

Dining Area Closures: Guidance for Food Establishments

On March 16, 2020 Governor Jay Inslee issued [Proclamation 20-13 Statewide Limits: Food and Beverage Services, Areas of Congregation](#). The proclamation temporarily prohibits onsite dining at most food establishments in Washington state to help reduce the spread of coronavirus. The ban does not apply to child care or school-based food programs or grocery stores. Restaurants can still provide take-out, delivery, or drive-through food and beverage services. Unless extended, the ban remains in effect until midnight on March 31, 2020.

Impact and Recommendations

Restaurants

Restaurants must close dining areas. Restaurants may provide take-out, delivery, and drive-through food and beverage services. We encourage food establishments that provide take-out service to stack tables and chairs in the dining area to give community members space and indicate the dining area is not in service.

Restaurants that want to modify their menus or style of service to provide take-out, delivery, or drive-through options are encouraged to work with their local health department to ensure safe processes.

Restaurants that close or are unable to use perishable food supplies are encouraged to donate food to hunger relief organizations using food safety recommendations in our [food rescue donation guide](#).

Grocery and Convenience Store Dining Areas

Under the proclamation, grocery and convenience stores are allowed to remain open, but any on-site dining areas must close. For example, the espresso counter in a grocery store can remain open and provide beverages to go, but the seating area (table and chairs) must be closed. We recommend food establishments stack their tables and chairs to discourage customer use.

Mall Food Courts, Bowling Alleys, Clubs, Faith-Based Facilities:

The governor proclamation also prohibits the onsite consumption of food and beverages at public venues. Public areas that provide seating for food consumption are encouraged to close the areas to discourage use.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.

Hotel Eating Areas, Including B&B's

Hotels should close seating areas within dining and common areas and provide room service or only allow guests to pick up food items to go.

School Cafeterias

Currently, there is a [statewide shutdown of schools](#) until at least April 24, 2020. It is recommended schools find ways to provide food service while maintaining CDC's social distancing recommendations. Strategies such as extending pickup hours, using online ordering systems, designating pickup hours based on student last name, or providing meal delivery are all encouraged.

Donated Food Distribution Organizations/Hunger Relief Organizations

Hunger relief organizations that distribute packaged foods, such as food pantries, are allowed to remain open. These facilities should use social distancing strategies, such as limiting the number of clients moving through the pantry or taking advanced orders, to help reduce close contact between community members.

Caterers

By definition, caterers prepare food in response to a contract with a client for service at a different location. Many catered events are gatherings of fifty or more people, which are currently restricted by [Proclamation 20-14: Reduction of Statewide Limits on Gatherings](#). We recommend caterers modify menus to support delivery only and not allow for buffet or plated service.

Bars, Taverns, Wineries, and Breweries

Facilities serving alcohol will need to switch to retail of packaged products only, with no on-premises consumption. Operators are encouraged to contact the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board to understand retail options.

Mobile Food Trucks

Mobile food trucks that provide take-out style food service may continue operation. If applicable, mobile food units should stack tables and chairs in customer seating areas to discourage customer use even if the seating is outdoors.

Self-Service Areas

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Food, even food in salad bars and other self-serve food stations, is not the primary route for spreading COVID-19. However, enhanced food safety steps can help reduce community spread of the virus.

All self-service food stations need to be monitored by staff to:

- ensure all sneeze guards, utensils, and other customer-service equipment is properly in place and used
- discard any food that has been contaminated by customers, such as touching food or sneezing and or coughing along the service line
- monitor food to maintain proper temperature
- replace utensils with clean utensils at least every four hours and ensure used utensils are properly washed, rinsed, and sanitized
- ensure non-food contact surfaces, particularly touchpoints such as counters, hand rails, etc., are washed, rinsed, and sanitized daily
- limit customer traffic to prevent close contact of customers (defined as being within 6 feet of each other for at least 10 minutes)

Self-service should be discontinued if this level of monitoring is not sustainable.

Packaged Food

We do not recommend staff use gloves to handle packaged food. We anticipate gloves may be rationed by the medical community or otherwise in short supply. Ensure gloves are only used when needed for food safety, such as preventing contact with ready to eat foods. See [Supply Chain Issues and Conservation Strategies](#) for more information about proper glove use.

Preventing Customers from Congregating

We recommend the use of call-in/mobile ordering and delivery/car pickup to prevent the congregation of customers awaiting orders.

Social Distancing at Grocery Stores

Grocery stores should arrange the flow of customers to reduce crowding as much as possible, provide education to your customers about social distancing (keep a distance of 6 feet or more), and encourage customers to shop at less popular times to help prevent congestion. See [CDC's Print Resources](#) for posters you can print out and post.