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The Greenville News



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PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Restaurants navigating rough COVID-19 waters



Blowup dolls are used to fill seats between booths for social distancing, near Rachel Edwards, left, and Regina Joseph of Greenville, at The Open Hearth restaurant in Taylors on June 18. KEN RUINARD/GREENVILLE NEWS

Should an eatery shut down when a worker tests positive?

Lillia Callum-Penso Greenville News | USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

June 23 should have been Kitchen Sync's reopening day. The Greenville restaurant, known for its locally sourced food as well as its community focus and environmental stewardship, was set to open its doors after closing April 6 due to the coronavirus pandemic. • But, with coronavirus cases increasing at a rapid rate and uncertainty about how to handle potential cases should one occur in their restaurant, the owners decided to wait a little longer. • Now, plans call for reopening later in July.

As businesses have reopened across South Carolina, people have responded by getting out, dining, shopping and seeking some measure of "normal life." But, the state has seen an uptick in the number of coronavirus cases, and Greenville has for weeks had one of the highest rates in the state.

This means businesses are also seeing a spike in cases among employees, and for restaurants this poses an added issue — the very nature of the business is counter to what experts suggest. Gathering and lingering and savoring are all part of dining out.

The virus is still so new that no real data exist on how to handle cases within the work-

place, industry experts say. South Carolina DHEC offers guidelines for the state's restaurants, but owners say even those are open to wide interpretation and don't account for problems like delays in receiving test results.

Restaurants that have already seen COVID-19 cases among employees are devising plans for how to navigate a scenario that many see as inevitable.

Among restaurant operators in South Carolina, more than 50% said they could not survive having to close for a second wave of COVID-19, according to research from Dr. Michael Brizek,

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"It's just guidelines, and some states are more aggressive than others. Who's right or wrong? It's still early to say, but who's caught in the middle? The small business restaurateur."

Dr. Michael Brizek
 Interim dean and associate professor in the College of Business at Lander University



Emerson Libbrecht exercises with others at Caine Halter Family YMCA May 28. JOSH MORGAN/GREENVILLE NEWS

Pandemic hurting child care industry

Half of SC families live in a child care desert

Ariel Gilreath Greenville News
 USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

The economic fallout from the coronavirus may cause many child care centers to close permanently.

But, this is not surprising to those in the industry.

"It was always a weak industry, and it was very vulnerable," said Jamie Moon, president of the Institute for Child Success, a Greenville-based policy and research organization. "The pandemic has only served to highlight that vulnerability, and it's really a shame because it's such a critical part of having a robust economy."

Affordable child care is paramount to a successful workforce and a recovering economy, Moon said, particularly for essential workers who are unable to work from home.

Some studies have shown that high quality, early child care programs also have long-term benefits for children.

A study from the University of Minnesota followed 1,500 children in Chicago for more than 25 years. Researchers found children in early childhood

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Parade Magazine published a combined edition on June 28. See next Sunday's paper for your next Parade Magazine.

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Restaurants

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interim dean and associate professor in the College of Business at Lander University, and Dr. Robert Frash, associate professor in the School of Business at the College of Charleston.

Now, restaurants are closing when employees test positive for COVID-19. But should they, and can they continue to do so as cases rise remains in question.

“We’re in the world of the unknown,” Brizek said, noting that restaurant operators’ responses got decidedly less optimistic as the study went on. “If there was an outbreak of something that has been around for years, we would have a protocol because it’s written in the books, but what do you do for COVID-19? Those books haven’t been established yet.

“It’s just guidelines, and some states are more aggressive than others,” Brizek said. “Who’s right or wrong? It’s still early to say, but who’s caught in the middle? The small business restaurateur.”

DHEC guidelines unclear

If he’d known a month ago what he knows now, Josh Beeby may never have reopened the dining rooms in his three restaurants. At least, not as soon.

When he reopened in May, cases of COVID-19 were going down, Beeby said, and it felt more manageable.

But not now.

Though Beeby reopened with strict safety protocols at all of his three restaurants, on June 15, an employee at Barley’s tested positive for COVID-19.

“We are doing our due diligence to stay on top of this thing, and it beat us,” Beeby said a few days after announcing

the temporary closure of Barley’s. “That was the most gut-wrenching thing is you’re watching all these other businesses going about business and we’ve done so much and for it to get us is very much a punch in the guts.”

Barley’s reopened after seven days, but, Beeby implored, “what happens if another employee tests positive?”

Current DHEC guidelines do not require a restaurant to close in the case that one employee tests positive for COVID-19, said Laura Renwick, spokesperson for SCDHEC.

The current recommendation is to clean and disinfect a restaurant where an employee tests positive.

“While the restaurant wouldn’t be required to shut down or close to perform the cleaning,” Renwick said, “many voluntarily do so temporarily.”

Also, Renwick said, “having a food worker test positive does not mean everyone in the facility was at risk for coming into contact with the virus.”

Each situation can be different, Renwick said via email, explaining why a set protocol doesn’t exist.

DHEC is available to help restaurant owners and workers with specific questions, Renwick said.

DHEC’s Food Safety Program and epidemiologists are finalizing a more streamlined set of guidelines for restaurants if and when an employee tests positive for COVID-19, Renwick said.

Part of the challenge is that rules and regulations are based on testing and data, and currently, “we just don’t have enough of that about coronavirus” to offer clear mandates for businesses like restaurants, said Ben Chapman a professor and food safety extension specialist with North Carolina State University.

Chapman pointed to the FDA Food Code, the federal standard guiding food safety in the country that states use to create food safety laws. The Food Code

is based on extensive research.

“We know if we do these things we have a measurable risk we can reduce,” Chapman said of the food safety regulations. “Our big challenge right now is we don’t have that data. Many of us can’t get to our laboratories, so generating data to create mandates is problematic.”

So, while there is preliminary data to support wearing masks to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, there is not enough other data to establish clear rules for exactly how a restaurant should handle a COVID-19 case.

In South Carolina, the only true mandate for restaurants is a limited capacity of 50%.

Gov. Henry McMaster announced Palmetto Priority, a new restaurant safety initiative last month, but stopped short of mandating the safety suggestions, instead imploring operators to participate by appealing to the economic benefits.

“Don’t go in if you don’t see that seal,” McMaster said during a news conference presenting Palmetto Priority, urging consumers to support those restaurants that commit to safety protocols.

Mask debate

Mayor Knox White took matters of masks into the city’s own hands when he led the passage of a mask ordinance requiring people to wear a face covering when in public spaces like grocery stores and pharmacies and requiring employees of barber shops, salons and restaurants and bars to wear a covering when having direct interaction with other people. Other cities have followed suit — Columbia, Charleston, Clemson and Spartanburg.

Prior to its passage, many restaurants did not require masks of their employees. Initially, Urban Wren did not, because customers said they preferred no masks, said Nick Lincoln, the restaur-

ant’s executive director.

Same at Jianna, where owner Michael Kramer said the staff was diligent about sanitizing and distancing. Requiring masks was to tread into a political debate, so he made them available but did not require them.

That policy changed after an employee tested positive for COVID-19, Kramer said.

Thus far, the ordinance has been met with mixed feelings, but among restaurant owners, there is appreciation for clarity.

“That’s not a big deal to us, we were already wearing them,” said Jeremy Krauze, marketing manager and a bartender at Reys, a popular bar downtown. “If it makes someone else feel comfortable, we have no problem wearing masks.”

Reys is currently closed, a result of the rising number of coronavirus cases in Greenville.

After closing, management discovered one employee had tested positive for the coronavirus.

Now, owners are in talks about what reopening might look like.

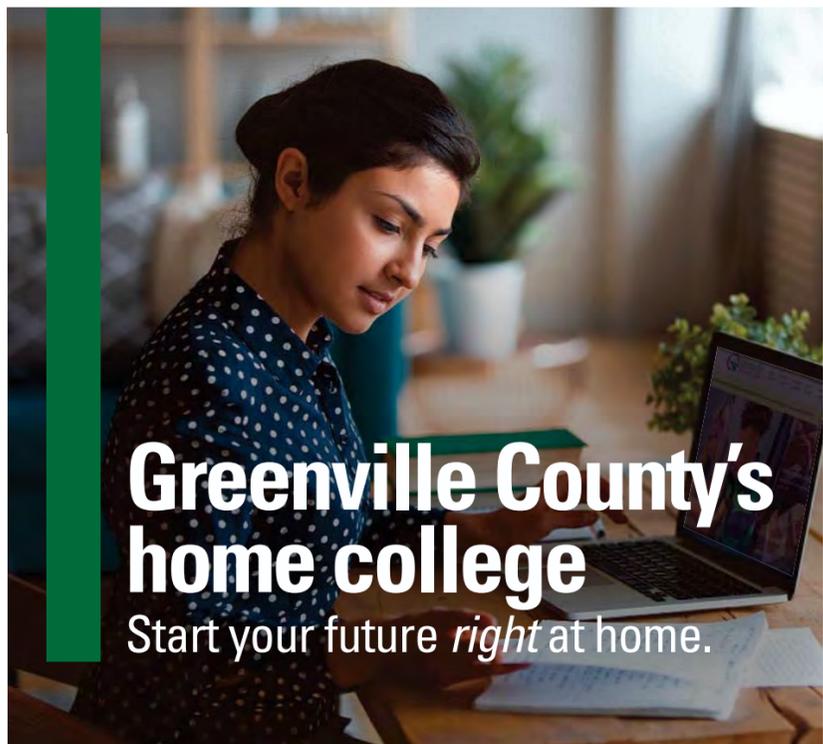
They are considering taking temperatures of patrons at the door when they check IDs.

“It’s a weird time we’re living in, and it’s constantly changing,” Krauze said. “Trying to adapt to that is a challenge for any business.”

Do restaurants need to close if an employee tests positive?

The answer is not clear, Chapman said. Best practices depend on level of interaction that person had with others, if safety measures were in place like wearing masks and hand washing and sanitizing, and if social distancing was followed.

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Postal information

The Greenville News, USPS #229-300, is published Monday through Sunday at 32 E. Broad St., Greenville, SC 29602-4100. Periodicals postage paid at Greenville, SC 29602-4100.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Customer Service, PO Box 62670, San Angelo, TX 76906.

Restaurants

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The CDC recommends a business inform anyone who might have been in contact with an infected person, which can mean being less than six feet from someone for 10 minutes or longer, and disinfect any area or surface the person may have been in contact with.

Testing is also encouraged.

But Beeby said his employees encountered issues with testing because they didn't display symptoms, and for those that were able to get tested, the timeline on getting results varied by several days.

So while his restaurant by DHEC standards was perfectly fine to reopen 24 hours after closing, Beeby ended up waiting another five days because of testing delays.

What happens if an employee tests positive?

"It's not sustainable," Beeby said. "We are operating at 30% revenue right now, so essentially, we're opening up to lose money and risk all this stuff. I don't know what to do with that."

The structure of restaurants, which are based on volume, means shutting down is particularly devastating. In post-survey interviews Brizek conducted with South Carolina restaurant owners, he found a palpable fear about whether they could survive another wave-induced shutdown.

Over half said they couldn't survive shutting down again.

Therein lies the challenge with COVID-induced closings now.

"Restaurants are reliant on high sales volumes in order to offset controllable and fixed costs," Brizek said. "So, operating at 50% capacity, your costs remain constant but your revenue isn't offsetting that."

Restaurants will look different, maybe forever:

Kevin Feeny at kitchen Sync remains hopeful about the future, but he is also trying to wrap his mind around what that future may look like.

For his business, one that has been charmingly low tech and interpersonal focused, it means investing in new technology.

"Curbside service, online ordering, online reservations, online waitlist and online ordering for curbside, QR codes and touchless payment," Feeny said listing the new technology he is implementing. "It is literally going to be a whole different operation. The key for us is going to be to assimilate it into as close a guest experience as we were able to provide before and still stay a warm, caring, welcoming neighborhood joint."

Finding balance

When an employee at Urban Wren tested positive for COVID-19, owners there closed and sent their employees to get tested. It took seven days for all 32 to find a testing site, get the test and get results.

The refined restaurant and wine bar reopened June 24.



Blowup dolls are used to fill seats between booths for social distancing near Alesia Ruby, left, and Orlando Marroquin at The Open Hearth restaurant in Taylors on June 18. KEN RUINARD/GREENVILLE NEWS

A day after they closed, management was refocusing efforts on how to balance necessary increased safety measures (they had already implemented masks before closing) while maintaining the guest experience, especially when experience is a defining trait of their restaurant.

"We are learning a new way to interact, a new way to conduct business and trying to keep it feeling normal," said Nick Lincoln, executive director for the restaurant.

Similarly, at Jianna, Kramer is navigating mixed customer sentiment. The dining room, he said, "is a wasteland of space," reservations are now needed for the bar, and tables that once held patrons are now makeshift sanitizing and glove stations.

The ambiance is a little different now.

"You try to be as normal as you can, but the reality is it's not the same as it was," Kramer said, reflecting on the current state of his industry.

"I think some people want to get out and have a normal dinner and escape some of the other stuff that is going on. Ultimately, we are trying to give them that as best we can, but the bottom line is everything is different now."

Some restaurants are embracing that difference. At The Open Hearth, that has looked like having fun and even promoting what is by all accounts a pretty creative social distancing effort.

The restaurant, which was opened by current owner Jimmy Melehes' father in 1959 is using blowup dolls to keep diners safely spaced.

The dolls have received so much attention that Melehes said he has had to turn people away on weekends. The dolls, which were Melehes' wife Paula

Starr's idea, have also helped distract from other changes like masks on all employees and temperature checks for both staff and customers at the door.

"A lot of our customers are regular but have seen new faces because of this doll thing," Melehes said. "It's all about marketing. We've only had one negative comment."

Most evenings you will find diners taking pictures with the dolls, whose wardrobe changes according to holidays and occasions.

As Feeny contemplates the reopening of Kitchen Sync, he is considering all the elements involved with keeping staff and customers safe. He is also considering how to manage public expectation and public perception as he navigates COVID-19.

Before he decided to delay opening, Feeny had all staff members tested for COVID-19 preemptively, before everyone met for training. Two of the 32 had a positive result.

Feeny has read a lot, talked to a lot of colleagues in the industry and studied health and safety information provided but to no definitive answer.

So, he is taking his time, planning and anticipating what he can.

It's going to require more collaboration between leadership and business owners, employees and also with guests.

"To maintain the viability of our businesses there is going to have to be an understanding from the public and employees that we're not closing every time something like this happens," Feeny said. "But necessity is the mother of invention. We can't shut down the economy but equally, we can't brazenly push forth without being respectful and careful."

Peripheral Neuropathy WARNING!

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Figure 1: Are you taking endless drugs for your feet/legs or hands/arms that does not seem to work?

These drugs may cause you to feel uncomfortable and have a variety of harmful side effects.

Peripheral neuropathy is a result of damage to the nerves often causing weakness, pain, numbness, tingling, burning, and the most debilitating balance problems. This damage is commonly caused by an injury and/or systemic inflammation as in conditions like diabetes or chemotherapy.

When human tissue is damaged it causes the release of bradykinins and prostaglandins (pro-inflammatory chemicals). These chemicals in turn activate channels on the nerves called TrpV1 (transient receptor potential V1) cation channels also called the



Figure 2: Swelling often occurs with nerve damage. As long as you have not had at least 85% nerve damage then our treatments may help.

capsaicin receptors. Once these TrpV1 channels are turned on, it causes the nerves to open up cell membrane channels to release chemicals (substance P and CGRP) that cause inflammation. This inflammation causes the blood vessels to leak (swelling), hypersensitivity (numbness and/or tingling), and painful sensations (sharp, shooting, stabbing, and burning-like pain).

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- NOTE: Once you have 85% nerve loss, there is likely nothing we can do for you.
- 3) How much treatment will your condition require?



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