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New Guidelines Released to Help Restaurants Reopen Safely

*Aspen Institute, World Central Kitchen, Off Their Plate, and James Beard Foundation
Partner on Expert-Reviewed Guide to Help Restaurants Resume Operations*

Washington, DC, May 14, 2020—As many states move to ease COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, significant uncertainty remains in the restaurant, hospitality, and food-service industry on how to reopen while ensuring a safe working and dining environment for employees and customers. A guide released today, *Safety First: Serving Food and Protecting People During Covid-19*, addresses this unprecedented challenge by offering practical information and operating guidelines for back-of-house operations.

Safety First: Serving Food and Protecting People is available to [read and download here](#).

These guidelines are co-presented by the Food and Society policy program at the Aspen Institute, World Central Kitchen, Off Their Plate, and the James Beard Foundation, and are made possible through the generous support of the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund. They streamline and build upon more than a dozen protocols spearheaded by restaurant operators globally. The primary author, Dr. Sam Dooley Jr., is a medical epidemiologist who retired in January from a 32-year career specializing in infection control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Experts in the science, medical, restaurant and public health fields, including Harvard and MIT faculty, also reviewed and contributed to the guidelines.

“In moments of crisis, chefs and restaurant owners jump in feet first,” says Corby Kummer, executive director of the Aspen Institute’s Food and Society program and a longtime senior editor at The Atlantic. “They want to take action. They want to help—not just the food service industry but their communities. José Andrés, of course, always sets the worldwide example in global response. The James Beard Foundation helped create

the Independent Restaurant Coalition right away to support struggling restaurants. And in my reporting I learned of Off Their Plate, a new nonprofit that in just a few weeks raised \$4 million to support independent restaurant workers and feed frontline health workers.”

All these groups, Kummer says, were hiring back staff, prioritizing their most vulnerable workers, to make meals for communities in need. Their overlapping safety protocols all pointed to the need for one streamlined, authoritative operating guide, and he started collecting the many careful protocols different groups were giving chefs. “Happily,” he says, “the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund had already embarked on a visionary series of grants to help New York City health workers in their fight against Covid-19, with a long-range view of their physical and mental health. Their support set us on our path forward.”

One of the Illumination Fund’s first emergency grants was to New York City Health + Hospitals, the City’s public hospital system, to provide meals for frontline staff working in emergency rooms and intensive care units. “As needs increased, we saw an enormous outpouring of generosity from the restaurant community to provide high-quality meals for healthcare heroes across the whole hospital system,” said Laurie M. Tisch, President of the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund. “It’s a win-win: restaurants are providing food where it’s needed in this crisis while simultaneously creating economic opportunity for restaurant workers who are struggling to meet their own families’ needs.”

COVID-19 presents a unique and existential threat to many in the restaurant trade, which before the pandemic [employed 15.6 million workers](#) in the U.S. Restaurants have either had to close or provide takeout service only, with an increasing number closing their doors permanently in the face of insurmountable financial challenges. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that in April 2020 alone, [5.5 million jobs were lost](#) at food service and drinking establishments. As more states begin to lift restrictions and restaurants plan to reopen, providing tangible guidance and assuring workers and customers that it is possible to prepare and serve food safely will be crucial to operating successfully in this new environment.

“As food first responders, World Central Kitchen has mobilized quickly under extraordinarily challenging circumstances to serve meals to those in need,” says Nate Mook, World Central Kitchen’s CEO. “The one constant is that safety is always of utmost importance, which we have learned from our on-the-ground experience even prior to the pandemic, and now having served nearly 7 million meals to people impacted by Covid-19. By codifying this work, and collaborating with seasoned leaders and experts in their respective fields, we hope the guidelines shared here help everyone to safely serve their communities.”

“When Off Their Plate launched, we wanted to ensure we could keep frontline workers in both restaurants and healthcare centers safe,” says chef Tracy Chang, lead author of Off Their Plate’s sanitation protocols and chef-owner of PAGU in Cambridge, MA. “We enlisted friends and experts in healthcare, science, and safety to collaborate on a general SOP for OTP. The objective has always been to share our learnings, empower others, and align with those doing important work in this field. We are so grateful to the Aspen Institute, JBF, and WCK for their partnership in this endeavor.”

The new operating guidelines complement COVID-19 guidance issued by government and health authorities, which sometimes leaves questions about what does and doesn’t apply to the restaurant industry. Chef Patrick Mulvaney, who operates restaurants in Sacramento, CA, reviewed the guide and remarked, “*Safety First* outlines the platinum standard for how best to keep a restaurant safe. For my leadership crew this has become bedside reading, because it contains many of the answers we have been looking for in one place.”

Safety First offers comprehensive guidance on a raft of industry-specific topics, ranging from hygiene best practices for employees at work and at home, organizing the workspace, administrative controls for managers and supervisors, actions to take should an employee become ill, safe food preparation, receiving deliveries, and appropriate protective wear. The guidelines acknowledge that some restaurants have less space available for social distancing in the kitchen, and are designed to be tailored taking into account specific circumstances.

“Safety First is the start of a new social contract between everyone who works in and dines at America’s restaurants, which will be most important during the time between reopening and a wide-spread vaccine,” says Clare Reichenbach, CEO of the James Beard Foundation. “It is our hope that this guide helps chef-owners and restaurateurs reopen in a way that reinforces restaurants as accessible, safe, and prioritizing the health of their employees and customers.”

Aspen Institute’s Food and Society Program and the James Beard Foundation will both offer *Safety First*, designed as a series of individual PDFs easily downloaded and clearly legible in both black and white and color, on their websites as a free resource. Dr. Dooley and the Food and Society Program will constantly monitor updated information from the CDC to keep *Safety First* a living, authoritative operating guide.

The next steps for *Safety First* will be operating guidelines for server and diner safety as restaurants move toward reopening: how does table service work to keep everyone safe? And then Food and Society will partner with other economic-opportunity programs at

the Aspen Institute to compile best practices to keep vulnerable food-services safe as they look for and return to work—both in their physical and financial health.

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Food and Society at the Aspen Institute brings together leaders and decision-makers in the food and beverage industry and the public health community—scientists, nutritionists, environmentalists, entrepreneurs, chefs, restaurateurs, farmers, and food makers of all kinds—to find solutions to production, health, and communications challenges in the food system. It is currently working on a [major initiative](#) to broaden the work on the Food Is Medicine movement, creating a Research Priorities Action Plan that will be a road map for future funding that will extend current work to rural and underserved areas. The goal is for people of all income levels to eat better and more healthful diets—and to enjoy them bite by bite. Find executive director Corby Kummer on Twitter [@ckummer](#).

World Central Kitchen (WCK) was founded in 2010 by Chef José Andrés. WCK uses the power of food to heal and strengthen communities through times of crisis and beyond. WCK has transformed the field of disaster response to help devastated communities recover and establish resilient food systems. Since its founding, WCK has served over 18 million meals to those impacted by natural disasters and other crises around the world in countries including Albania, The Bahamas, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Mozambique, Spain, Venezuela, and the United States. Learn more at [WCK.org](#).

Off Their Plate (OTP) is a grassroots nonprofit started on March 15 in Boston by Natalie Guo. 100% volunteer run and operational in nine of the most COVID-impacted US cities, OTP raises funds to deliver nutritious meals to frontline healthcare workers, while restoring work and providing economic relief to local restaurants and their most vulnerable staff. To operate ethically and safely during the pandemic, OTP has developed guidelines and processes for all operational areas, including needs assessment, meal preparation and delivery, and supply/demand forecasting. OTP prioritizes serving under-resourced facilities and underserved populations and builds deep, ongoing relationships with their restaurant partners to ensure meaningful income continuity and stability. As the industry embarks on a reopening phase, OTP is building on its mission to serve communities in need by leveraging its network, expertise and learnings to continue supporting restaurant partners as they navigate the transition.

The **James Beard Foundation** promotes Good Food For Good™. For more than 30 years, the James Beard Foundation has highlighted the centrality of food culture in our daily lives. Through the variety of [industry programs](#) that educate and empower leaders in our community, the Foundation has asserted the power of food to drive behavior, culture, and policy change. The organization is committed to giving chefs a voice and the tools they need to make the world more sustainable, equitable, and delicious for everyone. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the James Beard Foundation launched the [Open for Good](#) campaign to ensure that independent restaurants not only survive, but that the industry is able to rebuild stronger than before. For more information, subscribe to the digital newsletter [Beard Bites](#) and follow [@beardfoundation](#) on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [TikTok](#).

The James Beard Foundation is a national not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization based in New York City.