

Dealing with customers in the fight against COVID-19

Guide for **hospitality**

Update 01.09.2021



Scope

- These guidelines apply to party rooms, restaurants and cafés, including company restaurants and food and drink facilities at a hotel.
- These guidelines also apply to seated receptions and banquets provided by a professional catering company and to other professional organisers of receptions and banquets.
- These guidelines do not apply to room rental or accommodation.
- These guidelines do not apply to events, cultural or other representations, sports competitions and training and congresses referred to in Article 15 § 2 of the Ministerial Decree of 28 October 2020. For these events, conditions for the exercise of professional catering activities are stricter. Please refer to the applicable protocols.

Warning

The provisions set out in this guide take into account the easing of measures that has been decided by the Concertation Committee on 20 August 2021. The **Brussels-Capital Region** has decided to postpone all or part of these easings.

To find out what rules shall be followed in this Region, please visit the [website of the Brussels-Capital Region](#) or call 1819.



FPS Economy, S.M.E.s, Self-employed and Energy

Rue du Progrès 50 – 1210 Brussels

Enterprise no: 0314.595.348

 0800 120 33 (free number)

 SPFEco

 @spfeconomie

 linkedin.com/company/fod-economie (bilingual page)

 instagram.com/spfecocom

 youtube.com/user/SPFEconomie

 economie.fgov.be

Responsible publisher:

Séverine Waterbley
Chair of the Board of Directors
Rue du Progrès 50 – 1210 Brussels

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Purpose of this guide

As far as the management of the health crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic is concerned, Belgium is reaching the end of its vaccination campaign at the end of August 2021. However, we still have to live with Covid for the foreseeable future and we cannot be sure how the disease will evolve. The current situation remains nevertheless manageable, especially in hospitals. Many of the remaining restrictions can therefore be lifted. However, measures may differ from one Region to another, depending on the health situation there. This is the case in particular in the Brussels-Capital Region, where many of the relaxations decreed for 1 September 2021 will not come into force until later.

This guide sets out the necessary minimum preventative measures in the light of the health situation to ensure that contact between catering establishments with their customers is as safe as possible, by minimising the risk of infection and avoiding contamination as much as possible. However, the guide does not apply to the Brussels-Capital Region (you can find more info on the [website of the Brussels-Capital Region](#)).

These preventative measures may be supplemented at the sectoral and/or company level to take the specific context into account as much as possible, so that activities can be resumed in safe conditions. Other appropriate measures offering equivalent protection may also be taken.

This guide offers guidance to catering establishments.

It is based on the protocol that has been designed by the Joint Committee 302 for the safe reopening of the catering industry and approved by the Minister of the Economy and Labour and the Minister of the Self-Employed and SMEs.

See the protocol on info-coronavirus.be/en as well as on the website of the sector's Federations reouverturehoreca.be.

The protocol takes up the minimum conditions for exercising an activity that have been set by the ministerial decree of 28 October 2020 on emergency measures to limit the spread of the Covid-19 (Article 6), as in force on 01 September 2021.

Ensuring that the health regulations regarding the catering industry are being followed is the responsibility of the police services, which may, if required, use coercion and force, in accordance with the provisions of Article 7 of the Law on the police function. The police forces need to make sure that the minimum conditions set out in Article 6 of the ministerial decree of 28 October 2020 as specified in the protocol are respected. The social inspection services carry out controls in accordance with the provisions of the Social Penal Code, particularly Articles 17(2) and 238.

In addition to the preventative measures in this guide, entrepreneurs and workers are also advised to consult the "[Generic guide to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at work](#)" on the website of the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue.

Important

In this guide, a **mask or a cloth alternative** is defined as a non-ventilated mask, made of fabric or of disposable material that fits tightly over the face, covers the nose, mouth and chin and is intended to prevent contamination by personal contact. Shawls, bandanas, scarves, masks with a ventilation valve and plastic mouth shields do not fit this description.



Guidelines for the **customer**



- **Do not go** to a catering establishment if you have **disease symptoms**.
- Follow the **instructions** of the staff and the guidelines on display in the catering establishment.
- Keep **1.5 metres away** from staff and other customers, excluding those in your party.
- Wearing a **mask** or a cloth alternative is mandatory from the age of 13, except when you're sitting at a table or at the bar. If this is not possible for medical reasons, you may use a face shield. People who are unable to wear a face mask, a cloth mask or a face shield due to a disability, which is verified by a medical certificate, do not have to comply with this obligation.
- **Cough or sneeze into your elbow or into a paper tissue** that you immediately discard in a dustbin with a lid (e.g. in the toilets).
- **Wash your hands** upon entering the facility and repeat regularly. Only touch the objects you need.
- **Pay** as much as possible **electronically** or contactless.
- Install the **Coronalert** app on your smartphone so that you are alerted in case of a risk of infection and so you can assist in contact tracing.

Guidelines for catering establishments

Private gatherings such as weddings can be organised from 1 September onwards without any restrictions (social distancing, obligation to wear a mask and other guidelines that apply to the catering industry) for a maximum of 200 people indoors and 400 people outdoors (up to and including 30 September 2021) and for a maximum of 500 people indoors and 750 people outdoors (from 1 October).

- Ensure **complete cleaning and disinfection** of the materials and areas used by staff and guests.
- **Inform** your employees, including temporary workers and trainees, as well as external parties such as customers, suppliers and others who come into contact with your company in good time about the rules at your company. Do this for each change in the measures. Many people may have practical questions: it is important to tell them whom they can turn to via information panels, your intranet or your website.
- Make **arrangements visible outside** and inside the premises. You can find a model poster and a communication kit on the website of the FPS Economy (bit.ly/GuidePourHoreca).
- Leave the **doors open** as much as possible to ensure proper and adapted ventilation of your premises.
- Have a **welcome conversation** with your customers, where you raise their awareness, inform them and explain the preventative measures in place and the rules relating to guests' health.
- **Coats and accessories will not be accepted by the staff**; guests must hang their own coats and other items at the designated place.
- Customers (from the age of 13) must wear a **mask** or a cloth alternative, **except when they're sitting at a table or at the bar**. If this is not possible for medical reasons, they may use a face shield. People who are unable to wear a mask, a cloth mask or a face shield due to a disability, which is verified by a medical certificate, do not have to comply with this obligation.



- Wearing a **surgical mask** is mandatory for **each person working in the hospitality industry (owners and staff)**. If this is not possible for medical reasons, they can use a face shield.
- Provide **guidance of guests** to the tables as far as possible. Indicate the places/tables yourself to avoid contact between customers. For example, put up a “Wait to be seated” sign.
- Ensure that staff and customers can **wash their hands** by providing suitable hand gels or hand disinfectants. Make these products available at the entry and exit and, where necessary, inside the premises (e.g. toilets, eating area, till area, terrace, ...).
- Provide only paper towels or paper and lockable bins in the **toilets** on the premises. The sanitary facilities must be cleaned and disinfected frequently.
- **Clean tables and chairs** thoroughly after each customer.
- **Glasses, cups, crockery and cutlery must be washed** with soap and rinsed after each use (more information in separate box p 9).
- The **use of an air quality (CO₂) meter** is mandatory indoors. This device must be installed so as to be visible to visitors in each separate room of the establishment intended for the consumption of drinks or meals.
- **The target standard of 900 ppm CO₂ applies.** Between 900 ppm and 1,200 ppm, the operator must have an action plan to ensure compensatory measures for ventilation and/or air purification to bring the CO₂ level below 900 ppm. Above 1,200 ppm, the establishment must be closed. A ready-to-use action plan template is available (in French) at info-coronavirus.be/fr/ventilation.
- The use of **games of chance and bar games** present at the drinking facility (billiards, snooker, kicker, darts, etc.) is permitted with the mandatory use of a face mask. After each use, the games will be disinfected.
- Encourage **electronic payments** by bank card or contactless, and avoid cash as much as possible.
- When using the **payment terminal**, clean and disinfect it regularly with disinfecting hand gel. Make hand gels or possibly cotton buds available to customers.



Glasses, cups, crockery and cutlery

Glasses, cups, crockery and cutlery must be washed with soap and rinsed after each use.

Simply rinsing the beer glasses in cold water with a rinsing agent is not sufficient. Machine dishwashing is preferable to hand dishwashing.

If you wash by hand, it is recommended to use hot water and detergent. If necessary, you can rinse with cold drinking water.

If it is not possible to wash with hot water, then pay extra attention to the following points:

- the used washing-up water must always be kept clean,
- always use sufficient detergent (according to the manufacturer's recommendations),
- soak the glasses in detergent water for a sufficiently long time,
- rinse with drinking water.

Use a sink for dishwashing and another sink for rinsing. Allow the glasses to drain and dry thoroughly before reuse. Ideally, do not dry with a towel.

If this is unavoidable, then make sure you take a clean towel as often as necessary. Always wash the towels after use.

Wash your hands before touching the washed glasses.



Aeration, ventilation and COVID-19

When we breathe, speak, shout, sing, cough or sneeze, we emit a certain number of small drops of water into the air we breathe out. When we are infected with COVID-19, these drops are loaded with virus.

The larger drops fall very quickly onto surfaces and the ground, but can contaminate people in the immediate vicinity, which is why it is important to keep a certain physical distance between people and to wear a mask and, of course, to continue to observe protective measures.

Finer drops or microdroplets, on the other hand, remain suspended in the air for several hours: these are known as “aerosols”.

In a room, as a result of air movements, these aerosols gradually spread throughout the space, as would perfume or cigarette smoke, which can be smelled even when the person who emitted it is at the other end of the room.

The higher the concentration of aerosols in a room, the higher the risk of contamination, should an infected person be present in that room.

That is why any business shall pay attention to the quality of the air in the room.

CO₂ and COVID-19

Measuring the concentration of virus particles in the air is not easy.

When we breathe, we emit CO₂. Like aerosols, it spreads in space and is transported by the air movements in the room. But unlike aerosols, CO₂ is much easier to detect and measure.

Measuring the concentration of CO₂ in the air can therefore be **a good indicator of the ambient air quality** of an enclosed space: a high CO₂ concentration indicates that the ventilation is insufficient for the use of that space and that the air quality is not good.

In all circumstances, to maintain good air quality and to reduce the risk of being contaminated by aerosols, ventilation is necessary to ventilate to renew the air in enclosed spaces. This removes excess CO₂ from the room as well as aerosols in the air that are potentially loaded with viral particles.

Why measure CO₂-concentration?

An elevated CO₂ concentration in an enclosed space does not directly indicate the presence of COVID-19. However, measuring the CO₂ level allows the detection of reference thresholds at which the air in the room should be changed.

The natural concentration of CO₂ outdoors is on average 0.04%, or 400 particles of CO₂ per million particles (ppm). In an enclosed indoor space, the closer to this level, the more efficiently the room will be ventilated.

Some scientific studies have shown that above a concentration of 1,000 ppm, CO₂ has effects on human performance (especially intellectual performance) and that it is preferable to stay below this threshold. This is why it was recommended, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that the CO₂ level in a room remains **as much as possible below 900 ppm**.

Measure, ventilate, eliminate

For all activities mentioned in this guide, it is advisable to ensure good ventilation of the premises. A CO₂ measuring device is a first step towards better air quality in a commercial establishment or business. Therefore, except for open terraces, the use of such a device is mandatory in every separate room of catering establishments and pubs in the hospitality industry that is intended for consumption and it must be installed in such a way as to be clearly visible (and readable) to the visitor.

Using a CO₂ measuring device does not affect the quality of the air in a room. It is the **human or mechanical action** that will bring fresh air into the room to be ventilated, i.e. evacuate the inside air, after the CO₂ level has been measured by this device.

There are mechanical systems to ventilate a room that are specifically designed for this purpose. However, in the absence of such systems, or when the existing systems are insufficient or inefficient, the simplest and least invasive solution is to open the windows and doors to the outside, either continuously and gently (e.g. tilt-and-turn windows) or completely.

Using a CO₂ detector will :

- ensure that the CO₂ concentration in a closed room is **kept as low as possible**;
- help **detect when** the room needs to be ventilated;
- contribute to **improving the comfort** of the people present in the room. Indeed, if a room is constantly or too frequently ventilated in winter, the temperature will be too low, and throughout the year, open windows potentially lead to noise pollution, which is not very pleasant.

A proper CO₂ measurement will therefore determine the appropriate time between window or door openings, as well as the duration of the opening. Not too often, not too short, not too long!

It is also worth noting that most CO₂ measuring devices are also equipped with visual or audible alarms to warn users when it is time to ventilate the room. The Ventilation Task-force of the Government's Corona Office has produced the document "[Selection and use of CO₂ sensors in the context of Covid-19](#)" to help you choose and use these devices correctly. This document is an annex to the implementation plan published on the website of the [FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue](#).

The target air quality standard is 900 ppm CO₂. Between 900 ppm and 1,200 ppm the operator must have an action plan to ensure **compensatory ventilation or air purification measures**. Above 1,200 ppm the establishment must close immediately.

A ready-to-use action plan template is available at info-coronavirus.be/fr/ventilation.

Renewing the air in a room not only reduces the CO₂ concentration in the room but also helps to remove airborne virus particles, without losing sight of other safety measures. Measuring the CO₂ concentration in a low-occupancy room will give a low CO₂ concentration for that room, but will never eliminate all risk of contamination.

Communication material

The FPS Economy created a communication kit with posters, banners and pictograms.

You will find this communication material on bit.ly/covid19-commkit.