The novel coronavirus — COVID 19 — and the economic shutdowns enacted to slow its spread have forced essential businesses, institutions and healthcare facilities to examine ways they can adapt the foodservice industry to continue operation. It’s also forced them to take a look at what lasting changes this crisis will bring and the business practices they need to adopt.

Here are five ways business practices have been impacted by the pandemic:

1. Avoid Bulk

   For businesses and institutions, avoiding bulk foods can be critical to meeting consumers’ current expectations during the pandemic. In a Datassential survey, 60% of respondents indicated they would prefer portions of food in individual containers to bulk or family-sized trays. The results were consistent across all demographics, suggesting that the preference is not tied to household composition. Providing individually packaged and grab-and-go options can help to alleviate concerns around multiple individuals touching a single, shared surface.

2. Consider Your Menu

   Without compromising what makes your brands appealing, businesses, institutions and healthcare facilities need to understand what consumers are looking for when they choose to get food from restaurants in the current environment.

   These are the 10 foods that people are craving:
   - Pizza 63%
   - Burgers and Sandwiches 51%
   - Meat Entrees 50%
   - Pasta and Noodle Dishes 44%
   - Sides 41%
   - Mexican Dishes 40%
   - Soups and Chili 37%
   - Asian Dishes 34%
   - Salads 32%
   - Desserts and Sweets 29%

   SOURCE: Datassential, COVID-19 Report #3: Into the Home
3. Food Prep: Cooked Foods versus Cold-Prepared Foods

“62% of consumers believe that cooking food kills Coronavirus, agreeing that ‘Coronavirus cannot be contracted through food that has been thoroughly cooked.’” - Datassential, COVID-19 Report #2: Fear & Response

While scientific knowledge is constantly evolving around COVID-19, experience with other coronaviruses like SARS and MERS suggest that food is not a transmission pathway. Additionally, heat treatments have proven effective at eliminating SARS. While consumers continue to have heightened concerns around transmission, businesses and institutions looking to provide foods that don’t raise red flags may consider increasing their offerings of cooked foods compared to cold-prepared foods. The previous list of top foods people want from restaurants during the coronavirus crisis reinforces this message, with at least 7 of the 10 being traditionally hot-prepared foods.

SOURCE: Food Safety Authority of Ireland, COVID-19

4. At-Home Options

After months of social distancing with reduced access to dining out and more time spent at home, consumers may adopt new cooking habits. Additionally, 35% of consumers say that meal kits are not risky as it relates to coronavirus. Among the same respondents, only 28% said that takeout food was not risky, and just 16% said the same for self-serve food at a grocery store. Overall, 89% of consumers say they feel safer eating food from home compared to food from restaurants.

While it’s expected some of these concerns will subside over time — and some locations may even enjoy a post-coronavirus business “boom” — providing options that don’t raise consumer “alarm bells” will be critical to succeeding in the evolving marketplace.


5. Contactless Delivery & Service

Health experts have speculated the coronavirus could subside over the summer only to return during the fall. Consumers exposed to this news who are already building new social distancing habits may continue to look for ways to enjoy their favorite foods while minimizing the risk of exposure to a resurgence of the virus. Delivery businesses like Uber Eats, Postmates, DoorDash and Grubhub have adopted new “contact-free delivery” options, and some restaurant operators have begun to do the same.

Consumers also indicate similar concerns for in-restaurant interactions, with 38% saying they are most concerned with touching things others have touched, 28% with being near other people, and 15% with staff preparing and handling food.

“44% of consumers say contactless delivery (employees not handing food directly to them) would make them feel safer when ordering takeout or delivery from a restaurant.” - Datassential, COVID-19 Report #4: Hands Off

Final Thoughts

Social distancing, installation of physical barriers, self-checkout, an increase in hand hygiene, and adding additional sanitizing stations may become the norm for the short term but this has also forced us to take a look at what lasting changes this crisis will bring and what other business practices they need to adopt. To reassure customers — and their own employees — businesses, institutions and healthcare facilities will need to consider how they can incorporate health and safety into a seamless customer experience without sacrificing other consumer expectations of their brand’s quality.


Want to learn more about what Aramark is doing to help organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how we can help yours?

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* This document is based on information at the time of publication and may change as the pandemic continues to evolve.