

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Zagat survey shows significant change in US dining behavior after COVID-19

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Health and safety were chief concerns of U.S. consumers before they returned to dining in restaurants, according to a new study from Zagat. Image credit: Zagat

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

A study of nearly 6,775 U.S. consumers places health and safety as their chief concerns before they return to dine in restaurants.

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While missing restaurants, diners are taking a wait-and-see attitude with dining out, turning to cooking and ordering home delivery as a result of the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak and resultant lockdowns that have throttled businesses and economies worldwide. The evolving behavior affects not just standalone restaurants, but also those attached to hotels for whom dining services is a major stream of revenue.

"Restaurants play a vital role in every neighborhood," said Chris Stang, CEO of Zagat and cofounder of restaurant discovery platform The Infatuation, in a statement. "This study serves as further evidence that COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the people, businesses, and the communities that rely so heavily on their operations."

The Zagat Future of Dining online study was conducted in May and distributed in partnership with the [James Beard Foundation](#). Seventy-six percent of the respondents said they dined out two or more times per week.

Per [Zagat](#), the key findings:

Health and safety is paramount: Three in four diners said health and safety concerns were their biggest deterrent to dining out, far outweighing financial reasons.

Outdoor seating and reduced restaurant capacity are most likely to increase comfort levels and influence return.

Eighty-three percent of those respondents not immediately interested in returning to restaurants will be made more comfortable with social distancing measures and masks worn by staff.

Consumers take a wait-and-see approach: The study showed that diners miss restaurants and the entire experience of dining out, but comfort levels vary when restaurants reopen.

Two out of three diners are planning to wait more than a week to return to a restaurant. Of those, 93 percent will wait

more than three weeks and 20percent say they will wait more than three months.

Cooking and home delivery surge: As expected, consuming meals at home has become a much larger part of consumers' lives during the crisis, the survey found.

In terms of economic impact, 51 percent of people are very or somewhat likely to reduce spend on dining.

Grocery shopping, along with streaming service subscriptions and contributing to investments, were the areas of spending least likely to be cut, per the Zagat survey.

Also, restaurant delivery continues to grow.

Sixty-nine percent of consumers ordered delivery pre-COVID-19, growing to 88 percent during a 19 percent increase.

Of those not dining out immediately, 82 percent will continue to order delivery and takeout.

"Our goal with conducting the Future of Dining study was to help understand the COVID-19 related challenges that restaurants face in hopes that the local, state and federal government will identify ways to assist the industry in returning to operation safely and rebuilding itself to best address consumers' needs," Mr. Stang said.

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