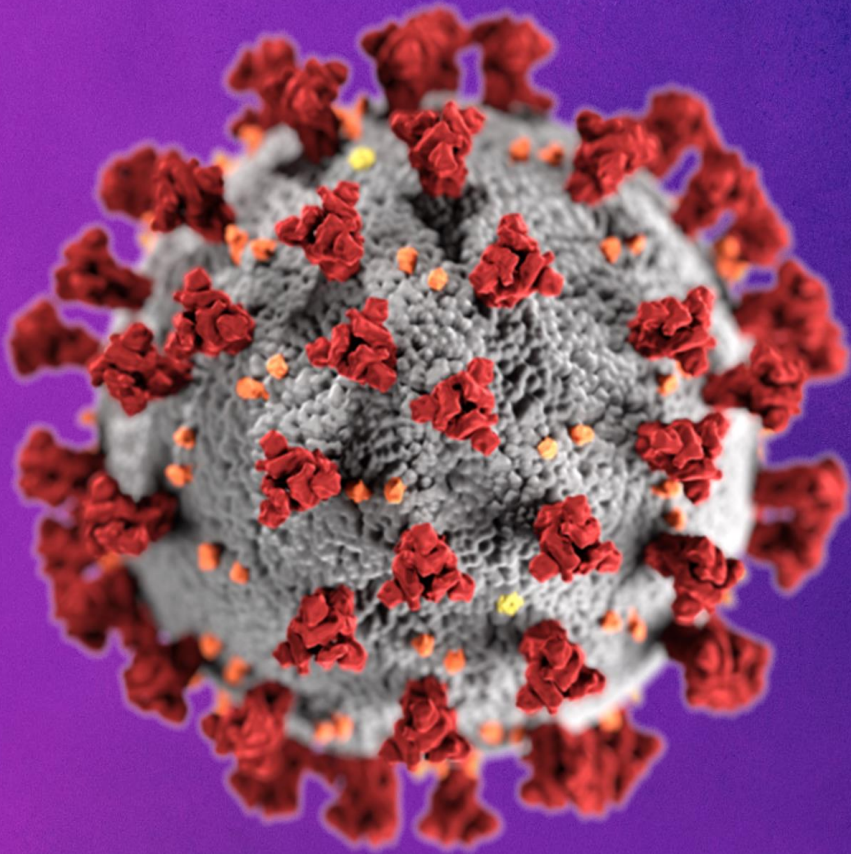


COVID-19

report 4: **HANDS OFF**

3.24.20





As cases of COVID-19 continue to skyrocket, major vulnerabilities in our healthcare system fuel even more panic. Stricter measures and shutdowns are being enforced, as pleas for “social distancing” are ignored. Americans are clinging tight to any sense of normalcy, as the everyday life they knew quickly slips away. While fear and paranoia remain high, one way they are doing this is by continuing to patronize restaurants. And while the industry has taken a huge hit, foodservice continues to find new ways to stay solvent.

Pivoting to all forms of take out has become the norm, but many restaurants are also getting creative in finding new ways to keep them coming back. Carryout and souped-up cleanliness are the new table stakes. But what else can restaurants do to comfort customers and maintain a sense of trust?

Here are highlights from Datassential's latest wave of Coronavirus research, fielded March 20-22 with 1,000 US consumers.



KEY EVENTS SINCE THE LAST FIELDING ON MARCH 18

March 19

China reports no new localized infections since start of coronavirus pandemic
State Department raises its travel advisory to Level 4, preventing Americans from traveling abroad
The number of global coronavirus deaths exceeds 10,000

March 20

President Trump taps Defense Production Act to order production of medical supplies.
Mexico and the US announce they would prohibit "non-essential" travel across their shared border

March 21

"Stay at home" orders go into effect in IL, NJ
Vice President Pence announces that HHS has order hundreds of millions of N95 masks
Spain records single-day spike of 5,000 confirmed coronavirus cases

March 22

Grocery stores giving temporary wage hikes during pandemic
The White House approves federal disaster declarations for CA, WA
The Senate fails to clear a procedural vote on a stimulus bill; negotiations continue
The National Guard is activated in CA, NY, and WA to respond to coronavirus

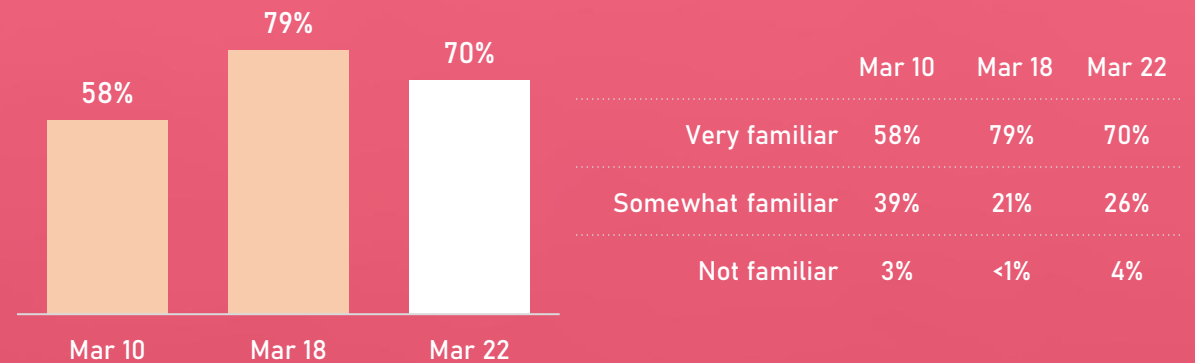


Concern remains high, but it's stabilizing.

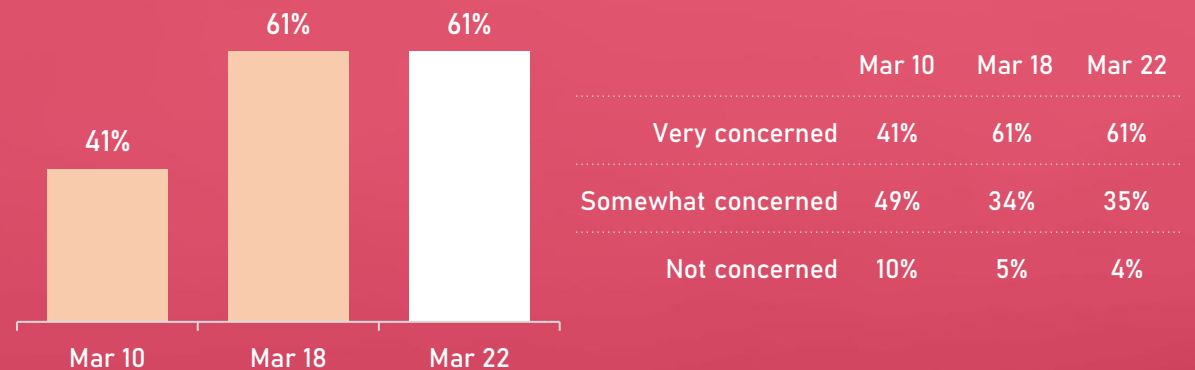
While awareness of Coronavirus in the US remains nearly universal, those claiming to be “very familiar” have decreased significantly from the previous wave, by 9%. With 24/7 media coverage and relentless updates, Americans may be struggling to stay on top of the latest information, causing uncertainty to grow.

Concern has remained stable in the past four days, with 61% very concerned about the risk and “hugely worried about my own personal health and plan to do whatever I can.”

very familiar with Coronavirus

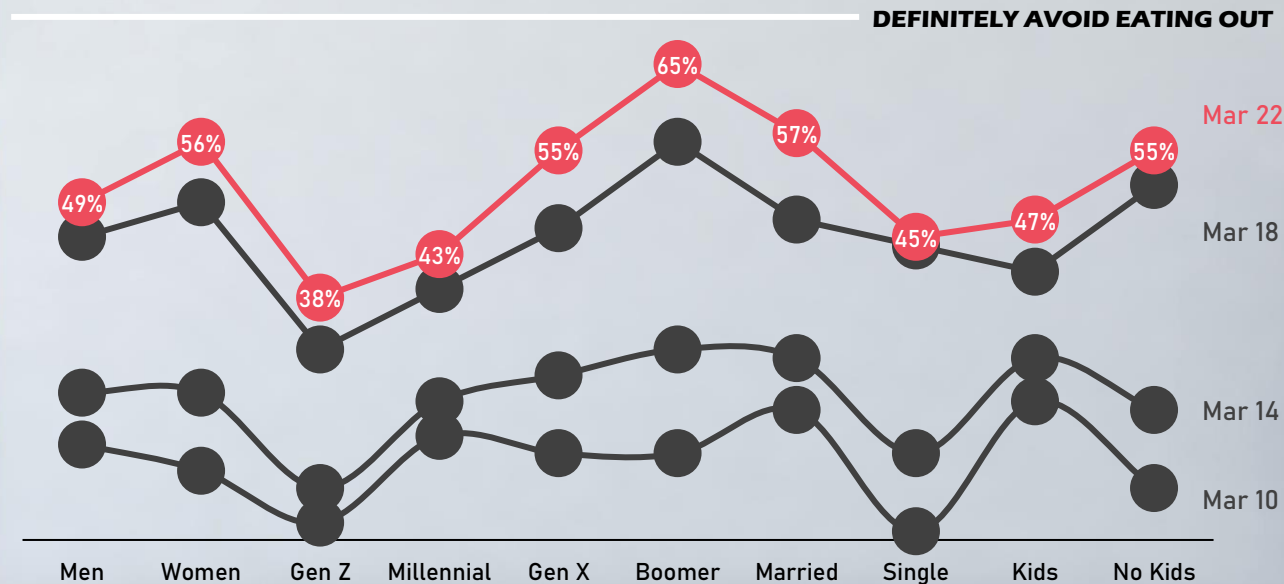
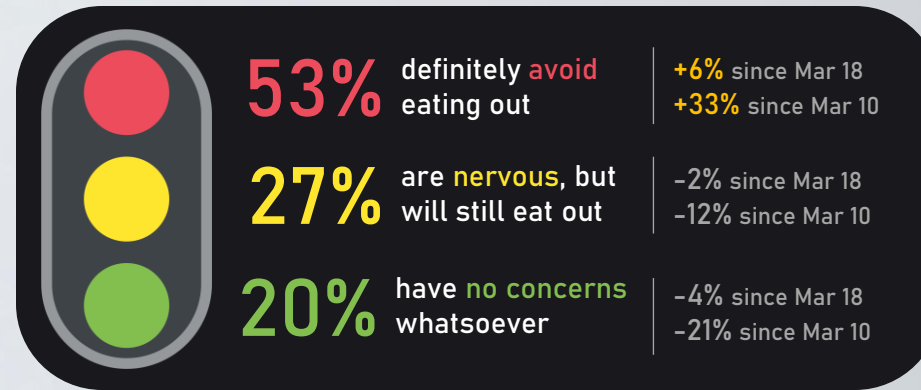


very concerned with Coronavirus



More than half of consumers now avoid eating out.

As of this fielding, 24 states have mandated that restaurants transition to delivery and takeout only, so the number of consumers avoiding dining at a restaurant continues to climb. Concern has grown across all demographic groups, with significant differences between men and women, parents and non-parents, married people and singles, and among generations. Numbers could increase further if more states and localities call on their citizens to shelter in place.



Dine-in hits a rough patch, but consumers adapt.

While many are doing their best to social distance, the reality is we still need to eat. As we've seen in previous waves, when it comes to meals from restaurants, the less contact the better. While people continue to avoid dining in, all forms of take out are still an option. In fact, avoidance of most forms of take out is at similar levels to popular options like discount grocers and warehouse clubs. And in some cases, take out is even more trusted. No surprise, consumers are least likely to avoid grocery stores and supercenters.



Boomers, who are considered a more at-risk population, are most likely to avoid dining in a restaurant (67%). However, Boomers are more likely to find no issue picking up food curbside, in grocery stores, or at drive-thrus.



Convenience just got less convenient.

Ask anyone and they'll tell you that one of the many benefits of restaurant takeout is the convenience. No fuss, no headaches and no dishes.

What used to be as simple as ordering and unpacking is now a multi-step process. In the era of COVID-19, people now have the added work of finding places that are still open, ordering from more limited menus and, most importantly, keeping the eating experience germ-free. And while most aren't complaining, it just adds stress to an already stressful time. There's an opportunity for operators to provide the types of "little extras" that can make the safe transition of food into the home just a little bit easier.



WHAT STEPS COULD RESTAURANTS TAKE TO MAKE YOU FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE?

"Frequent hand washing. Avoid touching face, and if you do, immediately wash hands. Frequent hand gel when handing food to delivery. Encourage delivery to gel before picking up food container. Staff has temperature taken at start of shift. Any staff who become symptomatic sent home with sick pay. (To avoid conflict of money to pay rent vs make me sick)."

- a 62-year-old woman in Dane County, WI

"To wear gloves, clean fruits and veggies before using, Do not handle meat products with bare hands. Close down buffets, increase the water temperature of the dish washer. Keep a close eye on employees to see they wash their hand and follow instructions to the letter."

- a 56-year-old woman in Shoreview, MN

"Social-media posting about all steps being taken to provide safe prep and sale, as well as working with limited crew to decrease exposure risks."

- a 29-year-old woman in Fort Wayne, IN

"Don't have the full menu. Just a few of the most popular."

- a 36-year-old woman in Burbank, IL

"If people are picking up food to go, insist that people in line maintain distance from each other. Also place credit card machine on a small table away from the cashier in order to create space."

- a 64-year-old woman in Lakewood, OH

"All restaurants are closed at this time. Instead of delivery, I go to the restaurant and order so I see how the restaurant is taking precautions."

- a 62-year-old woman from Maspeth, NY





It's a mixed bag of perceived risk.

When ordering from a restaurant, consumers cite food preparation as their top concern. Generation Z is the exception, with significantly more of those consumers worried about the delivery process (44%).

consumers ordering from restaurants are most worried about...

	Total	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer+
How food was PREPARED	41%	33%	37%	43%	45%
How food was DELIVERED	30%	44%	33%	27%	27%
How food was PACKAGED	29%	24%	30%	30%	28%



Dined, sealed, delivered.

Perceived risk extends even to many types of plastic disposables and packaging for takeout, seen in the majority of consumers who find all categories of to-go accessories to be at least somewhat risky. Plastic utensils sealed in plastic wrap come the closest to assuaging the concerns of nearly half of all consumers.

But relatively few people would be so risk-averse as to not eat foods that came into their home via common containers or wraps. Operators can consider sealed utensils or tamper-proof seals and stickers as one way to reassure customers that their takeout meals were handled with caution from the eatery to the home.

How risky do you consider each of the following types of food packaging as it relates to Coronavirus?

	Not Risky	Somewhat Risky	Too Risky
Sealed plastic utensils	46%	41%	13%
Plastic food containers	37%	49%	15%
Plastic wrap	35%	49%	16%
Paper bags and napkins	35%	49%	16%
Plastic bags	35%	49%	16%
Plastic straws	35%	45%	19%
Unwrapped plastic utensils	34%	49%	17%
Styrofoam or other foam packaging	34%	52%	15%
Cardboard containers	33%	51%	16%
Foil wrapping	33%	51%	16%

Operators need to go over the top.

Despite growing fear and questions around food safety, consumers just want to be assured of the basics. Even under normal conditions, healthy staff and protective gear are really no more than table stakes. There are many ways to demonstrate going above and beyond CDC guidelines. Consumers are receptive to efforts that minimize the number of staff in contact with their food and tamper-proof seals. Disinfectants and wipeable containers make it easy for a sanitary transition when food arrives home. And where you can't easily demonstrate, make sure you communicate with signs and emails.

Sending sick staff home	62%
Requiring kitchen staff to wear protective equipment	61%
Requiring delivery & food packing staff to wear protective equipment	54%
Tamper-proof seals on food packages	46%
Contactless food delivery	44%
Fewer staff in kitchen	43%
Signage about sanitation/food safety procedures	40%
Pack food in wipeable/cleanable containers	39%
Include disinfectant wipes with each order	37%
Individually-wrapping each part of my order	31%

If ordering delivery/takeout, what would you want to know the restaurant was doing to handle your food safely?



Are you doing any of the following in response to COVID-19 with your delivery or take out?



Wash hands after handling food containers/before eating 61%

Disinfect/wipe down all food surfaces before eating 42%

Use my own silverware, not the disposable provided 41%

Disinfect/wipe down all delivery containers/ bags before opening 34%

Transfer everything into my own plates/cups first 30%

Reheat food to make sure it's completely cooked through 26%

Throw away/won't eat any raw produce 24%



Boomers, who are most fearful of COVID-19, are most likely to use their own utensils (51%)



Gen Z (32%) and Millennials (31%) are less likely to eat produce

Help make the transition to takeout a safe one.

While most consumers aren't taking extreme steps when ordering out, more than half are doing the basics, like washing their hands after handling food containers. A third or more are also using their own plates and utensils and disinfecting eating surfaces and delivery containers. Having loved ones in the house may also make you more vigilant. Consumers who are married, living with partners, or who have kids are more likely to take some of these precautionary measures.

Anything that can ease some of the burden of these extra steps, like providing disinfecting wipes or a "handled with clean hands" stamp of reassurance, will help to boost the customer experience.



HOTSHOT REPORT

Get additional consumer and operator detail in Datassential's future COVID-19 reports, available for download at datassential.com/coronavirus.



Help us help you.

As the Coronavirus situation continues to evolve rapidly, just tell us what you want to know. If it's something that benefits the food industry, we'll do our best to incorporate it into an upcoming report and provide the results to everyone for free.

And if you have a need that's specific to your company or brand, we would love to design a custom research solution for you.

[click me](#)