

# Practicing Pandemic Precautions for Dining

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*Fifth article in a series about preventing foodborne illness in your dining service.*

“I’m looking for my provider to help me make it safe for students to eat. How will this affect the menu? Can we do this sustainably? What’s the cost? I need a partner who will come up with ideas and take the initiative.” – *A Clarion college client*

In addition to protecting diners from the risks of contaminated foods, food service operators also have to insure safety from coronavirus risks. The disease will be with us and dangerous for the year and longer.

“Consumers are developing a dramatically heightened sense of what they view as safe food handling practices and an increasing desire to know where their food comes from, how it was grown, raised and processed,” a report by the International Foodservice Manufacturers Assn. noted.

The good news: The virus isn’t transmitted through food like norovirus and hepatitis A, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says. The bad news is that it can be spread by anyone, food service worker or customer, just by touching, for example, countertops, handles or utensils.

## Follow the Basics, Plus

Operators should “continue to follow established food safety protocols and best practices . . . and important Covid-19 recommendations,” the FDA advises.

“Follow the four key steps to food safety: Always Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill.”

- Wash, rinse and sanitize food contact surfaces, dishware, utensils food prep surfaces and beverage equipment after each use.
- Frequently disinfect surfaces repeatedly touched by employees or diners, such as door knobs, equipment handles, work tables, counters, cashier stations and the like.
- Frequently clean and disinfect floors, and other facility access areas using EPA-registered disinfectants. ([epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2](https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2))
- Prepare and use sanitizers according to label instructions.

## May I Add Cream to Your Coffee?

The FDA advises steps to minimize customers’ risk of infection through contact while coronavirus is still active.

- Discontinue offering salad bars, buffets and beverage service stations that require customers to use common utensils or dispensers. That will require boxed salads and meals in place of self-service and manual service of beverages by employees.
- Ensure customers are spaced according to your state’s or local requirements when on line at a counter or cashier station. Stores do this by laying strips of tape on the floor in aisles at intervals, at least six feet.
- Discourage customers from bringing pets into the café, except service animals (a good practice under any circumstance).

The FDA guidelines don’t address un-staffed coffee pantries, but these will need attention –

frequent sanitizing and maybe requiring the use of disposable gloves when people pour coffee from a carafe or pick up a snack. It might be prudent to close the pantries while the risk of infection remains.

### **More Hands Needed**

All these precautions may require more labor than was needed in pre-pandemic days. Whether and for how long will depend on each unit's circumstance – type of customer and service; facilities layout, and local conditions. It's likely to be a while, maybe a year, before "normal" comes back.

Meanwhile, all the standard food safety practices remain valid and important. Ensure your operator is keeping food within safe temperature zones (40°F or lower and 135°F or above), changes disposable gloves between tasks and follows all other Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) practices.

*Establishing and maintaining a safe dining service is among Clarion Group's key competencies. To learn how Clarion can benefit you and your organization, call Tom Mac Dermott, 603/642-8011 or Tedd Mayer, 617/875-7882 or e-mail us at [info@clariongp.com](mailto:info@clariongp.com).*