COVID-19

report 19: HERE I COME

5.20.20

DATASSENTIAL

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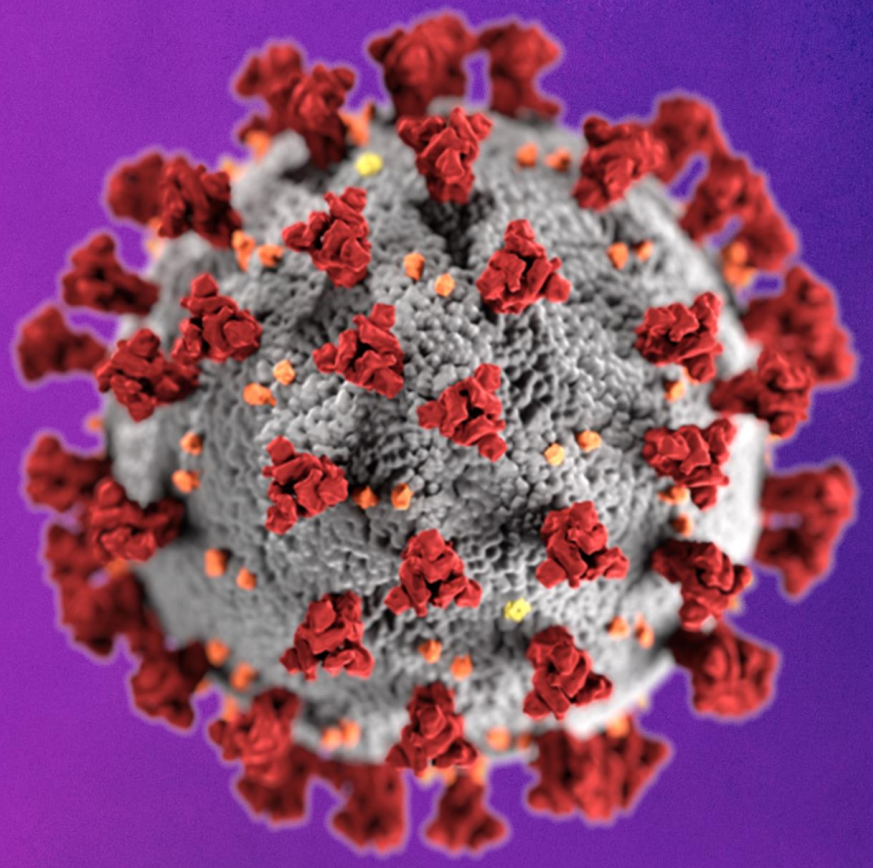


The past few weeks have given us a glimpse of what the next phase of our "new normal" may be like as restrictions are loosened and some business start to reopen. Each state is taking a unique approach. Places that open earlier have felt less need for restrictions. Other "hot spot" areas scarred by the experience may choose a more cautious path forward. Consumers have their own personal tolerances and preferences too. Some are slowly venturing out, geared up with masks and gloves. Others in lockdown states are crossing borders to get a taste of what it's like to socialize in bars again or simply get a badly needed haircut. As America tries to regain some semblance of "business as usual," there will be guidelines to adhere to, but also more leeway for personal choice.

As constraints start to ease up, what will Americans choose as "the way I eat now," and will it include newly adopted COVID behaviors? How can restaurants stay relevant as we move into this next phase?

Here are highlights from Datassential's latest wave of Coronavirus research, fielded with 4,000 U.S consumers from May 01 through May 14.

RECENT KEY EVENTS

May 12
Airlines acknowledge new mask policies are difficult to enforce
Georgia announces bars and nightclubs will remain closed until May 31
Arizona to allow professional sports starting Friday, governor says
Key coronavirus model now projects 147,000 US deaths by August

May 13
1 in 4 YouTube videos about Covid-19 got it wrong, a new study finds
Wisconsin Supreme Court strikes down state's stay-at-home order
Trump says Democrats' coronavirus relief package is "dead on arrival"

May 14
CDC releases guidelines for some business re-openings
New York City mayor says restrictions could begin to lift in June if indicators are met
Fourth USDA food safety inspector dies from Covid-19

May 15
Major League Baseball makes plans to play in empty ball parks
The US is "still way behind" on testing, former HHS secretary says
Ohio restaurants and bars with patios ready for soft reopening
Wyoming allows restaurants, bars and theaters to open

May 16
More USS Theodore Roosevelt sailors retest positive for Covid-19
Former President Obama criticizes US leaders' COVID response in virtual commencement speech
Labor secretary claims many jobs are "not lost yet"

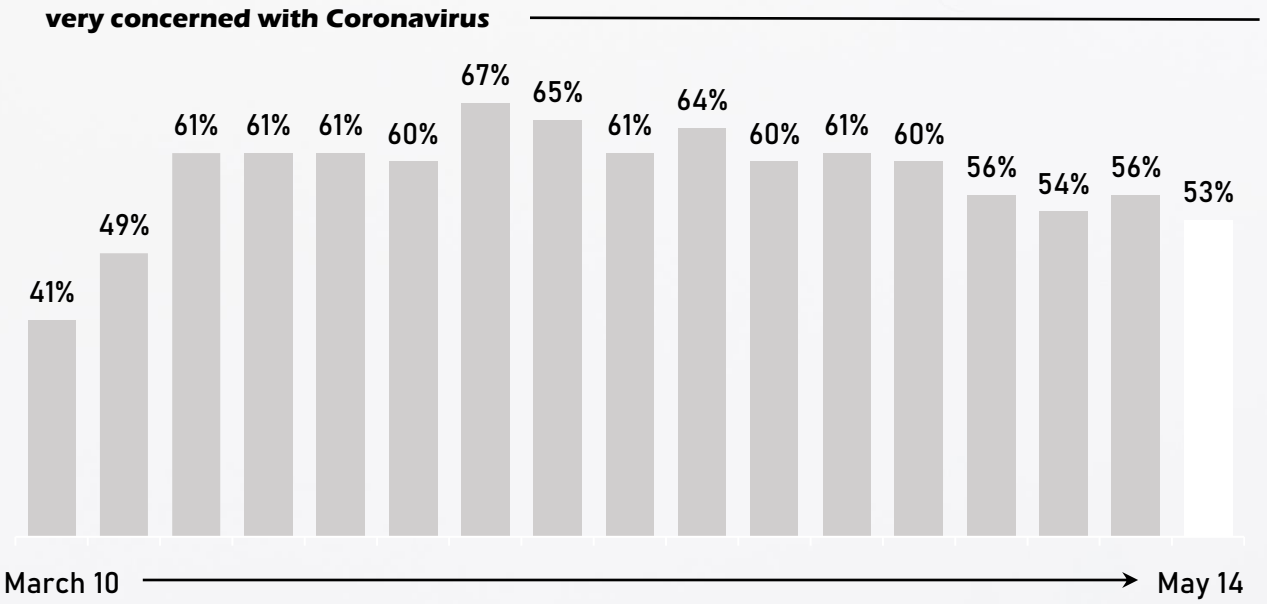
May 17
Over 5,400 NYPD members have returned to work after recovering from Covid-19
There are at least 1,482,916 coronavirus cases in US

May 18
More outdoor businesses will be allowed to open on Friday in NJ, governor says
Minnesota reports lowest number of COVID deaths in two weeks
Uber to cut another 3,000 jobs

Concern is easing back toward early March levels.

As spread of the virus has slowed with social distancing and some states continue to reopen, concern is more aligned with levels from early March. More than half of Americans remain anxious, feeling very concerned and hugely worried about their own personal health.

	March						April							May			
	10	14	18	22	25	29	1	3	7	10	15	17	23	27	1	7	14
Very concerned	41%	49%	61%	61%	61%	60%	67%	65%	61%	64%	60%	61%	60%	56%	54%	56%	53%
Somewhat concerned	49%	42%	34%	35%	34%	33%	28%	28%	34%	31%	35%	33%	34%	37%	37%	34%	38%
Not concerned	10%	8%	5%	4%	5%	7%	5%	7%	6%	5%	5%	6%	6%	7%	9%	10%	9%



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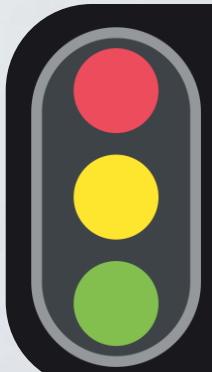
Avoidance of eating out is starting to decline.

A few weeks into the reopening of dining rooms in some states, avoidance of eating out is starting to decline, down 4 points in just one week. All demographic groups are showing decreases as well, with some of the largest drops among women and Gen Z.

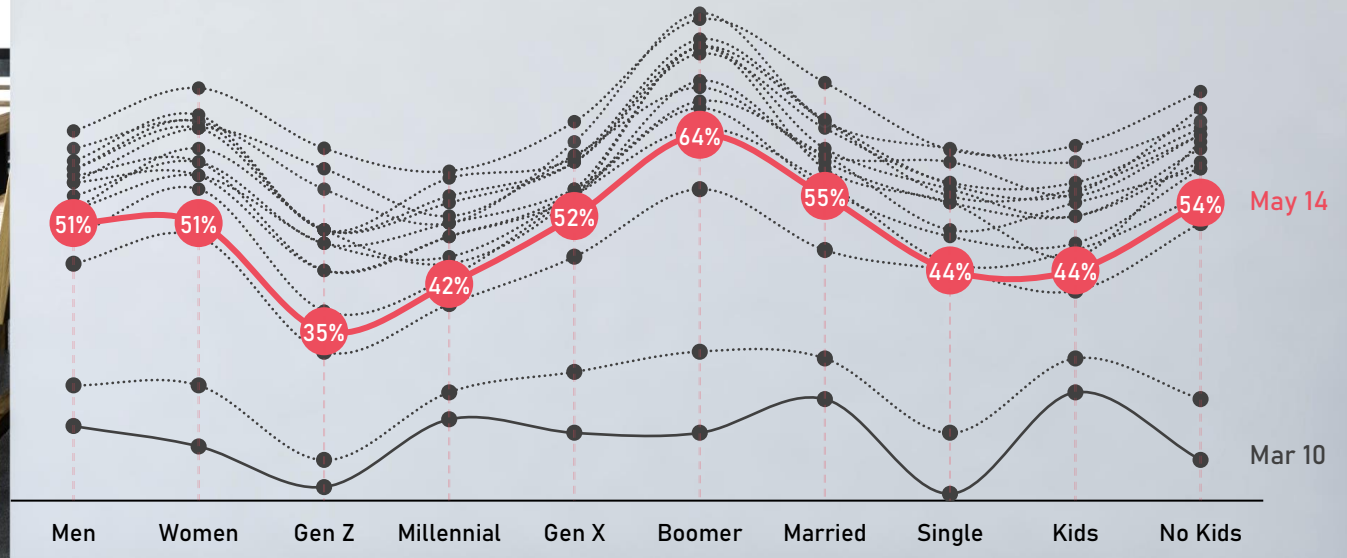


51% definitely avoid eating out
-4% since May 7
+31% since Mar 10

29% are nervous, but will still eat out
+2% since May 7
-10% since Mar 10

20% have no concerns whatsoever
+2% since May 7
-21% since Mar 10

DEFINITELY AVOID EATING OUT



Health concerns remain steady.

which are you more concerned about?

59%
PUBLIC-HEALTH CRISIS
+2% since May 7
-4% since April 7

41%
ECONOMIC CRISIS
-2% since May 7
+4% since April 7

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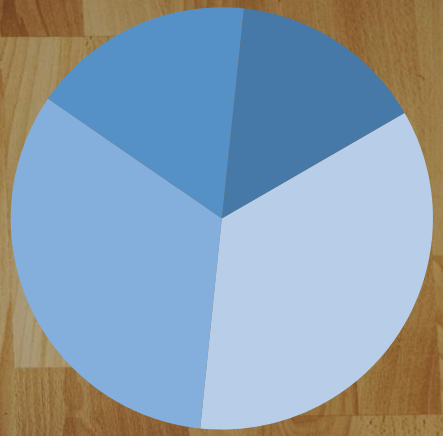
America is still waiting it out.

As the U.S. has slowly started to reopen in some states, the number of Americans going to work or school outside of home has risen slightly, up 3 points in the past week. Those working or schooling remotely remains the same.

19%
STILL GOING TO SCHOOL/WORK AS NORMAL

15%
LAID OFF / FURLOUGHED



34%
WORKING OR ATTENDING SCHOOL REMOTELY

32%
NOT WORKING OVERALL

which of the following best describes your current situation?

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What people eat won't change; how they get it probably will

Since the onset of COVID, people have tried to maintain as much normalcy as possible, especially when it comes to food. Barring food shortages and restaurant closures, this hasn't changed. Even as restrictions ease up and we have more choices, the biggest changes consumers will look to make are ones that help them safely navigate the new eating environment. It could mean a contactless restaurant trip, ordering a family meal in lieu of a trip to the grocery store, or simply finding a safe way to enjoy the salad bar.

As restaurants find new ways to thrive as they reopen, they shouldn't abandon the off-premise strategies that got them through the most difficult phases of social distancing.

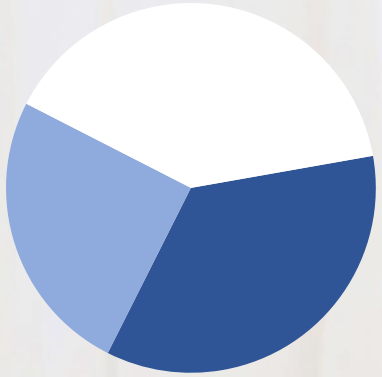
SECTION 01:

Have we adopted new eating behaviors?

The verdict is mixed on home cooking.

Although social-distancing measures have forced many people to stay indoors and start experimenting in the kitchen, two consumers in five did not actually start cooking more often. More than a third of consumers found joy and excitement in discovering new dishes, flavors, and techniques, yet more than a third of Gen X and households with kids are now sick of having to cook more for their families.

which of the following best describes consumers' attitudes to cooking at home?



40%
DID NOT START COOKING MORE
More likely among Boomers (58%)

25%
SICK OF HAVING TO COOK MORE
More likely among Gen X (32%) and HHs with Kids (35%)

35%
FOUND NEW PASSION IN COOKING
More likely among Millennials (47%)

COVID-19 has not been a testing ground for new behavior.

For the most part, this crisis has encouraged very few consumers to adopt new shopping and dining strategies; the rest are mostly retaining their prior routines. Online grocery shopping and grocery delivery have benefited the most from these new trials. Millennials are most adventurous, with higher first-time trials across all behaviors.

which of the following have consumers TRIED FOR THE FIRST TIME/ HAVE DONE BEFORE / HAVE NOT DONE?

	Tried For The First Time	Have Done This Before	Have Not Done This
Grocery shopped online for pickup/delivery	21%	24%	55%
Ordered groceries for delivery	19%	21%	60%
Ordered a family meal bundle from a restaurant for pick-up / delivery	17%	22%	61%
Used a restaurant delivery service / smartphone app	16%	27%	57%
Ordered restaurant food for delivery	15%	40%	45%
Baked something from “scratch”	14%	54%	32%
Ordered alcoholic beverages from a restaurant for pick-up / delivery	13%	15%	73%
Purchased a meal kit from the grocery store	10%	16%	74%
Purchased alcoholic beverages for delivery using an online service	10%	18%	73%
Subscribe to a regular “meal kit” service	10%	15%	75%

However, new habits are here to stay.

Across the board, consumers who have experimented for the first time with new cooking and shopping habits during quarantine are likely to retain them after COVID-19 restrictions are eased. Although meal kits had the lowest proportion of first-time subscribers in our consumer pool, nearly three quarters look to continue their subscriptions. Meanwhile, most Boomers, who are generally more attached to the social aspects of dining out, are keen to stop ordering restaurant food for takeout or delivery.

which of these activities will consumers CONTINUE DOING after COVID-19 restrictions are eased?

	% Among First Time Triers	
Baked something from “scratch”	80%	
Ordered a family meal bundle from a restaurant for pick-up / delivery	76%	
Subscribe to a regular meal kit service	74%	Less likely among Boomers (48%)
Ordered restaurant food for delivery	71%	
Purchased alcoholic beverages for delivery using an online service	69%	Less likely among Boomers (39%)
Used a restaurant delivery service / smartphone app	67%	
Grocery shopped online for pickup/delivery	67%	
Ordered groceries for delivery	66%	
Purchased a meal kit from the grocery store	64%	
Ordered alcoholic beverages from a restaurant for pick-up / delivery	63%	

SECTION 02:

What's the new normal for grocery shopping?

Grocery shopping is still mostly routine.

Since the onset of COVID-19, most households find themselves needing to go grocery shopping between several times per month and once per week. Less than a fifth are shopping more than once per week, and 19% of Gen Z actually shop less than once per month. Consumers are splitting their grocery dollars between many different outlets, with neighborhood stores most popular due to their accessibility.

how often are consumers shopping for groceries?

Multiple times per week	17%
Once per week	42%
Couple times per month	28%
Once per month	5%
Less often than once per month	8%

where are they shopping?

Neighborhood grocery store	40%
Discount center / super center	35%
Online grocery store or e-commerce website	23%
Convenience store / mini mart / bodega	15%
Specialty grocery store	15%
Produce shop / fruit stand / farmer's market / food stall	14%
None of the above	22%

People would adapt, even more than they have already.

Since the start of the pandemic, many consumers have had to switch up their shopping and dining routines. Most have already begun to alter their grocery shopping to off-hours, or they would consider it to avoid some of the other pain points they're less willing to endure, like longer lines everywhere or longer distances to a usable grocery store. But some adjustments cost more than time. More than two in five people have tipped restaurants for takeout meals — although this is less likely for Gen Z (30%) — and while a slight majority of shoppers have not had to pay higher prices for groceries yet, most of those people are prepared to do so.

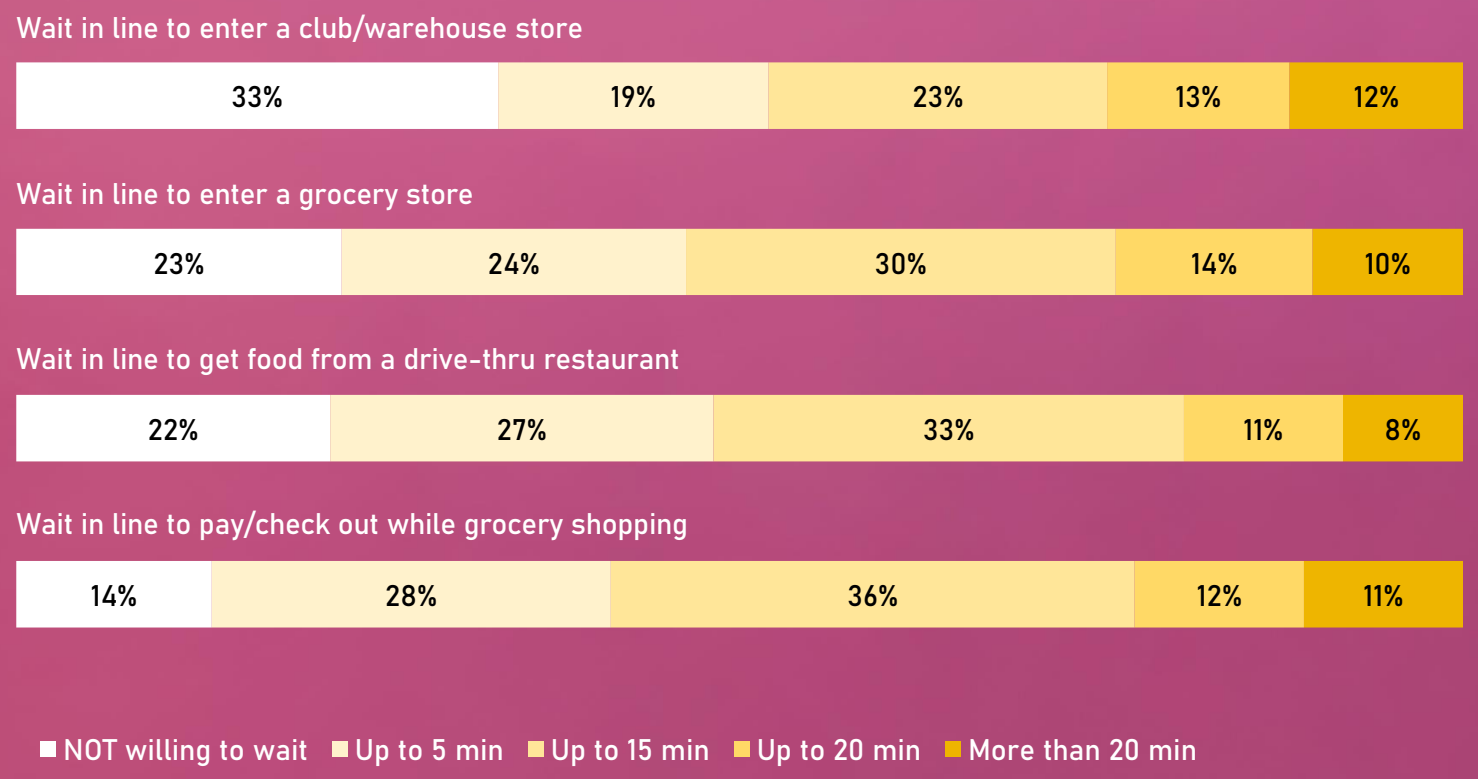
	Already Doing This	Haven't Had To, But Would Be OK With This	Would Not Do This
Go grocery shopping during off-hours	50%	36%	14%
Spend more on foods at the grocery store	48%	31%	21%
Tip on restaurant food even when it's for takeout/pickup	43%	34%	23%
Wait in longer lines to pay/check out at a grocery stores	38%	36%	26%
Wait in line to enter a grocery store	37%	35%	28%
Wait in longer lines to get food from a drive-thru restaurant	29%	34%	37%
Travel out of your way to get food from a restaurant/grocery store	23%	41%	36%

how do consumers feel about the following adjustments since the start of COVID-19?

Waiting is part of our new reality.

Most shoppers are willing to wait in line at least a little for food purchases, regardless of venue. Consumers are most vested by the time they are in line for grocery checkout and least likely to wait around to get into a warehouse club. Few will wait longer than 15 minutes.

how long are you willing to wait in line for the following tasks?



WHAT SHOULD GROCERY STORES DO/NOT DO TO CREATE A CONTACTLESS SHOPPING EXPERIENCE?

DO...

"All used carts should be left outside and wiped down before being put back to use."

"Provide clean washrooms, warm running water and paper towels."

"Plexiglass shields at checkout and sneeze guards for produce aisles."

"Tape on the floor to mark 6ft. distance in line and arrows for one-direction aisles."

"Sanitize touch screens and chip insert slots on self-checkouts between EACH usage."

"Have signage, especially in produce aisles, to request people not handle things they don't intend to purchase."

DON'T...

"Encourage or require employees who are ill or carriers without symptoms to work."

"Give out receipts unless customer specifically asks for one."

"Allow unmasked patrons to sift through produce."

"Allow cashiers or customers to wet their fingers using their tongues to open bags."

"Crowd aisles with displays/product stands that force people to stand close to each other as they pass by."

"Keep store open longer than you have folks to do shifts. You also need time to restock and clean without customers."

SECTION 03:

What will we want from restaurants?

Family meals have staying power.

42%

Have ordered a family meal bundle at least once during COVID

38%

Will likely continue ordering family meal bundles after COVID

There's opportunity to broaden their appeal.

Barriers to repeat purchases of family bundles focus on lack of variety or including unwanted items. Consumers would also like to see fewer and more eco-friendly containers. Restaurants should consider flexible or mix-and-match choices and minimizing packaging to raise demand.

	True
I'd prefer if takeout came in more eco-friendly containers	57%
I'd prefer if family meal bundles came with fewer containers	47%
I've avoided family meal bundles because people want to choose their own dish	44%
Family meals have been great during COVID, but I wouldn't order after the pandemic	44%
I haven't ordered family meal bundles because I don't like all of the items included	40%
I've been ordering family meal bundles because they're a better value for the money	36%
I've been ordering family meal bundles so I'll have food to eat over multiple meals	33%
I started ordering/increased orders from a meal-kit service due to COVID	21%

regarding the family meal bundles now available from restaurants, please rate the following statements true or false.

Family meals should offer flexibility.

One of the many benefits of ordering carryout is that family members have freedom of choice. Consistent with findings from Datassential's "Reinvention" report, in which build-your-own meals generated strong appeal, consumers are most interested in family meal bundles that offer flexibility with mix-and-match choices or foods that are customizable. As Americans become more price conscious, they'll also appreciate family meals that offer value, with enough food for multiple meals.

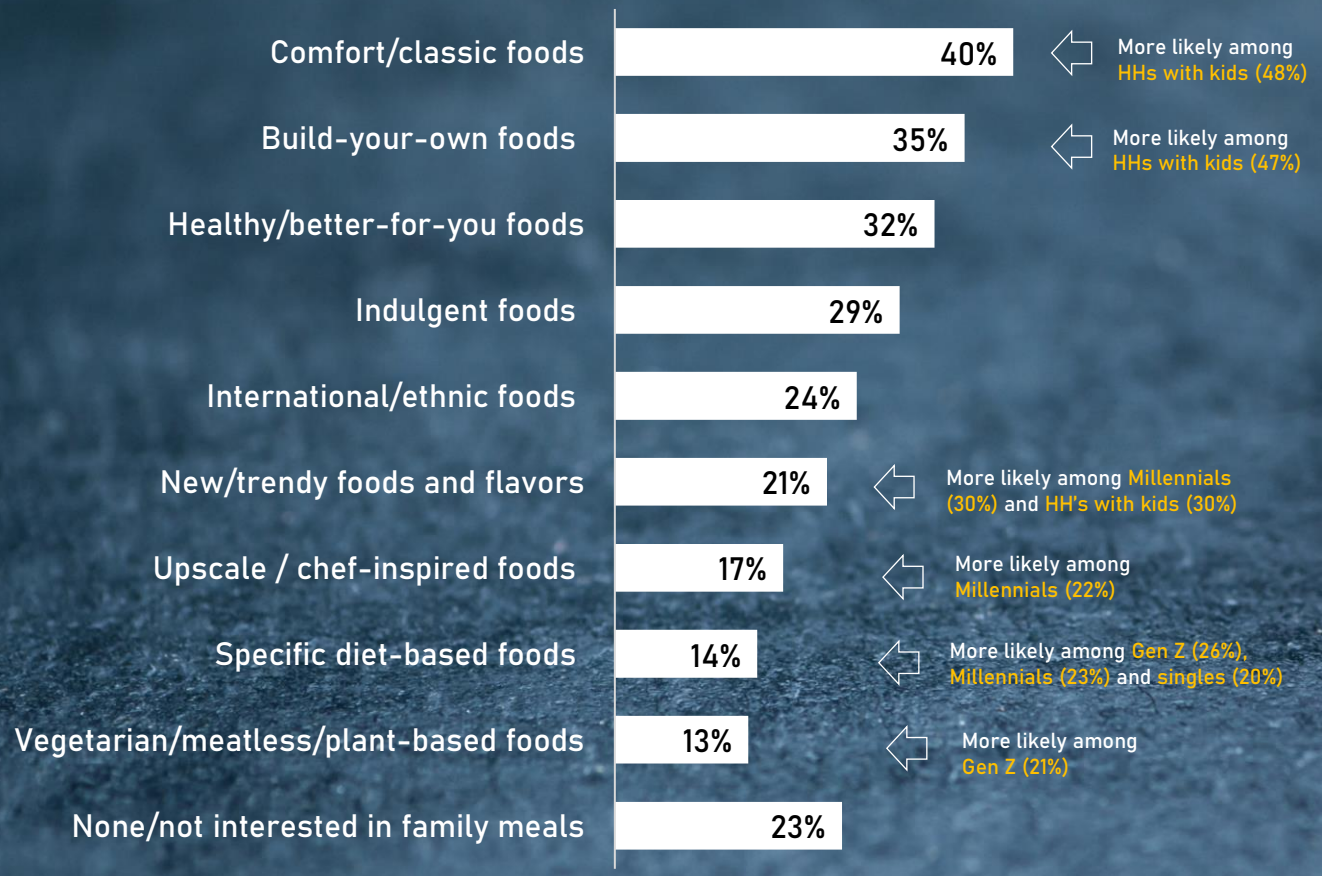
	Extremely Interested	Somewhat Interested	Not Interested
Family meals with mix-and-match options	34%	37%	29%
Family meals you can customize for each person	31%	36%	33%
Family meals with two entrees, for choice	30%	41%	29%
Family-size portions of single dish for multiple meals	30%	39%	32%
Multiple individual servings to eat over several days	29%	38%	33%
Family meals: one large entree and small side dishes	29%	39%	32%
Heat & Eat / Take-and-Bake meals	29%	39%	33%
Full multi-course meals	27%	35%	38%
Restaurant meal-kits	22%	35%	43%
Family meals for breakfast / brunch	20%	32%	48%

if restaurants continue to offer family meal bundles, which types would you prefer?

Diners prefer options with broad family appeal.

Households with kids seek family meals that offer "easy to please" options for the entire family, like classic comfort foods (meatloaf, chili) or customizable, build-your-own meals (sandwiches, tacos). One in three would like better-for-you options.

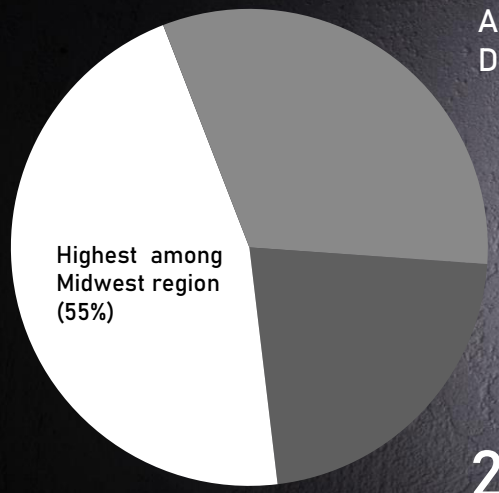
what types of family meals would you like to see more of?



Go big or cook at home.

When consumers order family meal bundles, they want them to at least have appetizers or sides, and almost one in three prefer a dessert as well.

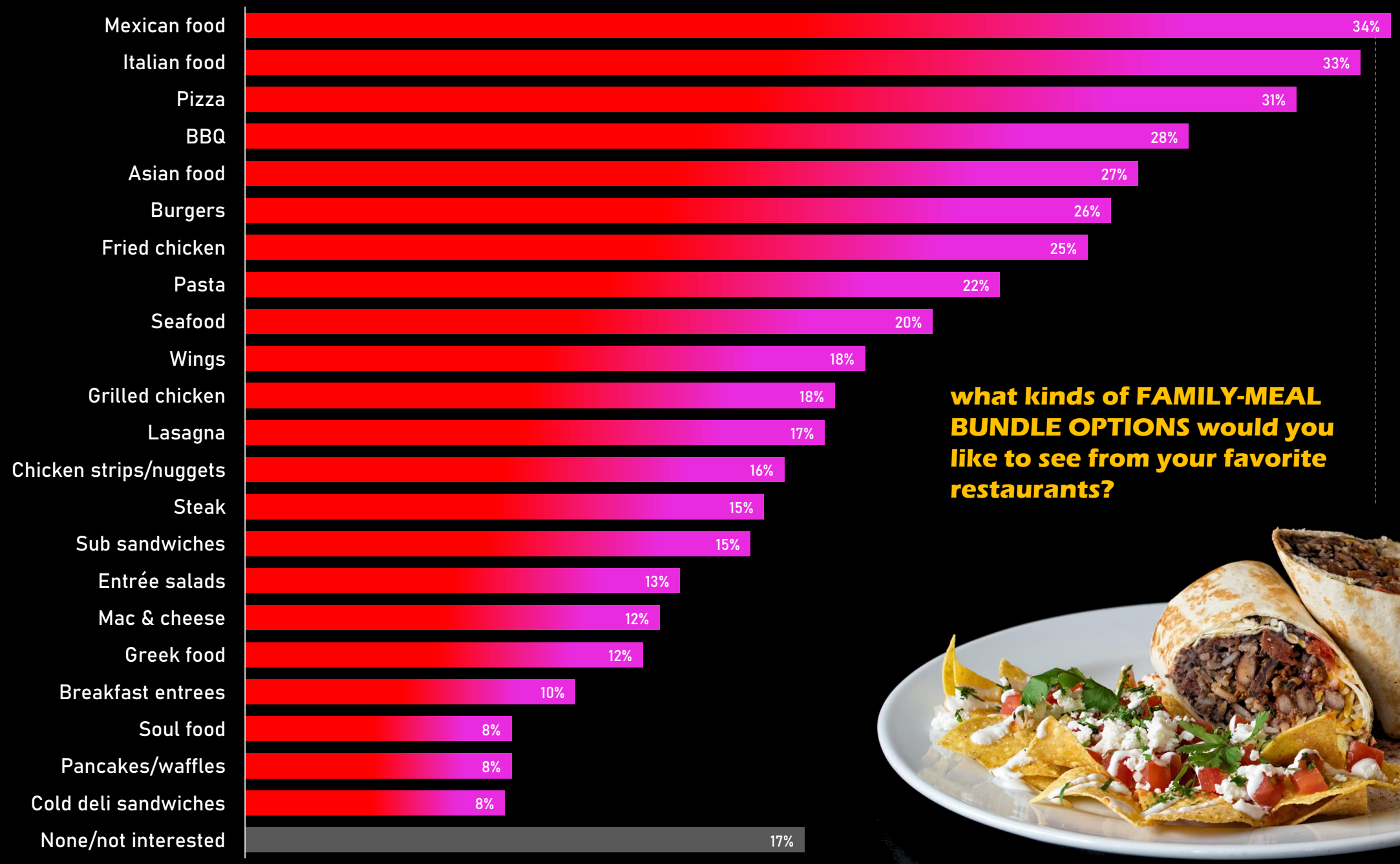
if restaurants were to offer family meal bundles, what would you want them to include?



32%
ENTRÉE + APPETIZERS/SIDES + DESSERTS

46%
ENTRÉE + APPETIZERS/SIDES

22%
ENTRÉE ONLY



what kinds of FAMILY-MEAL BUNDLE OPTIONS would you like to see from your favorite restaurants?

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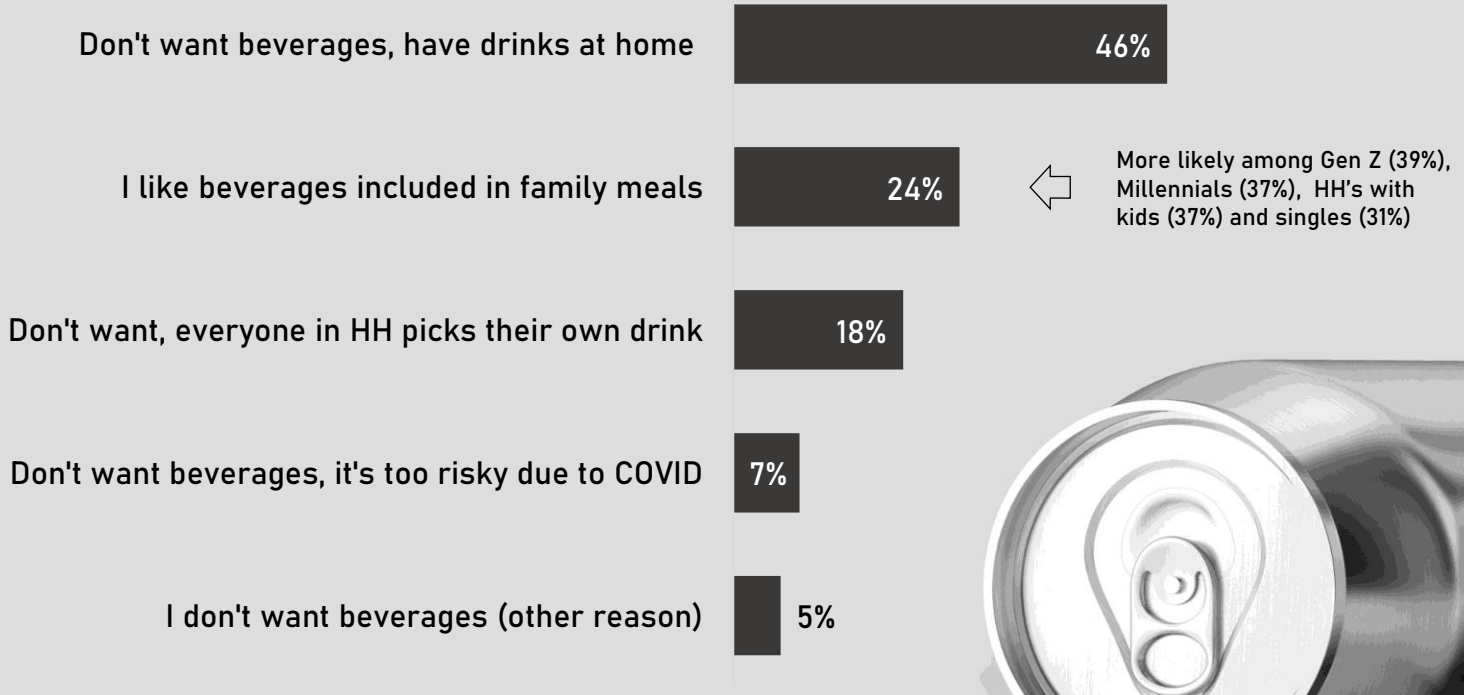
Beverages needn't be included.

While most don't want beverages included in family meal bundles, one in three consumers among the younger generations and households with kids would prefer the option.

how do you feel about beverages being included in family meal bundles?

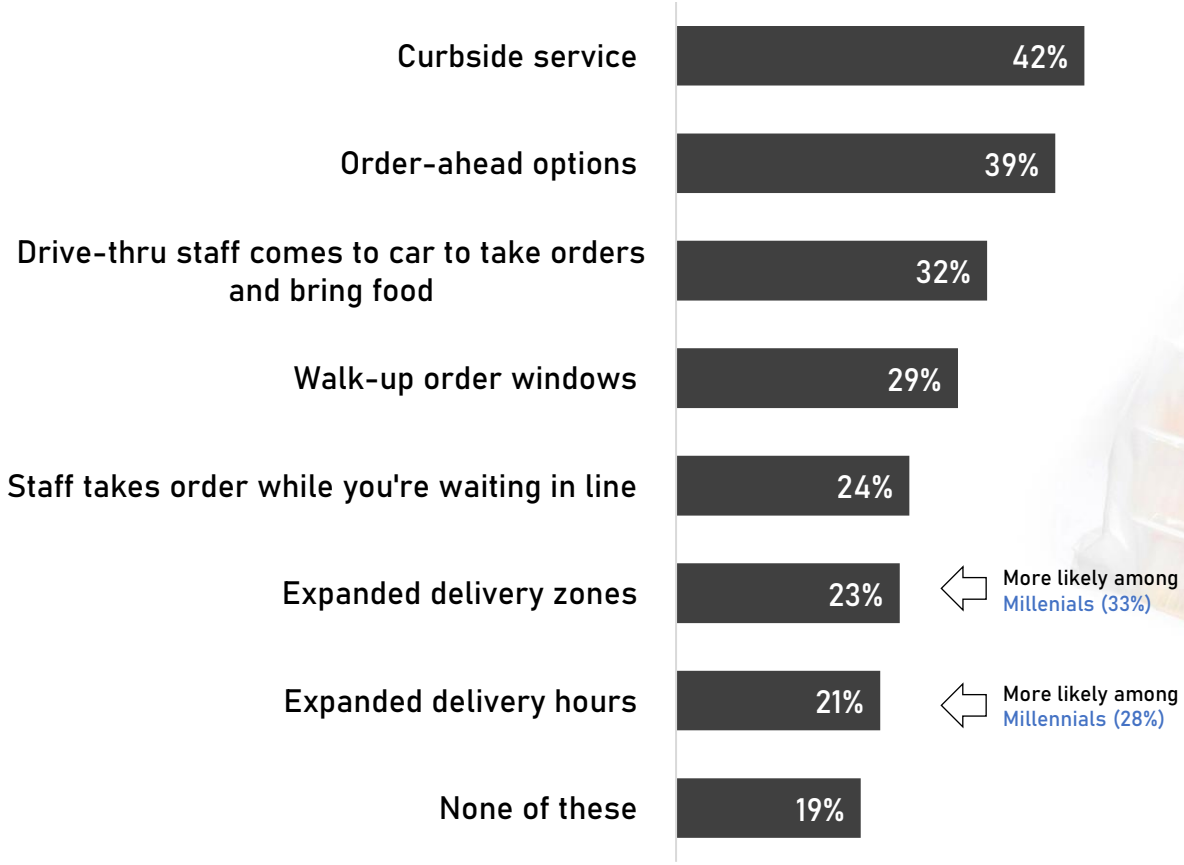


More likely among Gen Z (39%), Millennials (37%), HH's with kids (37%) and singles (31%)

A return to normal shouldn't necessarily mean business as usual for limited service restaurants.

Even as LSRs begin to reopen dining rooms under new COVID guidelines, some consumers would prefer they keep services that allow for social distancing when getting food to go. Methods that allow diners to stay outside of or minimize the time spent in restaurants are top on the list. Unsurprisingly, convenience-driven Millennials also like the option of expanded delivery hours and zones.

which would you like counter service restaurants to continue offering even after they reopen for dining in?



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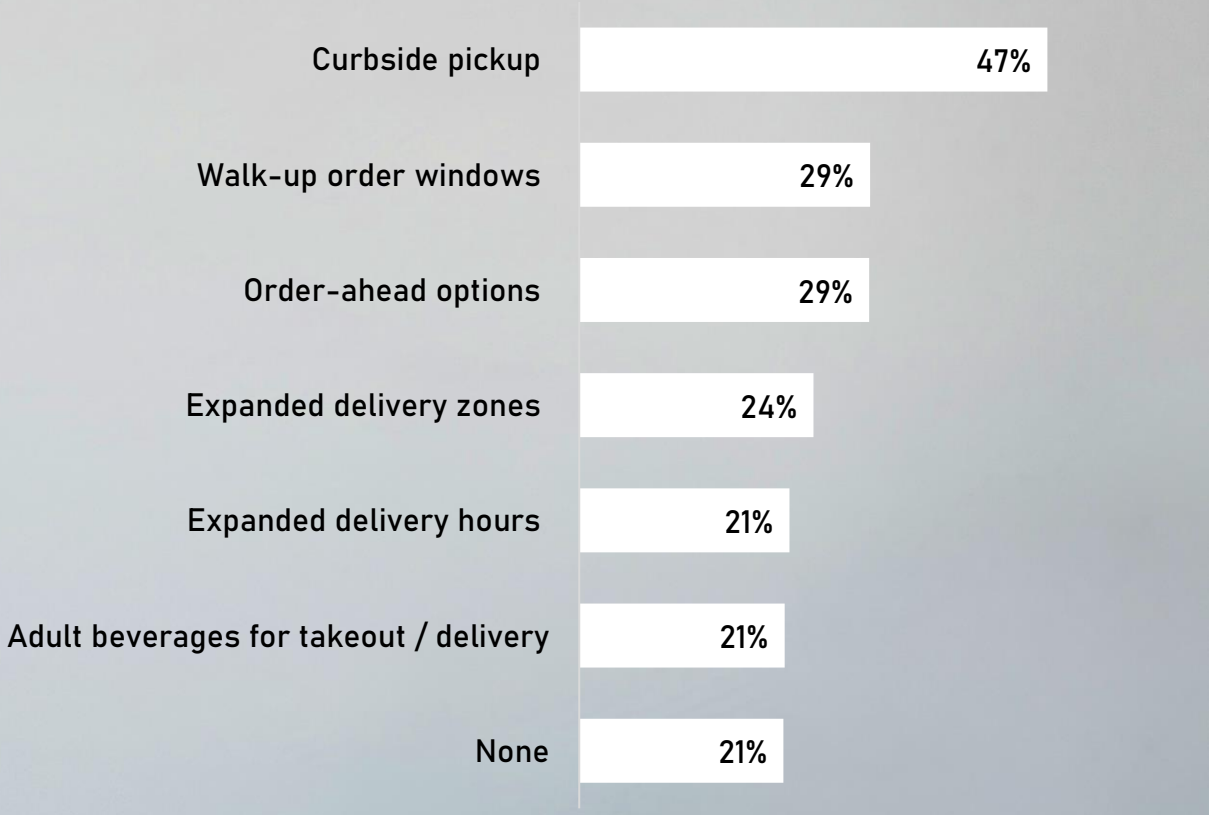
Diners hope for the same social-distancing options from sit-down restaurants too.

One in four would also like the option of adult beverages to go. Millennials want to keep convenience-driven services like order ahead and expanded delivery zones.

which would you like sit-down restaurants to continue offering even after they reopen for dining in?



People trust restaurant staff, but not other diners.

Getting food from outside of the home is not without risk, but some venues are perceived safer than others. Delivery and carryout have established themselves as the “tried and true” ordering methods during COVID. Most diners will also consider options where safety is in the hands of the restaurant staff, like dining-in options or assembly lines. There is still a high level of discomfort with anything that involves self-service and open food, like buffets and salad bars.

how risky do you consider each of the following ways to get food?

	Too Risky	Somewhat Risky	Not Risky
Buffet-style restaurant	57%	29%	14%
Salad bar-style restaurant	54%	31%	15%
Salad / soup bar at the grocery store	50%	33%	17%
Cafeteria-style serving line	42%	41%	18%
Dine-in at fast food restaurants	35%	43%	22%
Sit-down service at restaurants	34%	43%	23%
Hot / prepared foods from convenience stores	34%	44%	23%
Restaurants where workers assemble food in front of you	26%	48%	26%
Delivery from restaurants	14%	43%	43%
Carryout / takeout food from restaurants	13%	41%	46%

Diners hold higher safety standards for shared food.

With salad bars and buffets still considered risky, diners require more precautionary steps in order to ease their concerns. Anything that promotes social distancing, protects open food, and eliminates the need for multi-touch contact with surfaces will be a requirement — or at least “nice to have” — almost universally. Requiring staff to serve food is a positive, but it is lower on the list of requirements. Boomers and women are most stringent in their requirements, while Gen Z consumers are much less demanding.

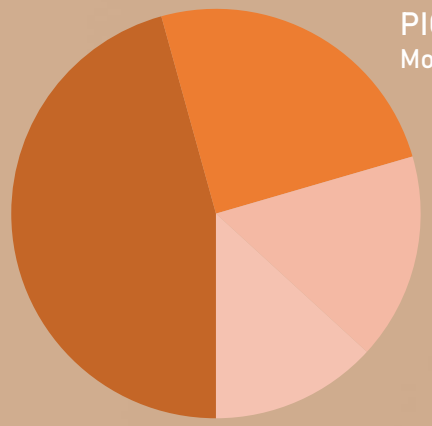
	Requirement	Positive, But Not Required	Not Needed
"Sneeze guards" / shields placed above the food	69%	21%	10%
Limited number of diners allowed to get food at once	59%	30%	11%
Guarantee that food is rotated at regular intervals	58%	31%	11%
Staff makes sure people interact with the food safely	56%	31%	13%
Only single-serve condiments	56%	30%	14%
Covers for each food compartment	55%	32%	13%
Single-use serving utensils for each container	55%	31%	14%
Gloves / masks for customers at self-service stations	54%	33%	13%
Staff at each food station serve you the food	46%	38%	16%
Order items you want; staff brings to you	39%	43%	19%

how do you feel about precautions that salad bars and buffet-style restaurants are taking to make you feel comfortable?

Prioritize contactless food preparation.

Although providing a contactless restaurant experience at every level is the platonic ideal, nearly half of consumers want restaurants to prioritize limiting contact during food prep, followed by contactless pickup or delivery. This is salient for Boomers, who generally perceive themselves to be a higher-risk population.

when is it most important to have a "contactless" (no touch) experience at restaurants?



25%
CONTACTLESS PICKUP/DELIVERY
More likely among Millennials (32%)

16%
CONTACTLESS ORDERING

13%
CONTACTLESS PAYMENT
More likely among Gen Z (27%)

46%
LOW/NO CONTACT FOOD PREPARATION
More likely among Boomers (60%)

WHAT SHOULD RESTAURANTS DO/NOT DO TO CREATE A CONTACTLESS DINING EXPERIENCE?

DO...

"Place customers at tables that are spaced at 6 feet apart."

"Plexiglass/shields between workers and patrons."

"Close down all self-serve food stations."

"Individual packs of condiments at table (instead of communal multi-use bottles)."

"Allow mobile/online ordering from table instead of in-person waitstaff."

"If there is no drive-up window and it's not feasible to open a drive-thru, set aside a parking space for pick-up."

DON'T...

"Pretend everything is back to normal and act like we did before the pandemic."

"Offer finger foods or shared plates."

"Allow sick people to work, but do not fire them – jobs are hard enough to get."

"Have community condiments, beverage dispensers, or bread baskets."

"Be disrespectful, be mean to the elderly, and forget about hospitality."

"Have runners or multiple people serving one table."

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HOTSHOT REPORT

Visit Datassential's Coronavirus Resource Library at datassential.com/Coronavirus, your one-stop shop for all COVID-19 research reports, video interviews, restaurant closure maps, and Traffic Briefings, all updated daily as new data come out of the field.

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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.

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312-655-0622

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contact Brian Darr to find out more:
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America's chain restaurant landscape, reframed in the age of COVID-19.

Datassential's recently-released Firefly 500+ Report dives deep into the metrics of chain restaurant success: annual sales, unit counts, and AUVs; year-over-year growth numbers; and consumer insights from SCORES and BrandFingerprints. This year, the report also includes custom research about COVID-19's impact on the chain restaurant landscape, compiled from March to early May.