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Reopening: Guidance for the Bar Industry

Guidance Document

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Overview

The bar industry has been incredibly challenged by stay- at-home or shelter-in-place orders across the United States. The majority of bars that derive over 50 percent of sales by alcohol, have been forced to close and furlough or lay-off employees. Most states are not allowing bars to reopen at full operation as shelter-in-place restrictions are being relaxed.

Some establishments have come up with unique solutions by offering drinks to-go as some states begin to allow alcohol sales for off-premise consumption.

With stay-at-home restrictions beginning to lift, bar owners are faced with difficult questions that must be addressed before reopening, such as:

- How can we protect our employees and customers from the disease while at our bar?
- How do we assure our customers that we are doing all we can to protect them from the disease?
- How can we minimize the risk of disease transmission to patrons from those who are ill or those who have had contact with positive COVID-19?
- What do we do if a customer is sick or not following guidelines?

Notably, according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food and drink. Existing food safety requirements are already very stringent and reduce the likelihood of foodborne disease transmission. Additional measures can be taken to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 from touching surfaces or from person-to-person spread through respiratory droplets.

This document offers practical guidance for bar owners to implement measures to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Any reopening efforts should be in accordance with local, state, and federal guidelines. It addresses the key questions above, and also provides tips for bar employees and customers. Bars with accompanying restaurants are also encouraged to review AIHA's Restaurant Guideline for additional safeguards.

What should an Employer do to protect themselves and their customers?

Bar owners should continually monitor international (World Health Organization (WHO), federal (CDC), state, and local guidelines for changes in recommendations, cleaning strategies, and other best management practices. Employers should also consider developing a team of professionals to monitor, assess, and implement new strategies as they become available.

In addition, employers should consider the following strategies for reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in regards to physical distancing, ventilation, enhanced cleaning practices, restrooms, drink/food preparation areas and contact surfaces, personal hygiene, employee wellness, personal protective equipment, training, waste and laundering, and communication.

Due to the wide variety of bars, their layout/format and sizes, it may not be possible for establishments to implement all of the following; however, trying to tackle the problem from multiple angles can help reduce health risks.

Physical Distancing

- Follow all local, state and federal rules and regulations at all times.
- Encourage outdoor seating as much as possible.
- Limit the number of customers in the bar at one time. Consider starting with a "Reservation Only" policy similar to restaurants. Limit the group size to six or less and allows for 6-foot distancing.

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- Mark distances of 6 feet for customers waiting for ID check. Consider installing plastic barriers to protect security personnel as they check IDs. Investigate the possibility of a "hands-free" ID check system so that security personnel don't have to touch the ID.
- Place signs at the entrance that encourages customers to follow physical distancing requirements. Find creative and fun ways for staff and security to encourage customers to follow these guidelines.
- Consider increasing the security staffing to help remind customers of physical distancing and to remove any customers that refuse to comply.
- Place plastic partitions between bartenders/servers and customers where possible.
- Consider removing barstools at the bar or other locations where drinks are made and served.
- Consider closing games, pool tables, dart boards, and other areas where people may congregate that have high-touch surfaces. If you keep these activities open, please provide disinfectant and encourage all patrons to clean before and after each use. Bar staff should, at minimum, clean and disinfect these areas at some frequency in between patrons' usage. Consider making these activities reservation only and keep game equipment behind the bar until reserved.
- For live music, ensure that there is ample distance (6 foot minimum) between musicians and customers.
- Close the dance floor.
- Try to distance tables or customers so that each table or customers are at least 6 feet apart.
  - If tables cannot be moved, consider putting signage on every other table or booth marking them as "PHYSICAL DISTANCE TABLE" or "RESERVED FOR YOUR SAFETY". Consider Plexiglass partitions between booths as an alternative.
- In lieu of having customers walk up to the bar, consider providing table-only service for drinks.
  - Alternatively, consider handing out "PHYSICAL DISTANCE" signs at the bar that customers can use to put on either side of them to maintain physical distancing.
- Consider non-traditional ordering and payment processing to minimize contact time between bartenders, servers and customers.
  - Consider an app-based system.
  - Consider writing a numbered menu on a wall/large board that can be easily communicated at a distance.
  - Encourage credit card use over cash, when possible.

Ventilation

- If possible, encourage customers to enjoy their drinks outside in fresh air.
- Get fresh air to the customers and staff and properly utilize ventilation system. Some ways to do this:
  - Open doors and windows if possible.
  - Maximize fresh air through your ventilation system.
  - Maintain indoor relative humidity at 40-60%.
  - Ensure restroom is under negative pressure.
  - If you don't know how, ask an HVAC professional and see ASHRAE updates for more information.
- Consider using portable HEPA filtration units.
- If fans such as pedestal fans or hard mounted fans are used in the bar, take steps to minimize air from fans blowing from one person directly at another individual. If fans are disabled or removed, employers should remain aware of, and take steps to prevent, heat hazards.

(NOTE: Contact an occupational health and safety professional or ventilation specialist for advice on how to best utilize ventilation systems).

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Enhanced Cleaning Practices

- Select appropriate disinfectants –consider effectiveness and safety.
  - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a list of products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2.
  - Review product labels and Safety Data Sheets and follow manufacturer specifications.
  - Consider consulting industrial hygiene experts if additional advice is needed.
- Establish a disinfection routine - no more wet rag approach (use disposable products instead).
  - Ensure disinfection protocols follow product instructions for application and contact time.
  - Consider establishing a single staff position whose responsibility is to disinfect. This person should be continuously cleaning and visible to customers.
  - Each table, chairs (as possible), and partitions should be disinfected after each customer.
  - Consider using a checklist or audit system to track how often cleaning is conducted.
- Consider covering chairs in a non-porous material for easy cleaning.
- Consider placing hand sanitizer on each table and place a sign on tables encouraging all customers to wash their hands or apply hand sanitizer
- Menus should be non-porous and disinfected between use. If paper menus are used, make them single use only. Consider alternatives like a menu board or phone app.
- Aprons, towels, work clothing, etc. should be placed in trash bags and treated as potentially contaminated and laundered per recommendations below.

Restrooms

- Doors to multi-stall restrooms should be able to be opened and closed without touching handles, if at all possible.
  - Place a trash can by the door if the door cannot be opened without touching the handle.
- For single restrooms, provide signage and materials (paper towels and trash cans) for individuals to use without touching the handles, and consider providing a key so disinfection measures can be better controlled. If a key is used, it should be disinfected after each use.
- Place signs indicating that toilet lids (if present) should be closed before flushing.
- Place signs asking customer and employees to wash hands before and after using the restroom.
- Provide paper towels in restrooms and disconnect or tape-off hand air dryers.
- Double efforts to keep bathrooms clean and properly disinfected.

Drink Preparation Areas and Contact Surfaces

- Place adhesive floor mats at entrances and at the entrances of food preparation areas.
- Cover any exposed clean silverware, dishes, glasses, pots and pans. Relocate hanging bar glasses to a covered area.
- Regularly disinfect liquor bottles, pour stations, taps, ice scoops, etc.
- Use disposable cups if feasible.
- Any items left by customers should be placed in sealed bags and the bag should be disinfected and isolated until customer returns.
- Remove all condiments from the table (e.g., ketchup bottles, salt and pepper shakers, etc.) and consider providing pre-packaged condiments or include condiments as part of the cleaning routine.

Personal Hygiene

- Establish a "before and after service" hand washing or sanitizing for all staff including bar staff.

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- Staff should wash hands between serving and clearing dishes or establish a dedicated person to clear dishes and wait staff arrange for dish pick up if a customer requests their dishes cleared.
- Provide hand-sanitizing stations at the front of and throughout the establishment for customers to sanitize hands before being seated or when needed, if handwashing is not feasible.
- Provide hand sanitizer at each table and throughout the bar.

Employee Wellness

- Conduct employee temperature screening and wellness checks before each shift.
  - Temperature screening can include manual (use non-contact infrared thermometers) or thermal camera methods.
  - Employees can self-check temperature, while wearing a glove, or disinfect between use.
  - There are a number of examples available for wellness questionnaires (see Resources below).
- If employee is sick or receives any kind of testing (virus or antibody), results should be reported to employer and timing/decision to go back to work should only be with doctor's approval.

Other Control Measures

- Consider use of gloves for bartenders and ensure the gloves are changed per current industry standards.
- Although not necessary if hand-washing protocols are rigorously followed, consider providing gloves to servers.
  - If they are worn, they must be changed regularly and are not a substitution for hand-washing.
- Require face coverings for staff. The type depends on local requirements and availability.
- Provide or encourage all other employees to wear face coverings and gloves, and to use hand sanitizer. **(NOTE: Homemade face coverings primarily protect others not yourself).**

NOTE: If an employer chooses to provide an N95 respirator, please fully consider all the potential OSHA requirements.

Training

- Provide instruction and training to employees on how to:
  - Handle their work clothing properly at home if laundry service is not provided by employer.
  - Properly put on and remove gloves.
  - Clean and disinfect tables according to product specifications.
  - Correctly use respirators.
- Provide Safety Data Sheets for cleaning chemicals and ensure employees are aware of the hazards of use.
- Industrial hygienists have expertise in selecting personal protective equipment (PPE) and training.

Waste and Laundering

- Single-use items and used disinfection materials can be treated as regular waste, following food safety guidelines.
- Cloth materials (e.g., linens, aprons, etc.) should be washed and dried on the highest temperature setting allowable for the fabric.

Communication

- Communicate to the customers what the bar is doing to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (e.g., disinfection routine, health policies for staff, and health & safety measures in place).
  - Consider communicating to customers when coming to the bar may not be a good option (e.g. taking care of someone who is COVID-19 positive, exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, being in a high-risk category, etc.).

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  - Consider placing signage on tables to show that they have been disinfected after previous customers.
- Communicate that the bar has the right to refuse service to anyone exhibiting symptoms or not following guidelines (e.g., physical distancing).
- Platforms for communication could include websites, reservation processes, hand-outs, and outdoor signage.

What should an Employee do to protect themselves and the customers?

- Evaluate your health constantly, and if you are sick stay home. If you have a temperature stay home. If someone at home is sick, stay home. If you have allergies and sneezing, stay home. **NOTE: Employer HR Policies, HIPAA guidelines and other laws should be followed at all times.**
- Wear a face covering when out in public and maintain physical distancing.
- Wash your hands when you arrive at work, after each customer, after touching your face or face covering and when you leave work.
- At all times, wear a face covering or something better if you have it if possible, as it aligns with local and state requirements.
- Let your employer know if you have concerns about the PPE that may be provided to you and that you are properly instructed on how to use it.
- Attempt to delay the urge to sneeze or cough if possible; carry a disposable towel or handkerchief, so if you get the urge to sneeze or cough, cover your nose, mouth and mask with it and then immediately leave the premises to wash your hands and face thoroughly before going back to work.

What a Customer can do to minimize the transmission of COVID-19

- If you are sick, stay home. If you have a temperature, stay home. If someone in your house is sick, stay home. If you have allergies and can't control sneezing, stay home.
- Use take-out/pick-up services where you can.
- Wear a face covering as you enter and leave the building.
- Wash your hands before and after you leave the building if possible. If not, use hand sanitizer when you sit down and before you leave the building.
- Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other customers and employees when waiting for a table and when walking throughout the bar to the extent possible.
- Attempt to delay the urge to sneeze or cough if possible; carry a disposable towel or handkerchief towel, so if you get the urge to sneeze or cough, cover your nose, mouth and mask with it and then, attempt to delay the urge to sneeze or cough, immediately leave the premises to wash your hands and face thoroughly before sitting back down.

Resources

- The National Restaurant Association has compiled information and resources for the restaurant industry, including employer guidelines, safety tips, and links to news articles and state guidelines.
- Numerous **wellness questionnaire examples** are available online (e.g., South Dakota Department of Health's COVID-19: Employee Screening Questions and Guidelines).
- The CDC has developed cleaning and disinfection recommendations for commercial facilities.
- The EPA has developed a list of disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2.

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- ASHRAE has a list of COVID resources for commercial buildings.
- AIHA's Indoor Environmental Quality Committee developed these guidance documents about reopening and cleaning buildings after closures due to COVID-19: Recovering from COVID-19 Building Closures and Workplace Cleaning for COVID-19.

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Occupational health and safety (OHS) professionals (also known as industrial hygienists) practice the science of anticipating, recognizing, evaluating, and controlling workplace conditions that may cause workers' injury or illness. Through a continuous improvement cycle of planning, doing, checking and acting, OHS professionals make sure workplaces are healthy and safe.

Get additional resources at AIHA's Coronavirus Outbreak Resource Center.

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