions.

RAM members agree that “High Capacity” restaurants and bars should be defined as those establishments that generally accommodate significant standing room only and cannot offer seating for all of their customers in a proper physical distance setting due to the nature of their business model, such as nightclubs and event venues that offer entertainment.

Restaurants and bars that are able to provide seating for all customers while adhering to the physical distancing requirements under Phase Two, should not be unnecessarily penalized for owning a large building and considered high risk. These restaurants should be allowed to open in Phase Two, provided they are able to meet the requirements.

## **REQUESTED ACTIONS FROM GOVERNOR HOGAN AND LOCAL OFFICIALS**

RAM requests that the Governor and Local Officials take the following actions to help restaurants and bars reopen in a safe and efficient manner, while also providing incentive to reopen and rehire employees rather than remain closed and provide consistent standards across the entire state.

1. Provide as much notice as possible to restaurants and bars regarding potential reopen dates under the three phases. These businesses need adequate time to rehire employees, order supplies and prepare their operations for dine-in customers.
2. Ensure that the State and Local Health Departments enact reasonable and efficient reopening requirements that are not burdensome and counterproductive to the intent of opening businesses and bringing employees back to work.
3. Executive Order allowing for the suspension of zoning, health department, liquor departments and other agency prohibitions to enable restaurants and bars to seat and serve customers in areas outside of their approved building, such as in parking lots and other available spaces, provided customer and employee safety can be maintained. Maintain this Executive Order until Phase Three is implemented.
4. Maintain the current Executive Order allowing for restaurants and bars to sell alcohol for takeout and delivery until Phase Three is implemented.
5. Executive Order that requires landlords of restaurants and bars in locations with comingled parking with other businesses to dedicate spaces in close proximity to entrances for the continuation of curbside pickup. This is with the understanding that many customers will be uncomfortable with dine-in and takeout services while in phase one and two, however will still want to utilize curbside pickup options.

## **REFERENCES**

**CDC Guidance for restaurants and bars to reopen** - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/restaurants-and-bars-decision-tree.pdf>

**Best practices from the US Food and Drug Administration** - <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/best-practices-retail-food-stores-restaurants-and-food-pick-up-delivery-services-during-covid-19>

**National Restaurant Association COVID-19 Reopening Guidance** - [https://go.restaurant.org/covid19-reopening-guide?utm\\_source=press-release&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_campaign=restaurant-reopening-guide](https://go.restaurant.org/covid19-reopening-guide?utm_source=press-release&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=restaurant-reopening-guide)

**What kind of questions should an employer ask an employee during a pre-shift health screening?**

- Do you have any of these symptoms: fever, aches, cough, shortness of breath, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, new loss of taste or smell? (*Consistently check the CDC website for changes in COVID-19 symptoms and adapt your questions accordingly*)
- Have you come in contact with anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 or suspected to have COVID-19?
- Are you currently waiting for the results of a COVID-19 test?
- Have you traveled outside Maryland over the last 14 days?
- I understand my responsibility to not come to work if I have symptoms of COVID-19 or have recently come into contact with someone who has COVID-19 or suspected to have COVID-19.
- I understand my responsibility to comply with the restaurant's health and sanitation standards.

If an employee should become ill or present signs of illness, the employer should identify that during a pre-work health screening and follow their established policies on when the employee will be permitted to return to work. At a minimum, follow CDC guidelines: self-isolate for seven days from the onset of symptoms and be symptom free for 3 days without medication.