



Best Management Practices for Craft Beverage Tastings During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Craft and farm-based beverages are a critical direct marketing opportunity for New York producers, farms, and entrepreneurs. Providing customers with a unique connection to regional craft beverages benefits the regional food and agritourism industries in large portions of New York State. Given our current understanding of COVID-19, new management practices are required to protect your craft beverage team and customers. This document provides recommended practices and communication strategies for craft beverage operations for the 2020 season. **These actions will help protect you and your team and reassure customers that you are taking steps to protect them.**

Please note: this document is not designed to supersede state and federal public health guidelines, and is not designed to address public health regulations for restaurants and bars. These are best management practices and practical strategies consistent with existing CDC and NYS DOH guidelines.

- **NYS is reopening regions in phases. Guidance for re-opening can be found at the NYS website here:** <https://forward.ny.gov/industries-reopening-phase>.
- Craft beverage operations will see little change for their operations during Phase I and Phase 2, will likely be included in Phases 3 (restaurants/food service) and 4 (recreation/entertainment). Please keep up to date on the NYS requirements for re-opening.
- Agricultural components of a craft beverage business **MUST** complete a plan to reopen for Phase 1, even though the business has been open throughout NY PAUSE. This plan must include compliance with applicable guidance for food and non-food businesses. **All businesses in NYS must complete this plan and have it available at their place of business, regardless of whether the business was previously deemed as essential.**
https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/NYS_BusinessReopeningSafetyPlanTemplate.pdf.
- The NYS Liquor Authority, utilizing the Governor's Executive Order Authority, suspended and/or relaxed many regulations pertaining to licensure and privileges during the pandemic; **these are in effect until May 28, 2020 unless otherwise extended.** Check the SLA website frequently to ensure your business remains in compliance. <https://sla.ny.gov/Restrictions-in-Response-to-COVID-19>

KEY POINTS IN THIS DOCUMENT:

- Conducting tastings in designated outdoor spaces is the safest practice given our current understanding of COVID-19 transmission.
- Appointment-only tastings allow optimal control of customer traffic and regular sanitation.
- Employee duties should be separate as much as possible to allow appropriate social distancing. This may require more staff per shift dealing with fewer customers.
 - Cleaning and sanitizing should occur several times throughout the day.

Facts about the SARS-CoV-2 Virus that causes COVID-19:

- It is most likely transmitted person to person through respiratory droplets, requiring physical distancing and limited time in shared indoor space to prevent airborne spread.
- It is not transmitted by food, but by respiratory aerosols.
- It can persist on surfaces for between 24-72 hours, requiring additional sanitation of commonly touched surfaces.
- Risk of transmission from surfaces can be significantly reduced by frequent handwashing, use of hand sanitizers, and by not touching one's face.
- Aerosol spread by those who may be infected but are not showing symptoms can be reduced through the use of cloth face coverings.

As the state re-opens in phases, it will be necessary to adjust your business management strategies to comply with guidelines designed to reduce risk, and to implement best management practices that protect your team and customers against virus transmission. These practices should remain in place until state health authorities have determined that the pandemic has passed.

If you are unable to implement these best management practices to prevent COVID-19 transmission, you may decide to rely solely on online ordering or curbside pick-up instead of reopening fully this year. If you or key team members are in a high-risk category for contracting COVID-19, it may be prudent to consider alternatives.

Alternatives to Re-Opening Fully

- Provide custom shopping for curbside pickup.
- Develop online sales. One option can be found here: <https://vinoshipper.com/>
- Collaborate with other regional producers to sell regional variety packs.
- Increase distribution and wholesale channels.

To safely offer tastings during the COVID-19 pandemic, you must:

1. Train your employees on new COVID-19 procedures and policies.
2. Create a plan to increase frequency of cleaning and sanitizing.
3. Separate staff duties, so that discrete groups handle tasting room activities, payment processing, and customer management.
4. Develop a communication strategy to inform customers of new COVID-19 practices.
5. Eliminate activities that will encourage customers to linger and congregate.
6. Provide additional hand washing and sanitizing opportunities for customers.
7. Adopt sanitary practices for tastings.
8. Redesign customer flow to maintain physical distance.
9. Post signs to emphasize traffic flow, physical distancing, and hand sanitation.
10. Stay up-to-date on current COVID-19 recommendations from the CDC and your state departments of agriculture and health.

1. Train employees on new procedures

Prior to opening for customers, schedule one or more training sessions to insure that all employees (including any unpaid volunteers) fully understand both your specific plan as well as all relevant federal and state guidelines.

Conduct daily employee wellness screening following city, county, and state guidance on primary symptom checks for COVID-19. At minimum, wellness screenings should include the following questions:

- Have you developed any of the following symptoms?
 - Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
 - Cough
 - Fever
 - Any other symptoms that might indicate you are ill
- If possible, use touchless thermometers to measure employee temperature at the beginning of each shift.

NYS currently requires that all employees who interact with the public, paid or volunteer, wear cloth face coverings and space themselves at least 6 ft from other workers and customers.

All personnel should be trained to:

- Properly use, store, and wash their cloth face covering.
Cloth face coverings must be provided by the employer.
 - Refer to CDC guidelines: <https://bit.ly/34YQHHy>
 - And Cornell guidelines: <https://bit.ly/3cHU1tr>
 - Hands should be washed before putting mask on and after removal.
 - Avoid touching cloth portions of mask; handle by ear bands only.
- Properly wash and sanitize hands as recommended for general food safety.
 - Wash hands upon arriving at work, before and after eating, after using the restroom.
 - Wash (not just sanitize) hands between customers.
- Put on, remove, and use disposable gloves properly:
 - Proper glove donning: <https://www.wikihow.com/Put-on-Sterile-Gloves>
 - Proper glove removal: <https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/pdf/poster-how-to-remove-gloves.pdf>
 - Remove all jewelry.
 - Wash hands before putting on new gloves.
 - Remove gloves before breaks, meals or toilet visits.
 - Avoid touching the outside of the glove during removal.
 - Wash hands after removing gloves.
 - Put on new gloves before starting work again.
 - If gloves are worn for checkout, sanitation between customer transactions must still be observed. (Rub sanitizer on outside of gloves, just as you would hands.)
- Employees should be familiarized with CDC's Interim Guidance for Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>
- Encourage employees to arrive each day wearing clean clothes.
- Encourage employees to wash their work clothes separately from other clothes.



2. Increase frequency of cleaning and sanitizing

Cleaning and Sanitizing Surfaces

Areas that see high traffic or frequent touching, like doors, light switches, tables, chairs, cart and basket handles, electronics, handrails, and bathrooms, must be cleaned and sanitized several times a day, ideally between each customer group.

- Identify high traffic and high-touch surfaces in your tasting room, and create a standard operating procedure (SOP) for each. An example SOP can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3eMw7ic>.
- Create a cleaning schedule and a checklist to record regular cleaning.
- Identify one or more employees responsible for cleaning and sanitizing during each shift.
- Train employees on sanitation SOPs.
- Use non-porous tables and/or plastic table cloths on wooden tables since these surfaces are easier to clean and sanitize.
- Follow this four-step process (<https://bit.ly/2VVowp5>) for cleaning and sanitizing high-touch surfaces:
 - Remove visible dirt and debris.
 - Wash with soap and water or appropriate detergent.
 - Rinse the surface of debris and detergent.
 - Sanitize with a food contact surface approved sanitizer.
 - For a list of materials, visit: <https://bit.ly/2Y0EaIM>.
 - Verify that the product is registered for use in your state and region: <https://bit.ly/2VNEkdo>.
 - Follow the label.
 - Remember that concentration of active ingredient will differ between products, for example, some bleach productions may contain 6% active ingredient, others 12%. The Sanitizer Dosing Calculator (<https://bit.ly/3cJSR0m>) can be used to calculate the amount of product needed.
- Clean and sanitize the credit card units and sales equipment twice daily.
 - Ideally, use protective plastic coverings to support ease of cleaning.
 - Use 70% isopropyl alcohol wipes.
 - Do not spray electronics with sanitizer solutions.
- Consult the EPA N-list for other disinfectants for use against coronavirus: <https://bit.ly/3f1PxA3>



Glassware

- Verify that glass washers are operating at the required wash and rinse temperatures.
- Verify that detergents and sanitizers are effective and appropriate.

Toilets

- Provide soap, water and single use paper towels for handwashing, and provide hand sanitizer.
- Provide a garbage can lined with a trash bag for used paper towels.
 - Make sure garbage cans are anchored and have foot operated lid to minimize litter. Ideally, place one close to the door for customers who prefer to touch doorknobs with paper towels.

- Replace can liners daily.
- Post signs emphasizing importance of handwashing after using facilities.
- Perform regular toilet cleaning in between each group of customers, paying special attention to sanitizing all door handles, power switches, faucets and toilet handles.

3. Separate staff duties

To ensure staff safety, minimize cross-contact. Each employee will ideally have a “zone,” so workers can minimize time spent in close proximity. The employee pouring tasting samples, for example, should not also be managing payment, to decrease risk of cross-contamination.

Create a plan of work to create separate work areas. At a minimum, separate:

- Servers- provide tasting samples to customers and take purchase orders.
- Hospitality- manage traffic flow and monitor social distancing.
- Retail sales- receive purchase orders from servers, package purchases, deliver to checkout area or to curbside deliver.
- Check-out- handle payments for tastings and purchases.

4. Inform customers of new practices

To make your customers comfortable while keeping them safe, communicate your new practices clearly and often. When visitors know what’s expected of them, they won’t be intimidated or flustered. Take proactive steps to make sure they understand your new protocols prior to their visit. It’s advisable to update your webpage, social media accounts, winery signage, newsletters, ads, and all other regular media outlets with COVID-19 protocols as soon as possible.

Your communication campaign should include the following information:

- Customers should not come to the tasting room if they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or any contagious illness (e.g., fever, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, fatigue, body aches), or have come in contact with someone who has.
- Customers displaying these symptoms will be asked to leave.
- Customers will be asked to maintain 6-foot physical distance during their visit, and should follow all directional and traffic flow signs.
- **Customers must wear cloth face coverings**, as per NY COVID-19 guidance dated April 17, 2020: <https://on.ny.gov/2yyPqej>
 - Anyone who is over age two and able to medically tolerate a face-covering must cover their nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face-covering when in a public.
 - <https://bit.ly/34YQHHy>
 - <https://bit.ly/34VUCFe>
- Customers will be asked to wash and/or sanitize their hands when they arrive at the tasting room.
- Pets are not allowed. Even if you generally have a pet-friendly policy, pets tempt people to violate social distancing guidelines.
- Customers will be asked to confirm that they understand, and will cooperate with, these unique requirements when they arrive for their visit.
- Any limitations you’re placing on visitor numbers, whether you’re accepting reservations, and if you have specific hours designated for vulnerable populations (the elderly or immunocompromised.)

Update communications frequently for:

- Any changes in daily hours of operation
- Special reserved hours
- Pre-selected online ordering and pick up opportunities
- Changes to the COVID-19 management plan

5. Eliminate non-essential activities

Events and entertainment can be important revenue generators for craft beverage tasting rooms because they encourage people to linger and spend more time and money. Unfortunately, lingering in large groups is exactly what needs to be avoided at this time. To ensure safe social distancing, we recommend eliminating the following activities until further notice:

- Entertainment events, like concerts, that encourage congregation
- Picnicking, unless a protocol ensuring strict social distancing is implemented (assigned, separate areas; scheduled times; reservations)
- Re-fills of growlers or other customer-provided beverage containers
- Group tours of the production area, unless a protocol is ensuring strict social distancing is implemented. Consider that customer tours expand the area in which visitors may transmit the virus from the tasting room into other areas of your facility. Limiting customer access to one area also limits the range of transmission.
- Remember that NYS is re-opening in phases, and different regions may have different rules about when recreational and tourism related activities can reconvene and how those activities are to be conducted safely. Keep re-checking the official NYS websites to ensure your business remains in compliance if you do resume tours, musical events, hosted dinners and weddings, etc.

6. Provide handwashing and sanitizing stations

Provide hand washing stations (soap, water, single-use towels) or hand sanitizer (minimum 60% ethanol or 70% isopropyl) for customers as they enter the tasting room door, and as they leave.

- Install a hand sanitizer dispenser, and signs encouraging its use, just outside your entrance; place another just inside or at the hostess station as a back-up.
- Build a free-standing handwashing station: <https://bit.ly/3buwqfL>
- Insure that restroom facilities have functional and well-stocked handwashing sinks.

7. Sanitary tasting practices

Because COVID-19 is spread through respiratory aerosols, transmission risk is highest during beverage tasting, when consumers must remove their masks. In order to reduce risk as much as possible, it is essential to:

- Customers should keep their mask on until they arrive at their tasting space, and should replace it when their tasting is over and before they move around the tasting room.
- If at all possible, tasting room staff should pour samples at a surface more than 6ft away from customers, but within their sight. Staff should place samples in front of customers, then retreat to a safe distance to provide them with any additional information.
- **Prohibit spitting.** Spit cups/buckets should not be provided, and consumers should leave any unwanted beverage in their tasting glass. Spitting increases the risk of aerosol virus transmission.

- Do not provide shared snacks. Crackers and other palate cleansers should be offered in single-serve packets or in disposable containers, and discarded at the end of the tasting.
- Other than tasting glasses, all tasting items should be disposable, including tasting sheets. Writing utensils should not be reused, as they cannot be sanitized between customers. Encourage customers to use their own, or provide them as free gifts (and discard those used but not taken.)

8. Redesign customer flow for physical distancing

Evolving research suggests that the 6' spacing rule is appropriate for two people outside or moving past one another, but is ineffective after 5-15 minutes in an enclosed space. For this reason, we strongly suggest that all tastings be held outside until we have a better understanding of COVID-19 transmission in enclosed spaces.

The number of customers that you can accommodate at one time is dictated by your ability to keep them 6' apart within your tasting area. Calculating that capacity is your first task in a reopening plan. Ensure that you are complying with all capacity limitations and restrictions as required by state and local laws, mandates, and public health recommendations. Clearly post signage communicating any capacity limitations and restrictions.

- If tents are used for tasting, keep sides rolled up. A tent with enclosed sides poses the same transmission risks as indoor tasting areas.

Limiting customer capacity

- Appointment-only tastings are the recommended practice at this time. Your customers will appreciate the sense of safety this gives them, as well as your undivided attention, and are likely worth higher tasting fees. This practice allows for:
 - Optimal control of customer density
 - Regular cleaning and sanitizing between customer groups
- If appointment-only is not feasible, enact the following:
 - Prominently post maximum capacity on signs in- and outside tasting room, on websites and social media, and in outgoing phone messages.
 - Limit the group size you will accept, and include that information in signage and media communications.
 - Dedicate one hospitality staff person per shift to monitor and control traffic flow, and to limit customer entry when tasting room is at max capacity.
 - When tasting area is full, encourage customers to wait in their cars until they can be accommodated.

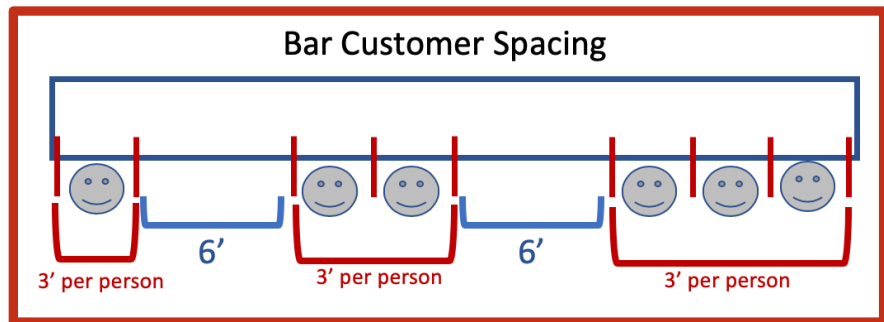
Physical distancing during tasting

- At a bar: calculate customer capacity by linear feet, allowing 3' per customer and an additional 6' between each customer. Customers that arrive together do not need to be spaced 6' apart, but must be 6' from other groups.
- At tables: place tables 9' apart, to allow 3' per customer and 6' between customers at neighboring tables.

- Tables should accommodate a maximum of 6 people. Groups larger than 6 are discouraged.
- These distances must be maintained whether tastings are held inside or outside.

Tasting area traffic flow

- If possible, provide different routes for entry and exit, and label them clearly.
- Place an employee at the entrance to greet customers and briefly explain the traffic flow.



One or more employees should be placed in the tasting area to monitor physical distancing.

- Create a one-direction foot-traffic pattern for customers to walk through the tasting area.
- Clearly label tasting areas, ideally including taped space on the floor to show tasting locations.
- Assign a specific tasting space to each customer, emphasizing the importance of staying at their table or bar space. Emphasize that groups should stay close to each other.
- Encourage customers to use the toilet before or after their tasting, to limit trips back and forth.

Check-out Process

Prior to opening:

- Prepare to accept credit cards/tap-to-pay or electronic payments (e.g. Paypal, Venmo, Apple Pay, Cash App); encourage personal checks to reduce your team's exposure to cash and coins.
- Plan ways to expedite check out and avoid lines, such as pre-packaging popular selections.

During business hours:

- Don't let consumers select their own bottles. Assign one staff member to package purchase orders and deliver them to the check-out area.
- Designate one employee to process payments.
 - Hands should be washed or sanitized between transactions, and gloves should be used if feasible. (See instructions on glove use, above).
- Employees must maintain a 6-foot distance from customers at check-out.
 - Consider installing clear plastic shields or dividers between employees and customers.
- Post signs at check-out to emphasize physical distancing while waiting (e.g. taped lines on the floor at 6-foot intervals).
 - Encourage one group member to check out while others proceed to their vehicle.
- If possible, direct customers to exit in a different way than they entered, to maintain one-way flow of foot traffic.
- Provide hand sanitizer at exit.

9. Post signs reinforcing new practices

- Post signs at the business entry:
 - Customers who have symptoms or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 should not enter.
 - Customers displaying COVID-19 symptoms will be asked to leave.

- Customers must wear cloth face coverings; if they refuse, they will be asked to leave.
- Customers will be asked to maintain 6ft physical distance during their visit.
- Maximum safe capacity and/or maximum group size allowed.
- Clearly post traffic flow:
 - Mark walkways with crowd control barriers.
 - Demonstrate flow with directional arrow signs or floor tape.
- Clearly mark curb-side pickup, if relevant, and post instructions for drivers awaiting pickup (e.g., call this number for order to be brought out to you.)
- Share “Stop the Spread.”
 - <https://on.ny.gov/3bH6gXj>
 - <https://bit.ly/2RYLhqN>
 - <https://bit.ly/2XWBUMf>
- At check-in, post the following written statements and request customer verbal confirmation of the following:
 - No one in my family is ill, and I have not been exposed to someone sick with COVID-19 in the last two weeks.
 - I will maintain a 6-foot distance between myself and other customers at all times.
 - I will follow all posted guidelines, and comply with the safety requests of employees.

10. Stay up to date on COVID-19

- Frequently review the CDC’s COVID-19 guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>
- Be prepared to modify COVID-19 operating protocols to reflect new information on best management and safety practices.
- Consider assigning vulnerable workers duties that minimize contact with customers and other employees- e.g., managing inventory, performing administrative work from home.
- Employees with COVID-19 symptoms must report to their supervisor.
 - Sick employees must be sent home immediately.
 - Clean and disinfect all surfaces at their workspace before other employees work in that area.
 - If a worker is confirmed to be COVID 19 positive, other workers should be informed of their possible exposure, while maintaining patient confidentiality.
- Sick employees must stay home and follow the CDC’s [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#), as well as directives from the local health authority.
- Instruct employees who are well, but know they have been exposed to COVID-19, to notify their supervisor, self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC-recommended precautions.



Taking these proactive steps will protect your team and your customers, creating a positive impression of local craft beverage operations during this pandemic.

We're in this together.

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Cooperative Extension. Please visit <https://eden.cce.cornell.edu/coronavirus-response/> or <https://instituteforfoodsafety.cornell.edu/coronavirus-covid-19/food-industry-resources/> for updates.