



Regional State  
Administrative Agency

# **Regional State Administrative Agencies' guidelines on restricting and supervising restaurant operations**

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Regional State Administrative Agencies  
Aluehallintovirastot

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These guidelines are intended for restaurant entrepreneurs and staff and for the purpose of implementing official supervision, and they describe the restrictions specified in the Communicable Diseases Act and the Decree issued under it for the restaurant business starting 1 June 2020.

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# 1. Introduction and scope

According to the Parliament's decision, the Communicable Diseases Act (1227/2016) has been amended by temporarily adding section 58 (a) on restricting the operations of restaurants to prevent the spread of an infectious disease and section 58 (b) on the supervision of restaurants and following the requirements of the restrictions. The objective has been to lay down restrictions on restaurants so that they can serve customers while preventing the spread of coronavirus. The Act is in force from 1 June 2020 to 31 October 2020.

Pursuant to section 58 (a) of the Communicable Diseases Act, the Government subsequently issued a Decree on temporarily restricting the operations of restaurants to prevent the spread of an infectious disease. The Decree is in force from 1 June 2020 to 31 July 2020.

These guidelines are intended for restaurant entrepreneurs and staff and for the purpose of implementing official supervision, and they describe the restrictions specified in the Communicable Diseases Act and the Decree issued under it for the restaurant business starting 1 June 2020. The restrictions provided apply to the restaurant business referred to in the Act on accommodation and restaurant operations. A restaurant refers to premises where catering services are carried out. These premises will be subsequently referred to as restaurants.

## Purpose of the guidelines

The purpose of the guidelines is to support restaurants in the implementation of the current restrictions so that they can be implemented efficiently and consistently throughout the whole country. By carefully following these guidelines, the number of coronavirus infections and the number of people exposed to the virus can be reduced.

The Communicable Diseases Act contains temporary provisions on the necessary restrictions concerning the opening and serving hours of restaurants and the number and use of customer seats indoors and outdoors in order to prevent the spread of the infectious disease. Restaurants are required to comply with special hygiene requirements and to maintain a sufficient distance between customers.

The restrictions apply to marine vessels to the extent that they are governed by Finnish law. The legislation applicable to vessels in international maritime traffic is primarily determined by the state of registration of the vessel, i.e. the flag state.

## Personnel restaurants and takeaway sales of food

The restrictions on opening hours, the number of customer seats, the placement of customers and maintaining a sufficient distance between customers do not apply to personnel restaurants or selling food or beverages for consumption

elsewhere. However, other requirements of the Communicable Diseases Act and the Decree issued under it must be followed.

A personnel restaurant refers to serving food or beverages for the personnel of a community, foundation or institution or an otherwise restricted group of people. These include the personnel restaurants of retirement homes, hospitals, garrisons, prisons, day-care centres, schools and industrial facilities. Takeaway sales refer to selling food or beverages for the purpose of consuming it elsewhere.

## Validity and supervision

The obligations and restrictions laid down in and under section 58 (a) of the Communicable Diseases Act apply to all municipalities, including the Åland Islands, from 1 June 2020. The Government has a legal obligation to monitor the validity of the conditions for restrictions. Based on the epidemic situation and experiences gained, restrictions on the opening hours of shops and other facilities can be gradually alleviated. Alleviating the restrictions on the time for serving alcoholic beverages depends above all on the ability of the restaurants to supervise serving and maintain order in this exceptional situation.

Restaurants have a primary and self-supervising responsibility to comply with the restrictions and objectives set out in the legislation. One of the objectives of the temporary restrictions is to develop operating models based on independent measures and plans in restaurant operations to prevent the spread of the infectious disease in restaurants when the restrictions are gradually alleviated.

The main responsibility for combating infectious diseases lies at the local level, i.e. municipalities. Thus, municipal authorities bear the main responsibility for the guidance and advice of local facilities, including the adjustments required by the new changes on organising restaurant operations required by the Communicable Diseases Act. The role of the Regional State Administrative Agency is mainly to monitor and intervene in detected shortcomings and, on the other hand, to help local authorities interpret the new legislation. The official supervision of the obligations imposed on restaurants will be implemented in accordance with the powers granted to the Regional State Administrative Agency in the Communicable Diseases Act, in cooperation with other authorities. The guidelines have been collected on the Regional State Administrative Agencies' website [avi.fi](http://avi.fi).

The Regional State Administrative Agencies take the principle of proportionality into account in their supervision and do not take measures that are broader than the intended objective. The objective is to ensure the lawfulness of operations and the safety of customers in terms of preventing the spread of the infectious disease by means of guidelines and regulations.

## 2. Guidelines for restaurant customers (section 2 of the Government Decree)

### Do not enter a restaurant when you have symptoms

The restaurant must inform its customers in a clearly visible way that a person with symptoms matching coronavirus infection may not enter the restaurant. Coronavirus causes a respiratory tract infection: symptoms include coughing, throat pain, fever, shortness of breath, muscle pain, stomach problems and headache (<https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>)

### Hand hygiene for restaurant customers

Customers must be able to wash or disinfect their hands when entering the restaurant. Customers are reminded of hand washing with signs that guide customers to a hand washing station or indicate the possibility for customers to sanitise their hands. The hand washing station must be equipped with warm running water, liquid soap and a way to dry hands (e.g. hand paper towels, cloth towel dispenser) and a waste container for hand towels. The cleanliness of washrooms and the hand washing station must be ensured sufficiently frequently. Customers are instructed on correct hand washing technique.

#### Hand washing instructions

- Wet your hands with a lot of water
- Apply soap and rub your hands palm to palm
- Rub the backs of your hands, your thumbs and between your fingers
- Rub your hands together with your fingers interlaced
- Rinse your hands with a lot of water
- Dry your hands carefully with a paper towel
- Use a paper towel to turn off the tap

Illustrated instructions

#### Using hand sanitiser

- Take about a tablespoon of sanitiser in your hand
- Carefully rub your fingertips, thumbs and between your fingers
- Finally, rub the sanitiser on your palms and the backs of your hands
- Rub until your hands are dry

Sanitisers with an alcohol content of at least 70% are recommended. If another active substance than alcohol is used, it must be approved by the chemical authority.

Avoid crowding the hand washing station.

### **Coughing instructions**

- Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- If you don't have a handkerchief, cough or sneeze onto the upper part of the arm of your sweater, not into your hands.
- Immediately put the used handkerchief in the rubbish bin.

### **Reminder to maintain a safe distance to other customers**

Customers must be provided with instructions on maintaining a safe distance to others and on other measures to prevent the spread of the infectious disease in the restaurant.

## **Cleaning premises and washing cutlery and dishes**

Maintaining the hygiene of facilities, surfaces and different equipment is important to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. All customer contact surfaces (e.g. door handles, handrails, chairs, high chairs and table surfaces, payment terminals and washrooms) should be cleaned carefully and as often as possible. Dishes and cutlery must be thoroughly cleaned so that infectious diseases cannot spread through them. In customer facilities, the frequency of cleaning must be increased, especially with regard to various buttons.

For more information on enhanced cleaning in customer spaces, see the website of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health ([link](#)).

Link to a general cleaning programme on the website of the Finnish Food Authority (in Finnish)

### 3. Opening and serving hours

Restaurants may be open from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. and alcoholic beverages can be served from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Alcoholic beverages served before 10 p.m. may be consumed until 11 p.m. Example: A restaurant that closes at 10 p.m. does not need to stop serving alcohol on the previous hour, i.e. at 9 p.m.

A significant proportion of social contacts in restaurants is related to the consumption of alcohol. Night-time alcohol consumption in Finland typically involves drunkenness both in homes and restaurants. Intoxication reduces inhibitions and weakens judgment, which can lead to neglect of precautions such as safe distances and hand hygiene.

According to current information, speaking loudly, yelling and singing spread the coronavirus more effectively than speaking quietly. This must be taken into account in restaurant operations and the volume of the music played. Loud music also requires a higher volume of conversation. In these situations, the risk of infection may be high, even if maintaining a distance of several metres to a person carrying the virus.

The purpose of the restrictions on the opening and serving hours of restaurants is to limit customers' time and means of exposure both indoors and outdoors when alcoholic beverages are most commonly consumed in restaurants and when restaurant customers may be intoxicated.

### 4. Number of customers and location of customer seats

Each indoor section of a restaurant may simultaneously accommodate half of the number of people indicated in the alcohol serving license or building plan.

If the restaurant has an alcohol serving licence, the number of customer seats is specified by section in the permit. The sections of licensed premises and the number of customer seats have been published in open data:

[Link to open data.](#)

If a restaurant does not have a licence to serve alcohol, the number of customers is determined in the building plan. If necessary, you can request the building plan from municipal building supervision.

Indoor spaces are spaces with a floor, roof and walls, or where a single level surface can be added to create a closed space. A restaurant terrace may not have more than two walls in addition to the roof. If a terrace has three walls and a roof, it is considered an indoor space and subject to indoor restrictions of the number of customers and persons. The material of the walls or roof is irrelevant in this respect. Surfaces that can be opened, such as glass panes and marquees, also constitute a wall or level surface. The definition is in line with the definition of interior spaces in the Tobacco Act. As a rule of thumb, if smoking is allowed somewhere, it is considered an outdoor space.

The limitation on the number of customers does not apply to staying in a space short-term, for example when leaving a terrace to go indoors to get food or drinks, going to the washroom, or another similar reason.

## **Location of customer seats in a restaurant and avoiding crowding**

The limitation on the number of customers only applies to the restaurant's indoor areas, but customer seating must be arranged sufficiently spaciouly both indoors and outdoors, and customer seats must be placed at a sufficient distance from each other. As a starting point, a sufficient distance should be at least 1 to 2 metres, which is the recommended distance between persons at public events according to the guidelines of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL).

All restaurant customers must have their own seat at a table or a similar surface. Sitting in a seat at a bar counter is permitted. However, restaurants must take into account that they are obliged to maintain a sufficient distance between customers as well as between customers and staff at all times while the restaurant is open.

Restaurants must organise the structures and furniture of their indoor and outdoor facilities and determine customer service practices to ensure that customers are not exposed to the infectious disease. For example, regarding structures and furniture, one option is placing screens or plexiglass between tables and, regarding service practices, restaurants can avoid crowding with measures such as table service or assigning queue numbers for picking up food and beverages at a service counter.

Restaurants must ensure in particular that there is no unnecessary crowding in its premises and that the arrival of customers in the restaurant is carried out so that a sufficient distance between customers and groups is maintained. For example, for a terrace, it is a good idea to consider in advance how to prevent a crowd if it starts to rain heavily and there is already the maximum number of customers indoors.

## 5. Serving food and beverages

Customers may not serve food and beverages themselves except at their own table. This means that customers may not take food from a buffet themselves. However, this restriction does not apply to personnel restaurants or selling food or beverages for the purpose of consuming it elsewhere, i.e. selling takeaway food to customers.

Restaurants' service practices should be arranged to minimise customers breathing on or touching anything other than their own serving. Getting food or beverages from a machine so that the customer only uses the machine or equipment is not included in the restriction of self-service intended in the regulation.

The restrictions apply to restaurant premises. If a private event is organised somewhere other than in a restaurant, for example a catering service delivers food to a meeting house, buffet-style self-service is allowed. The Regional State Administrative Agency recommends following the guidelines concerning restaurants in private events as well. If a private event, such as a wedding or birthday party, is arranged at a restaurant, food cannot be served as buffet-style self-service.

A buffet table can be used so that restaurant staff serves the food to the customers at the buffet table. Picking up pre-packaged or pre-portioned food is not considered as serving food. Customers can pick up a prepared serving at the counter, making sure to maintain a safe distance to others. At a café, customers can pick up pre-packaged food, such as a juice or roll or a pre-served salad from the display cabinet.

Picking up ready-made plates from conveyor belts rotating past customer tables is not considered self-service. However, such operations must ensure that servings are adequately protected.

### Serving food in personnel restaurants

Personnel restaurants include cafeterias in day-care centres, schools, hospitals and prisons as well as personnel canteens in industrial facilities whose clientele is limited to the personnel of the community, foundation or institution or an otherwise limited circle of people. A personnel restaurant is not an open lunch restaurant where anyone can come to eat. Instead, it must be limited to the staff of a particular workplace.

Buffet tables can still be used in personnel restaurants. THL's general guidelines on the prevention of infections must be taken into account during meals. Below are instructions for meals at personnel restaurants:

- Everyone must wash their hands before entering the restaurant

- Hand sanitisers are added at the beginning of the service line where possible
- Meal times are staggered as much as possible, and customers are reminded to maintain safe distances
- If possible, self-service is changed to restaurant staff serving the food
- At a self-service table, cutlery used for taking food from the buffet is changed or washed more frequently, or single-use cutlery is used if possible
- Contact surfaces are cleaned more frequently (including condiment and spice containers, butter knives, etc.)
- Cloths or covers protecting the food must be replaced several times during the day
- It is sensible to serve bread and similar products as ready-made portions
- Customers should be placed as loosely as possible

## 6. Plan

The plan referred to in section 58 (a) paragraph 5 of the Communicable Diseases Act must include:

1. a description of the policies adopted by the place of business in order to comply with the aforementioned general obligations;
2. a description of the indoors and outdoors premises of the restaurant, the maximum number of customers or persons, and a description of the measures and instructions given to staff for implementing the other obligations laid down in section 58 (a) of the Communicable Diseases Act and supervising their implementation indoors and outdoors at the restaurant;
3. information on the person responsible for the implementation of the plan.

Information on the person responsible for the plan must be provided to customers on request.

**The plan is considered to be visible to customers if its summary is visible to customers when they enter the restaurant and it states that customers have the right to see the plan on request.** The plan may be combined with self-supervision plans referred to in the Alcohol Act, the Food Act (23/2006) and the Tobacco Act (549/2016).

Customers must follow restaurant policies and instructions given by staff. If a customer does not comply, the restaurant staff have the right to remove the customer from the premises under the Act on accommodation and restaurant operations (308/2006, section 5).

[Link to template and instructions.](#)

## 7. Supervision

Section 58 (a) of the Communicable Diseases Act lays down the necessary restrictions on the operation of restaurants in order to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. In addition, restaurants are required to comply with special hygiene requirements and to maintain a sufficient distance between customers. Each restaurant must draw up a plan on how it will fulfil these statutory obligations and restrictions. One central objective of the temporary restrictions is to develop operating models based on independent measures and plans in restaurant operations to prevent the spread of the infectious disease in restaurants when the restrictions are gradually alleviated.

The Regional State Administrative Agency, in whose jurisdiction the restaurant is located, supervises compliance with the obligations and restrictions laid down in section 58 (a). In addition to the Regional State Administrative Agencies, food control experts from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Finnish Food Authority and municipalities as well as alcohol control experts from Valvira have prepared for supervision and guidance. The main responsibility for combating infectious diseases lies at the local level, i.e. municipalities. Thus, municipal authorities bear the main responsibility for the guidance and advice of local facilities, including the adjustments required by the new changes on organising restaurant operations required by the Communicable Diseases Act. The role of the Regional State Administrative Agency is mainly to monitor and intervene in detected shortcomings and, on the other hand, to help local authorities interpret the new legislation.

Key points of supervision include sufficient distances between customers, how food and beverages are served, opening and serving hours, number of customer seats and placement of seats at a table or similar surface, and the requirements related to hygiene and the plan referred to in section 58 of the Communicable Diseases Act. In addition to their own food safety inspections, municipal food control services may also observe the operations of a restaurant and advise and instruct business owners on the operations referred to in section 58 (a) of the Communicable Diseases Act and, if necessary, report any shortcomings to the Regional State Administrative Agency. The need for real supervision depends decisively on the way restaurants respond to compliance and the fulfilment of obligations. It is very likely that restaurants will take effective measures to prevent the spread of the infectious disease simply because customers demand that their personal safety is ensured.

If shortcomings or flaws are found in the compliance with obligations or restrictions, the Regional State Administrative Agency may issue the restaurant with an order to correct them. The order must include a time limit for taking the necessary measures. If the shortcomings have not been rectified within the given time or if obligations have been substantially violated, the Regional State Administrative Agency may order the restaurant to cease any service operations immediately and to be closed to customers for a maximum of one month. The decisions of the Regional State Administrative Agency can be implemented immediately despite any appeals.

The purpose of the supervision required by the regulation is that authorities can react efficiently and without delay with precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the infectious disease. The targets of supervision are selected on the grounds of assessed risk, based on reports from other authorities and citizens and the agency's observations.

If necessary, police must provide executive assistance at the request of the Regional State Administrative Agency in order to implement supervision and the closing of a restaurant.

## 8. Additional information

For questions related to the operation of restaurants, you can:

- Find answers in the frequently asked questions (in Finnish)  
<http://www.avi.fi/web/avi/usein-kysytyt-kysymykset>
- Send email to [koronainfo@avi.fi](mailto:koronainfo@avi.fi)
- Call the service line 0295 016 666,  
Mon–Fri from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. and from 12 noon to 4 p.m.

