The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we gather for food and drink. Restaurants, bars, food carts and tasting rooms must modify floor plans, operations and service strategies to provide a safe and welcoming environment to both guests and employees.

Occupancy limitations necessitate creating outdoor spaces for customers that provide comfort and shelter from the elements.

This toolkit is intended to provide guidance on how to winterize your dining areas.
STATEWIDE HEALTH GUIDANCE

Oregon’s COVID-19 regulations are now based on a county by county safety framework that uses four different risk levels for counties based on their level of COVID-19 spread—Extreme Risk, High Risk, Moderate Risk, and Lower Risk. To view the risk status of your county, visit the Governor’s COVID-19 webpage and click on the County Risk Level Table or Map to determine your county’s status.

Please note that the risk levels are subject to change as frequently as every two weeks upon data review by OHA and/or your county health department, and there are significant operational restrictions between each level.

RISK LEVELS

As of December 3, 2020 the parameters for dining are as follows:

Low Risk:
Indoor dining: available at 50% capacity / 12:00am close
Outdoor dining: 300 cap, max 8 guests per table.

Moderate Risk:
Indoor dining: available at 50% capacity or a max 100 (whichever is smaller), max 6 guests per table / 11:00pm close
Outdoor dining: 150 cap, max 8 guests per table

High Risk:
Indoor dining: Not to exceed 25% capacity, max 50 capacity / 11:00p close
Outdoor dining: available with max capacity 75, max 6 guests per table from no more than 2 households

Extreme Risk:
No indoor dining
Outdoor dining: max 50 capacity, max 6 guests per table from no more than 2 households / 11:00pm close
Takeout highly recommended
PPE RESOURCES

At every risk level, to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks, Oregonians must continue to wear face coverings, watch their physical distance, wash hands, stay home when sick and keep social get-togethers and gatherings small.

PPE is necessary no matter what the current risk assessment is and in an effort to reduce your PPE expenditures the Governor’s office has created a free supply connection site for businesses with fewer than 50 employees.

Use this Request PPE form to request masks and gloves. Products are provided on a first come, first served basis.

Oregon-based companies Protectly and Spirit Sanitizer offer a wide array of PPE including masks, gloves, sanitizers, and dispensers. Both companies are responsive and order fulfillment is swift.
PLANNING

How to find your local outdoor seating permitting regulations and resources.

a. Oregon Health Authority guidance for eating and drinking establishments can be found through this link. In this guidance the definition of ‘outdoor dining’ is any open-air space including any space which may have a temporary or fixed cover (e.g. awning or roof) and at least seventy-five percent of the square footage of its sides open for airflow.

Structures that do not comply with this definition are considered to be ‘indoor’ and can only be used when indoor dining resumes in your county. This guidance is enforceable by county health departments and all questions specific to regulatory measures should be directed to your local health department.

b. Permitting for use of outdoor spaces such as parking spaces, parking lots, and roadways can be found through your local Department of Transportation. Please inquire before beginning your project.

c. The OLCC has created a streamlined process for serving outdoors. Visit their site for details and applications.

d. Your local fire marshal may need to approve your structure or use of propane heaters, be sure to inquire as you begin planning.
SERVING OUTSIDE DURING COVID

The COVID-19 pandemic requires adjustments to workflow and the diners’ experience. Bold, clear and concise communication will help alleviate discomfort for both guests and staff. Here are a few ways that you can make dining during a pandemic a little less perplexing.

SIGNAGE

From the time a guest arrives to the moment that they leave, they should have an idea of what they can expect and what is expected of them. Signs indicating when and where face coverings are required, how to place an order, and how to be seated are a great starting point. Determine how you can best display this guidance at the entrance of your business and outdoor dining area, and on the tables themselves.

Adding images to your website and social media profiles will help guests prepare to dine with you.

MENUS & ORDERING

**QR Codes:** Most point of sale systems provide integrations that allow guests to order from a digital menu access by scanning a QR code with their smartphones. QR codes may be posted on tables or storefronts to allow guests to order with little human interaction. These digital menus can also replace disposable paper menus. Do keep in mind that your guests may not be familiar with how to use their phone to scan a QR code. Staff should be prepared to coach from a distance, or offer an accessible alternative.

**Portable Card Readers:** To simplify in person payment systems, and eliminate lines, consider portable card readers. These readers can be brought to a table and easily sanitized once the guest is through. Clover has a very convenient reader that also functions as a portable POS so you can place and send orders tableside.
SERVICeware

Whether you are fast casual or fine dining, compostable plates, cutlery and drinkware is worthy of consideration. Beyond mitigating risk of exposure, disposable flatware & glassware can actually decrease labor cost during the slower winter months, allowing you to allocate dishwashing hours to other tasks. Health code currently dictates that restaurants should not fill a guest’s reusable water bottle or coffee cup.

SANITIZING

OHA regulations provide clear guidance for sanitizing dining areas between parties. Additionally, having hand sanitizer readily available to guests is essential. Bottles can be placed directly on tables, and available throughout the dining area. Look for sanitizers that are scent-free to reduce the impact on the meal, especially if you have a lot of ‘finger food’ on the menu,
OUTDOOR SEATING STRUCTURES

The best and most durable structures for the winter months utilize materials such as corrugated clear plastic roofing and wood. Heavy weight canvas and weather resistant tenting may also be used for less permanent seasonal structures. To avoid damage from heavy rain and snow, avoid a flat roof. If you don’t have an architect or engineer designing your outdoor structure, you can find specifications in the Snow Load Safety Guide from FEMA. You will also need to design the roof in a way that will prevent snow and ice from shedding onto parking areas or pedestrian walkways.

WALLS

Temporary or permanent walls work well to insulate from the cold and wind. These can be made with clear tarping that is secured to the structure or with corrugated clear plastic. A reminder that according to the OHA, outdoor structures must be seventy five percent open so that air can easily flow through the space.

TABLES & SEATS

Tables and seats should be comfortable and easy to sanitize. Avoid using metal as it will age quickly due to water exposure and guests will find it to be cold to the touch. Sealed wood works well in outdoor spaces and if you treat it every few months, the furniture will last you a few years. If you can find affordable vinyl cushions for your chairs, it will provide much appreciated comfort for your guests. Remember that all materials in your dining space will be subject to frequent sanitizing.
**LIGHTING**

Lighting outdoor areas can be done easily with incandescent string lights powered by solar, battery or electricity. Remember that extension cords must be at least 10 feet above the sidewalk or, if on the sidewalk, under ADA-compliant cord-protector ramps. Look for soft, warmer toned lights will create a welcoming environment.

Using light-colored and translucent materials in the design for your structure are also advised.

**CLEAR AND SAFE WALKWAYS**

Clear and safe walkways need to be preserved throughout the winter for social distancing, ADA compliance, and pedestrian safety. All seating, heaters and structures should allow for 6 feet of clearance on sidewalks.

Be sure you have the right tools on hand to keep sidewalks safe and free of debris, leaves, ice & slush.
PROpane HEATERS

The use of propane heaters for sidewalk tables and outdoor dining structures will be essential to keeping your guests comfortable while they dine. When planning for heating, be sure to budget for both the cost of heaters and the propane needed to keep them operational. Propane fire pits are most often used for ambience rather than heat. They will however require the same budget and safety protocols.

HEATER SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Your local Fire Marshal may have guidelines or codes for use of propane heaters posted on their website and in addition to those recommendations, here are a few general tips to keep you and your guests safe:

- Make sure to consider placement of the heater. In general, heaters should be at least 3 ft away from combustible materials. This includes planters, fabric, and glass. It may be tempting to push heaters towards walls or windows to allow for walkways to be clear, but remember, these burn very hot and at high intensity. If a heater is closer than 2 ft to a glass window, chances are it will crack it when the temps drop.

- Are you using a heater you used last winter? Make sure there is no rust on or around any valves or switches. It is essential that you can safely control the propane output of your heating devices. If you are seeing your heater age, have it serviced or consider a replacement.

- Do not allow guests to turn the heaters on and off. Clear and frequent signage is a must. Your insurance agent may have additional suggestions or requirements for signage to reduce your liability.
Customer engagement ensures a safe and healthy experience from start to finish.

**WEBSITE, GOOGLE BUSINESS & SOCIAL MEDIA**

Your guests’ experience begins the moment they look for you online. Be sure your hours, safety protocols and dining options are up-to-date on your website, online listing, and all social media platforms. Photographs of your outdoor dining area are highly recommended.

Make sure to claim your business on Google so that you can edit and add information to your business’ Google profile. This guide outlines the steps to follow: Add or claim your business on Google My Business.

Yelp has created an area on page profiles where businesses can highlight the COVID-19 ‘Health & Safety Measures’ that they are using. Use this area to highlight what your team is doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. You can also communicate these safety practices on your website. This transparency and communication helps encourage trust during this uncertain time.

For other resources on marketing your business during the time of COVID-19, visit Travel Oregon’s Small Business Marketing Series.
WINTER MENUS

Get your guests excited about coming out and not cooking at home by offering winter menu items that are warm, comforting, and seasonal. ‘Cabin Fever’ has a whole new meaning this year and guests will appreciate a chance to safely explore outside their home for a nice hot meal and a warm drink. Get creative with your mulled wine, cider, and hot toddy recipes.

WINTER IDEAS FOR GUESTS

The motto this year is ‘Bundle Up to Dine Out.’ Encourage your guests to dress warmly when they come to visit and bring their own blankets to sit outside. Embrace the cozy vibes and utilize old camping tricks like hot water bottles for guests to hold after the sun goes down. And there has never been a more appropriate time to put a hot chocolate on the menu for kiddos. Creativity and a willingness to adjust to COVID-19 circumstances while making an experience fun and safe will make your business stand out and will encourage your guests to return.
The **Independent Restaurant Alliance of Oregon** was formed in response to the Coronavirus Pandemic when it became clear that independently owned restaurants and bars needed assistance in determining how to safely operate and recover from the economic fallout of this crisis.

Eleven percent of Oregon’s workforce depends on income from restaurants and bars — their lives are currently in peril. Our mission is simple — we are fully committed to working together to find the solutions to the challenges our industry faces, together.

For more Information, find us at [indprestaurants.org](http://indprestaurants.org)

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