

COVID-19 Food Facility Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

These FAQs are based on the State Guidelines and the Sacramento County Public Health Order. The [Guidelines for the safe operation of restaurants, bars, & wineries](#) that have been published by the State of California must be followed to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Requirements may change. Please check the [EMD website](#) for the most current information.

RESTAURANTS, BARS & WINERIES

1. Q: What is the California Blueprint for a Safer Economy?

A: The State of California has devised a tiered system for reducing COVID-19 in the state with revised criteria for loosening and tightening restrictions on activities. Under the tiered system, counties are designated a color coded tier based on several factors.

As Sacramento County moves through different color tiers, the restrictions are adjusted. The following is a summary of the restrictions under each color tier.

	Purple – Tier 1 Widespread	Red – Tier 2 Substantial	Orange – Tier 3 Moderate	Yellow – Tier 4 Minimal
Restaurants	No indoor dining allowed. Outdoor dining is allowed with restrictions.	Indoor Dining allowed at 25% of capacity or 100 people, whichever is fewer.	Indoor Dining allowed at 50% of capacity or 200 people, whichever is fewer.	Indoor Dining allowed at 50% of capacity.
Bars, Breweries, and Distilleries <i>(without permitted food service/kitchen)</i>	Closed. Not allowed to operate.	Closed. Not allowed to operate.	Indoor areas must remain closed to customers (except for restrooms). Outdoor seating areas are allowed.	Indoor Dining allowed at 50% of capacity.
Wineries	Wine tasting is restricted to outdoor service only.	Wine tasting is restricted to outdoor service only.	Wine tasting is allowed indoors at 25% of capacity or 100 people, whichever is fewer.	Wine tasting is allowed indoors at 50% of capacity or 200 people, whichever is fewer.

2. Q: Under what tier is Sacramento County currently listed?

A: Sacramento County's current status can be found at <https://www.saccounty.net/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>. Please check to see which color tier Sacramento County is listed under before adjusting operations.

3. Q: How is the capacity determined?

A: The capacity percentage varies by tier. It includes customers only (not employees) and is based on the building occupancy.

Example: Red Tier

Building occupancy is 100

25% = 25 people

All customers inside shall not exceed 25 people.

4. Q: Can outdoor dining areas remain open and are they subject to the tiered system capacity restriction?

A: Outdoor dining areas may remain open and do not have a tier system capacity restriction, but must maintain 6 ft. of social distancing between households/groups. Outdoor operations may be conducted under a tent, canopy, or other sun shelter as long as no more than two sides are closed.

5. Q: Are buffets, salad bars and salsa bars allowed to operate?

A: No. The Public Health Order has not changed from previous versions regarding customer self-service for buffets, salad bars, salsa bars, or Mongolian BBQ ingredient bars, etc. These types of self-service operations are to remain closed for customer self-service; however, your employee may work at these stations and serve the customers.

6. Q: Are soda fountains, water dispensing machines, ice dispensers, and frozen yogurt machines open for customer self- service?

A: Yes. Soda fountains, water dispensing machines, ice dispensers and frozen yogurt machines are open for customer self-service. All touch points on the equipment should be cleaned and sanitized with increased frequency. Cups at beverage stations can be accessible by customers, but lids must still be provided by employees or a touchless lid dispenser can be used.

7. Q: Can customers use gravity feed bulk food dispensers and self-service coffee grinders?

A: Yes. Gravity feed bulk dispensers and self-service coffee grinders can be used if the facility provides disposable gloves for customer use or sanitizes the touch points of the equipment after each use.

8. Q: Are condiments in pump style dispensers allowed for customer self-service?

A: Yes. Syrup pumps, ketchup and mustard pumps and other similar enclosed equipment is permitted. All touch points on the equipment should be cleaned and sanitized with increased frequency.

9. Q: Should grab and go food items be prewrapped?

A: Yes. Grab and go items (e. g. tamales, hot dogs, sandwiches, etc.) should be prewrapped. Napkins or disposable gloves can be provided for handling items that cannot be prewrapped.

10. Q: Are multi-use utensils allowed for customer self-service when handling pre-packaged grab and go food items?

A: Yes. Multi-use utensils, such as tongs, are permitted for handling pre-packaged grab and go food items if the utensil is exchanged or cleaned and sanitized after each customer use.

11. Q: Can customers self-serve toppings for frozen yogurt?

A: Yes. Customers can self-serve toppings at frozen yogurt shops if the employee sanitizes the scoops after each use or the employee provides the customer with a disposable spoon to scoop their toppings. Social distancing guidelines should be maintained.

12. Q: Is customer self-service of baked goods allowed when the items are in a fully enclosed bakery case?

A: Yes. Customers must use bakery tissue, disposable gloves, napkins, or one set of tongs per customer that need to be cleaned and sanitized after each customer use. Social distancing guidelines should be maintained.

13. Q: Is customer self-service of coffee from a carafe/pot along with the use of condiment canisters (e.g. sugar, non-dairy coffee creamer, etc.) allowed for customer self-service?

A: Yes, with hand sanitizer by the coffee pot so that each customer can sanitize their hands.

14. Q: Is customer self-service of whole fish on ice allowed?

A: Yes. Customers must use gloves or one set of tongs per customer that need to be cleaned and sanitized after each customer use. Social distancing guidelines should be maintained.

15. Q: Can food facility employees hand out samples to customers?

A: Yes, if the facility has protocol in place that prevents gathering of customers and the samples are not available for customer self-service.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

16. Q: Is it required to place markings on the floor to maintain social distancing?

A: Yes. Markings are helpful to maintain adequate social distancing of a minimum of 6 ft. Tape is considered an acceptable form of marking.

17. Q: Is the operator required to approach customers if they are not adhering to the proper social distancing guidelines?

A: Yes. Operators should approach customers to remind them to maintain social distancing guidelines.

18. Q: What are the approved materials for physical barriers to maintain social distancing guidelines in indoor dining areas? What is the approved height for installation?

A: Plexiglass or any other impermeable physical barrier is acceptable. If physical barriers will be used, partitions between tables should begin at the finished floor or seat height and extend to protect at least up to 5 ft. Physical barriers at booths should begin at back rest and extend to up to 5 ft. Physical barriers are not required if social distancing of at least 6 ft. is maintained between parties. Ensure indoor dining capacity restrictions are being followed. Refer to #1 & #2 for information regarding approved operations and current tier designation in Sacramento County.

19. Q: Can facilities expand their dining area by temporarily placing tables and chairs outside of their facility on the sidewalk?

A: Yes. Prior to setting up a new seating area outdoors, follow the guidance below:

Unincorporated County: Restaurants shall self-certify that they comply with the County Temporary Outdoor Use Area Regulations. Additional information including the self-certification checklist is available at www.SacCounty.net

Please note: Heaters are not allowed under portable tents, but may be allowed elsewhere in the outdoor dining area. Prior to setting up heaters or other equipment (such as lights that require electrical), please contact Building Permits & Inspections at www.Building.SacCounty.net. Contact your local fire provider for requirements pertaining to heaters that use propane/gas.

Incorporated Cities: The facility should contact their local fire, planning/zoning, building department and California Department of Alcohol and Beverage Control (ABC) for approval and requirements for outdoor operations, heaters, and other outdoor equipment.

The information below is based on guidance provided by [CDPH in The Use of Temporary Structures for Outdoor Business Operations](#). Please refer to this guidance for additional details.

Outdoor dining areas must still maintain 6 ft. social distancing between households/groups. Outdoor dining areas with or without overhead coverage may only have two sides enclosed with non-permeable walls.

Non-permeable walls are made of any type of material that can restrict aerosols from passing through (fabric, vinyl tarp, plastic sheeting, glass, solid fence or wall). Non-permeable walls must be non-adjacent (not touching each other to form a corner).

Permeable walls may be used without limit. A permeable wall is one that is made of a material or design that does not restrict natural air flow (wrought iron, lattice fence, course mesh screen)

Please note: A barrier or solid structure, greater than 3 feet in height from the floor, used to create a perimeter for a business is considered a closed side.

20. Q: What are the criteria for determining outdoor dining areas?

A: To operate for outdoor dining service, a facility must allow for the free flow of outdoor air through the entire space and must meet **one** of the following two criteria:

1. The facility is completely uncovered and open to the sky (meaning no shade structures are in use other than individual table umbrellas), such as an outdoor courtyard or patio; or,
2. If the facility is covered (in whole or in part) by a temporary or permanent shade structure (such as an awning, canopy, or roof), at least 50% of its perimeter is open to the outdoors. For example, a square tent with a roof must have **at least two of its sides** completely open to qualify as an outdoor facility.

Notes:

1. Partitions or barriers measuring 5 feet measured from the floor, used to separate between parties, within the outdoor dining area may be used if 6 feet social distancing cannot be maintained. These barriers do not qualify as a closed side unless they are used to create a perimeter for a business and are higher than 3 feet or impede the free flow of air through the entire facility.
2. Fences and screens that do not impede airflow are not considered closed sides for purposes of determining whether an area is outdoors.

21. Q: What is considered an event/gathering?

A: A “gathering” is an event, assembly, meeting, or convening that brings together multiple people from separate households in a single space, indoors or outdoors, at the same time and in a coordinated fashion—like a conference, festival, fair, party, or performance. Events such as marriage ceremonies, cultural ceremonies, funerals and worship services have specific guidance that applies to them and can be found at [EMD.SacCounty.net](https://www.emd.sacounty.net).

Gatherings at home are highly discouraged. If the individual chooses to not follow the public health order and participate in a gathering, no more than 3 households should be present.

Gatherings in public are generally not allowed because it is likely that more than 3 households participate.

Note: Some outdoor gatherings are allowed as long as everyone attending the outdoor gathering strictly complies with all the requirements set forth in the [Event & Gathering Guidance](#) to reduce risk and keep everyone who attends as safe as possible. An [Event Application](#) can be submitted to EMD-EventApplication@sacounty.net.

22. Q: Can a banquet hall or event center hold a private event or party that brings together people from different households?

A: No. All events or gatherings that would bring together persons from different households, such as private parties, must be cancelled or postponed until further notice; unless it’s a marriage ceremony (*indoor/outdoor receptions are not allowed*), cultural ceremony, indoor funeral, or a worship service 25% capacity. The specific guidance that applies to the aforementioned events can be found at [EMD.SacCounty.net](https://www.emd.sacounty.net).

23. Q: Is there a limit to the amount of people that can sit together for a meal in a dining establishment?

A: No. There is no limit so long as the individuals are in the same household or have requested to be seated together. All events or gatherings that would bring together persons from different households, such as private parties, must be cancelled or postponed until further notice.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT

24. Q: Is it a requirement that servers and bussers wear gloves?

A: No, however proper hand washing is required. It is recommended that servers, bussers and any other employee that remove items used by customers (dirty cups, plates, napkins, etc.) or handle trash, use disposable gloves (and wash hands before putting them on and after removing them).

25. Q: Can bartenders serve garnish in the cocktails without wearing gloves?

A: Yes. Gloves are not required for this activity. However, handwashing is required before handling the garnish.

26. Q: Are face coverings required?

A: Yes. Face coverings are required while outside of the home, unless one of the exemptions below applies.

Individuals are exempt from wearing a face covering in the following specific settings:

- Persons in a car alone or solely with members of their own household.
- Persons who are working in an office or in a room alone.
- Persons who are actively eating or drinking provided that they are able to maintain a distance of at least six feet away from persons who are not members of the same household or residence.
- Persons who are outdoors and maintaining at least 6 feet of social distancing from others not in their household. Such persons must have a face covering with them at all times and must put it on if they are within 6 feet of others who are not in their household.
- Persons who are obtaining a service involving the nose or face for which temporary removal of the face covering is necessary to perform the service.
- Workers who are required to wear respiratory protection.
- Persons who are specifically exempted from wearing face coverings by other CDPH guidance.

The following individuals are exempt from wearing a face covering at all times:

- Persons age two years or under. These very young children must not wear a face covering because of the risk of suffocation.
- Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents wearing a face covering. This includes persons with a medical condition for whom wearing a face covering could obstruct breathing or who are unconscious,

incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance. Such conditions are rare.

- Persons who are hearing impaired, or communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
- Persons for whom wearing a face covering would create a risk to the person related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

Note: Persons exempted from wearing a face covering due to a medical condition who are employed in a job involving regular contact with others should wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it. See complete Guidance for Face Coverings [here](#).

27. Q: Can an employee wear a face shield instead of a face covering?

A: No. A face shield does not meet the PHO definition of a face covering. A face shield provides splash protection, not respiratory protection. Per CDC guidance, face shields are not meant to function as primary respiratory protection and should be used concurrently with a face covering. Persons exempted from wearing a face covering due to a medical condition who are employed in a job involving regular contact with others should wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it.

28. Q: Can a dishwashing employee wear a face shield instead of a face covering and goggles?

A: No. A face shield does not meet the PHO definition of a face covering. Face coverings are required while indoors in a public space unless [exempt](#) from wearing one. The dishwashing employee needs to be protected from splashing of dirty dishes and utensils and is required to wear a face covering **and** a face shield or goggles. Persons exempted from wearing a face covering due to a medical condition should wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it.

29. Q: Can a plastic barrier at a cash register be used instead of a face covering?

A: No. Physical barriers or partitions cannot be used in lieu face coverings. Face coverings are required while indoors in a public space and while outdoors in a public space when maintaining physical distance of 6 ft. from individuals from other households/residence is not feasible. Full face covering mandate and exemptions available on the [CDPH website](#).

30. Q: Are face coverings with cylindrical openings on the front or side an approved face covering? (See example)

A: Yes, but only if the face covering incorporates a cloth fabric insert between the user and the opening on the face covering.



Traditional light breathing face coverings incorporate a one-way valve (typically a raised plastic cylinder about the size of a quarter on the front or side of the facemask) that is designed to facilitate easy exhaling. These valves permit droplet release from the facemask, putting others nearby at risk. The light breathing face coverings **without the cloth fabric insert** are not considered a face covering under the most recent Public Health Order and are not to be used.

31. Q: What if an employee refuses to wear a face covering?

A: An individual can refuse to wear a face covering if they are [exempt](#). See # 26 for information regarding exemptions. Persons exempted from wearing a face covering due to a medical condition who are employed in a job involving regular contact with others should wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it. A medical note or certification of a medical condition is not required to prove that one is exempt from wearing a face covering; however, employers may request one from employees. Full face covering mandate and exemptions available on the [CDPH website](#).

32. Q: If customers are not wearing a face covering in my facility or drive thru, are my employees required to enforce the state’s face covering mandate?

A: No, however, private businesses can refuse service to customers if they choose and facilities should inform their customers of the Public Health Order requirement to wear face coverings. Some individuals may be [exempt](#) from wearing a face covering. If COVID-19 guidelines are not followed and COVID-19 cases continue to rise, the county and cities may be forced to order another stay at home order which will create additional economic hardship.

33. Q: Do kitchen employees have to wear a face covering when they become overheated and can’t breathe?

A: No. Employees suffering from excessive heat and breathing difficulty should remove the face covering, remain at least 6 ft. away from others, and recover until they can safely resume wearing the face covering.

MISCELLANEOUS

34. Due to current California Department of Alcohol and Beverage Control (ABC) regulations, can a bar that doesn't sell meals partner with a restaurant or food truck in order to be allowed to operate? If so, does every transaction at the bar require a food purchase?

A: Yes, the facilities may partner. Alcohol can only be sold in the same transaction as a meal. A menu should be created to show the available options agreed upon from both facilities. Refer to #1 & #2 for information regarding approved operations and current tier designation in Sacramento County. Visit the links below for additional information

[ABC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Updates](#)

[ABC Guidance by License Type](#)

[Industry Guidance for Restaurants, Bars, & Wineries \(State Guidelines\)](#)

35. Q: According to ABC what foods are considered bona fide meals?

A: For a full list of what is considered a meal, visit the [ABC web page](#).

36. Can wineries and tasting rooms remain open?

A: Refer to #1 & #2 for information regarding approved operations and current tier designation in Sacramento County.

37. Q: Where can I report an employee with a positive COVID-19 test result?

A: Call Environmental Management Department at 916-875-8440.

38. Q: Is there a requirement that the hand sanitizer for customer use be manufactured?

A: No, if certain conditions are met. Follow the [FDA's Temporary Policy for Preparation of Certain Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizer Products](#)

39. Q: Are customers allowed to bring their own reusable bags, mugs or other reusable personal items from home into retail markets or other food facilities?

A: Customers are allowed to bring in their reusable carry-out bags into food facilities; however, other reusable personal items from home such as mugs cannot be brought in. Facilities should no longer be distributing single-use carryout bags and should be charging customers when providing reusable grocery bags.

40. Q: Are vehicle based drive-in events allowed in Sacramento County?

A: Yes, vehicle based drive-in events can be allowed under specific circumstances and only after approved by EMD and Sacramento County Public Health. Refer to [Vehicle Based Drive-in Event Guidelines](#), propose a gathering plan, and submit to EMD to begin the review and approval process.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Thank you for your efforts in keeping Sacramento residents and visitors safe!

- Sacramento County [COVID-19 Industry Guidance for Restaurants, Bars, and Wineries](#)
- If you have questions, please call EMD at (916) 875-8440.
- For additional information, refer to the [Sacramento Business Environmental Resource Center \(BERC\)](#) and [Industry Guidance for Restaurants, Bars, & Wineries \(State Guidelines\)](#)
- To ensure you receive the latest information, call EMD at (916) 875-8440 to update your email and contact information.

Revised 2/09/21