

COVID-19 Guidelines for Restaurants, Food Vendors and Beach Bars

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Introduction

The Food Safety division of the Inspectorate of Public Health (Food Safety Inspectorate) is responsible for assuring that foods prepared and sold in Sint Maarten are fit and wholesome for human consumption. Food for consumption that is not prepared under hygienic conditions can cause severe gastrointestinal complaints and severe allergic reactions which can lead to death. The food industry is responsible for producing, preparing, serving and selling safe food.

The requirements for storing, selling and serving safe food stems from the “Commodities Ordinance” A.B. 2013 GT no 805 as amended lastly by A.B. 2015 no 9, mostly by articles 8, 13, 16. The Food Safety Inspectorate is responsible for conducting inspections, enforcement and monitoring of food products under this legislation.

Owners and management of restaurants, bars, and food vendors are strongly recommended to draft and work according to an action plan containing procedure of operations for personnel and customers based on the guidelines provided below to be able to re-open safely after the COVID-19 lock down. This is also a good opportunity to finalize and implement the required HACCP control plan.

Should these guidelines not be adhered to, citizens can be inadvertently exposed to an unsafe environment for dining and take out of food due to lack of proper sanitization method, minimal social distancing and unsafe food and hygiene practices.

The purpose of these guidelines is to encourage business owners also to be self-regulatory in order to mitigate the spread of this disease so workers can be in a safe working environment. It is also prudent to focus on preventing a new lock down which would add to the already financially disastrous effect of the previous one.

Indoor and outdoor dining restaurants are considered high risk and must submit a prevention and safety plan prior to opening to taskforce@sintmaartengov.org

Personal hygiene for employees

- Emphasize effective hand hygiene including washing hands for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before and after eating, after smoking breaks, after receiving goods from suppliers and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Always wash hands with soap and water. If soap and water are not readily available, then use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol and avoid working with unwrapped or exposed foods. DO NOT touch food with chemically sanitized hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wear gloves and face mask while working on the cold prep station.
- Use gloves to avoid direct bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods.
- Before preparing or eating food, always wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Provide employees with a safe working environment and access to disposable napkins to cough and sneeze in.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and walk away from food, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash hands with soap and water before they return to the work station.
- Uniforms need to be changed at least once a day and are not allowed to be worn while traveling to work.
- Servers must wash hands before attending to tables and after serving each table
- No personal mobile phones are allowed in the kitchen, bar and dining area. If a mobile is used for taking orders this needs to be sanitized frequently.

Monitoring employee health

- Instruct employees with symptoms associated with COVID-19 to stay home and to report to their physician.
- If employees are sick at work, send them home immediately. Clean and disinfect surfaces in their workspace. Others at the facility with close contact (i.e., within 6 feet) of the employee during this time should be considered exposed.
- Instruct employees who are well, but know they have been exposed to COVID-19, to notify their supervisor and follow the recommended precautions from the health department.
- Inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace, if an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, while maintaining confidentiality.
- Implement workplace controls to reduce transmission among employees, such as those described below.

- Employers - Pre-screen (e.g., take temperature and assess symptoms prior to starting work).
- Employers - Disinfect and clean work spaces and equipment, and consider more frequent cleaning of high touch surfaces.
- Employees - Regularly self-monitor (e.g., take temperature and assess symptoms of coronavirus).
- Employees - Wear a mask or face shield.
- Employees - Practice social distancing and stay at least 6 feet from other people whenever possible.

Managing operations in a foodservice establishment or retail food store

Continue to follow established food safety protocols and best practices for retail food establishments and important COVID-19 recommendations, including the following:

Cleaning and sanitation

- Thoroughly detail clean and sanitize entire facility especially if it was closed during the shutdown.
- Follow the 4 key steps to food safety: Always — Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill.
- Wash, rinse, and sanitize food contact surfaces dishware, utensils, food preparation surfaces, and beverage equipment after each use.
- Clean and disinfect tables, chairs, table condiments after each guest.
- Frequently disinfect (every 30 min.) surfaces repeatedly touched by employees or customers such as bar areas, serving counters, door knobs, equipment handles, check-out counters, etc.
- Frequently clean (every hour) and disinfect floors, counters, and other facility access areas using approved disinfectants.
- Disinfect money pin machine after each use.
- Clean and disinfect reusable menus.
- Check rest rooms regularly, clean and sanitize them based on frequency of use.
- Provide touchless hand sanitizers and/or hand washing stations for guest to use before they are seated.
- Prepare and use sanitizers according to label instructions.
- Re-organize / clean walk ins and freezers where applicable.
- Verify that your ware-washing machines are operating at the required wash and rinse temperatures and with the appropriate detergents and sanitizers.

- Remember that hot water can be used in place of chemicals to sanitize equipment and utensils in manual ware-washing machines.

Social distancing

- Help customers maintain good infection control and social distancing by:
 - Discontinuing operations, such as salad bars, buffets, and beverage service stations that require customers to use common utensils or dispensers.
 - Finding ways to encourage spacing between customers while in line for service or check out in accordance with the applicable local requirements.
 - Discouraging customers from bringing pets — except service animals — into stores or waiting areas.
- Re-organize prep/work stations in the kitchen to adhere to the 6-8 feet guideline.
- Dining tables and seating capacity must take into account the 6-8 feet distance and will be reduced depending on the available space.
- No more than 3 persons at one time at counter to pick up food and social distancing to be practiced for those who are waiting to be served.
- Server to service 2-3 tables at once.
- Servers are to wear face mask when in contact with guest
- Determine ingress and egress to and from bathrooms by using floor markings
- Post signage at entrance stating that social distancing needs to be practiced, hand washing /sanitizing measures are required and that no one with a fever or displaying symptoms of being sick will be allowed to enter
- Design a process that guest stay separated while waiting for seating. Don't allow them to congregate in the waiting area or at the bar.
- Limit party size at tables to 4 persons.
- Consider a reservation only seating business model to better space dinners and adhere to social distancing regulations.
- Stagger your staff shifts and days.
- Stagger work stations in dining area and kitchen.

Other measures

- Consider using rolled silverware/ prepackaged utensils and avoid table presets.
- Food should not be left/stored in shipping boxes.
- When changing your normal food preparation procedures, service, delivery functions, or making staffing changes, apply procedures that ensure:
 - Cooked foods reach the proper internal temperatures prior to service or cooling.

- Hot foods are cooled rapidly for later use – check temperatures of foods being cooled in refrigerators or by rapid cooling techniques such as ice baths and cooling wands.
- The time foods being stored, displayed, or delivered are held in the danger zone (between 41°F and 135°F) is minimized.
- Proper training for food employees with new or altered duties and that they apply the training according to established procedures.
- If you donate food to food recovery or charitable organizations, check for local guidelines from these entities.

In addition to the above the following services and establishments must adhere to the following:

Food Pickup and Delivery

- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces such as counter tops and touch pads and within the vehicle, by wiping down surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
 - Make sure to read the label and follow manufacturer’s instructions on use.
- Establish designated pick-up zones for customers to help maintain social distancing.
- Practice social distancing when delivering food, e.g., offering “no touch” deliveries and sending text alerts or calling when deliveries have arrived.
- Conduct an evaluation of your facility to identify and apply operational changes in order to maintain social distancing if offering take-out/carry-out option by maintaining a 6-foot distance from others, when possible.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold by storing in appropriate transport vessels.
 - Keep cold foods cold by keeping enough coolant materials, e.g., gel packs.
 - Keep hot foods hot by ensuring insulated cases are properly functioning.
- Keep foods separated to avoid cross contamination, e.g., keeping raw foods separated from cooked and ready-to-eat foods.
- Ensure that any wrapping and packaging used for food transport is done so that contamination of the food is prevented.
- Routinely clean and sanitize coolers and insulated bags used to deliver foods.

Food Vendors

- Running potable water must be available.
- Clean and sanitize condiments every half hour (30 minutes).
- Clean and sanitize serving area every half hour (30 minutes).

Beach Bars

- Running potable water must be available.
- Clean and sanitize tables, beach chairs and table condiments after every use.
- Beach chairs and tables should be 6-8 feet apart.
- Not more than 3 persons at a time to pick up food.

Complaints

If there are any health and safety concerns in your business you can contact Inspectorate VSA via Inspectoratevsa.sxm@gmail.com or call the Complaint Officer at 5202936