



Restart Columbia / Business FAQ's

Disclaimer Statement: This information was compiled on May 12, 2020. Please note that guidelines and procedures may change based on the decisions made by the Governor's Office and other government entities/agencies.

The City of Columbia has compiled information that may be helpful in assisting small business owners as they work to reopen their businesses.

Columbia City Council, City Staff, Columbia Police Department and Columbia-Richland Fire Department are committed to the health and well-being of the residents of our City. We are actively and openly working with all businesses to be a resource and partner to promote safe operations as businesses reopen as the State lifts restrictions on our local economy.

Information from the Columbia Police Department

Q. What are allowable occupancy rates for my business?

- A. The Governor's executive order allows restaurants to have 50% of their posted occupancy inside, as long as other social distancing requirements are also followed. The order requires other retail businesses to limit the number of customers so as not to exceed five customers per 1,000 square feet of retail space or 20% of the occupancy limit, whichever is less.

Q. What other social distancing enforcement requirements do businesses have?

- A. In restaurants, tables should be spaced six to eight feet apart. Once inside the restaurant, every customer is required to have his/her own seat and each family/household/party will need to stay at least six feet apart from each other at the table.

All businesses should enforce social distancing with customers, which means customers should not congregate within six feet of one another. This includes times when customers are shopping, dining, and standing in line (both inside the business

and outside waiting in line to enter). Businesses should also enforce social distancing requirements with employees.

CPD suggests businesses consider the following recommendations to ensure the safety of employees and customers:

- Support customers who are most vulnerable to COVID-19 by dedicating the first hour of operation every day to serve senior customers and customers with disabilities.
- Limit the number of customers in your business.
- Monitor and mark the distance between customers waiting in line outside of the store and at checkout locations.
- Install signage in interior and exterior locations to remind customers of social distancing rules.

Q. What are potential consequences of businesses who violate Governor McMaster's various COVID-19 executive orders?

A. Under the Governor's Order, violations are punishable by a \$100 fine or 30 days in jail. The Columbia Police Department will only issue a citation as a last resort after a warning and after educational efforts have failed to correct the problem.

Q. What is the role of Columbia Police Department regarding social distancing?

A. Columbia Police Department officers will continue to remind patrons about the value of social distancing. The Columbia Police Department welcomes conversations with business owners and management about businesses' role in enforcing social distancing both inside and outside of their establishment.

Q. Is the curfew in the City of Columbia still in effect?

A. The City of Columbia curfew is still in effect and enforced on public roads and public property from 11:00 p.m. – 6:00 a.m.

Q. What can everyone do to help stop the spread of coronavirus?

A. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and South Carolina's Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) recommend wearing face coverings as an extra layer of protection while in public. Additionally, both agencies recommend washing hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds, avoiding touching your face, and using hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

Information from Planning and Development

Q. If I want to establish or expand an outdoor dining area within a City right-of-way, do I need City Council approval? What is the process?

A: The expansion or establishment of an outdoor dining area within a City right-of-way does not require City Council approval; it is administered at the staff level. Certain requirements apply to these areas to include ADA, safety, and design criteria. To learn more about the process and requirements, please visit www.columbiasc.net/development-inspections/encroachments

Information from the Columbia Fire Department

Q. Can my restaurant be open for in-dining service?

A. Governor Henry McMaster has established guidelines for restaurants to follow if they choose to re-open for dine-in services. These new guidelines took effect on Monday, May 11, 2020.

Q. If I choose to do dine-in service at my restaurant what guidelines will I have to follow?

A. Under the new guidelines restaurants may have dine-in service provided that the total number of people in the business does not exceed 50% of the posted occupancy (Example: if your business is normally allowed to have 100 people inside it, under the new guidelines you can only have 50 people inside the business at a given time). Restaurant owners must also space tables 6 to 8 feet apart and implement additional cleaning and sanitizing guidelines for equipment, tables, chairs, etc.
Everyone inside the eatery should also practice social distancing and additional health screenings should be put in place for all employees.

Q. What if my job requires me to be within 6 feet of another employee and/or customer?

A. Businesses and their employees should work together to execute all public health measures to protect restaurant staff and customers. Any worker or customer who is concerned that COVID-19 prevention guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are not being followed should contact South Carolina DHEC. This includes cleaning and sanitation concerns at a restaurant as well as concerns on employee health screenings.

Q. My business has a public waiting room with congregate seating. Should I limit access to it if I reopen?

A. Business owners are encouraged to implement a system where customers can wait inside their vehicles prior to entering the business. This is strongly encouraged for restaurants so customers do not have to remain inside the building while waiting for a table to become open.

Q. Can I report a restaurant that is not complying with the 50% occupancy restriction and/or table spacing restriction?

- A. Yes, if you have a complaint of a restaurant not complying with the new occupancy or spacing guidelines, you can call CRFD's Fire Prevention Division at (803)545-3701 or at (803)727-0443.

Q. Can I be fined for violating any restrictions under the new guidelines?

- A. Those business owners who violate the new 50% occupancy restriction can be subject to a fine. The fire department is doing everything possible to seek voluntary compliance with the new rules and will work with business owners to avoid formal action if at all possible.

Q. Should I wear a face cover while working or eating in a restaurant?

- A. Citizens are strongly encouraged to protect themselves by wearing face coverings any time they are in a community setting. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) advises that citizens use face coverings to help slow the spread of the virus. Wearing a face covering helps people who may unknowingly have the virus from transmitting it to others.

Q. Do I have to reopen my restaurant or eatery to in-dining service?

- A. The decision on whether a restaurant should allow customers to dine-in is solely up to the owner of the business. Restaurants may continue to offer only outdoor dining and/or take-out options if the owner of the business so chooses. If a restaurant only offers outdoor dining, social distancing guidelines should still be followed.
Keep in mind that the outdoor area of your restaurant also has its own occupancy limit. The number of people on an outdoor deck or patio area of your restaurant should not exceed that occupancy limit.

Q. Are there any other guidelines I should consider while operating or going to a restaurant?

- A. The South Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association encourages the following:
- Restaurant customers and/or workers should self-screen before entering the restaurant for any signs of COVID-19. These signs include but are not limited to fever, cough, shortness of breath and known close contact with someone who has COVID-19.
 - Restaurant customers should call ahead or make a reservation if possible to avoid congregating outside or in the restaurant lobby.
 - All restaurant workers and patrons should follow social distancing guidelines. Customers should not congregate in groups as they wait to enter a restaurant.

Q. My business is not a restaurant. Can it be open?

- A. At this time all other guidelines and restrictions concerning essential and non-essential businesses are still in effect. Entertainment venues such as nightclubs, bowling alleys and arcades are among the businesses that **MUST** remain closed. For the latest developments on what businesses can operate and which cannot, visit www.governor.sc.gov

At this time the Columbia-Richland Fire Department encourages all citizens to exercise patience as some businesses begin to reopen. With the new occupancy restrictions in place, customers of area restaurants should expect there to be wait times for them to get seated.

If you go to your favorite restaurant and there is a wait, do everything you can to practice social distancing and **DO NOT** congregate in large groups outside or inside of the business.

South Carolina Restaurant & Lodging Association

In response to Phase Two of reopening restaurants, the South Carolina Restaurant & Lodging Association (SCRLA) has provided a list of FAQ's and guidelines for businesses to review to ensure they can open safely. If you have any questions regarding this information, please visit their website at <https://www.scrla.org/>

[SCRLA Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[SCRLA Reopening Guidelines](#)

For more information regarding Resilient Columbia business resources and information, please visit resilient.columbiasc.gov.