

# COVID-19 and Reusables

A guide for hospitality businesses to navigate new regulations and recommendations concerning single use plastics in the context of COVID-19 in Greece.

# What's inside this guide

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. Priority safety measures: what are our strongest defences? .....    | 04 |
| 2. COVID-19 transmission and plastic .....                             | 04 |
| 3. What about masks and gloves? .....                                  | 05 |
| 4. What are the new requirements for hospitality businesses? .....     | 06 |
| 5. What are the best ways to keep using and accepting reusables? ..... | 08 |
| 6. Further waste reduction .....                                       | 10 |

## SUMMARY

The food and tourist industry are at the forefront of interaction with the public. Despite the apparent increase of disposable items, many establishments – supported by research and common sense – are continuing to **reduce waste and prioritize reusables**.

Protection from the novel coronavirus does not need to mean more throwaway plastic littering our world. Indeed, **the use of disposable materials is not associated with greater protection from infection**. It is pertinent to remember that *“Public health must include maintaining the cleanliness of our home, the Earth”*.<sup>(1)</sup>

Here we consider the priority safety measures, mask and glove use, and guidelines for supporting reusables; namely cups, bags, straws and bottled water, as these are amongst the plastic items most commonly found on our beaches. This information was drawn from Greek regulatory documents for tourist businesses, and the leading international scientific sources for COVID-19, plastics and reusables.

While every effort's been made to ensure this guide's accuracy, it isn't legal advice tailored to your individual circumstances. If you act on it, you acknowledge that you do so at your own risk. We can't assume responsibility or accept liability for damage or loss as a result of your reliance on it.

## 1. PRIORITY SAFETY MEASURES: WHAT ARE OUR STRONGEST DEFENCES?

A good way to get started is by keeping in mind these **essential and simple measures** for protecting public health. In all contexts, especially in the food and service industry, these preventative measures are drawn from the consensus of leading national and international health organizations.

### HAND WASHING AND DISINFECTANTS

**Wash hands** frequently and thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap to neutralize the virus and prevent it from spreading. **(2)**

### SAFE DISTANCES

**Keep at least one meter** from everybody as the virus is primarily transferred through airborne particles. **(3)**

### RESPIRATORY HYGIENE

Cough or sneeze **into your elbow not your hands**. **(3)**

### MATERIAL CLEANLINESS

Especially in the context of hospitality businesses where surfaces may be contacted by many people: **Wash and disinfect surfaces** that are frequently contacted specifically following use after each guest. Keep containers and equipment clean using hot water and soap. **(2,4)**

## 2. COVID-19 TRANSMISSION AND PLASTIC

The COVID-19 virus is primarily transmitted through **respiratory droplets**. Contact transfer is rarer, but still possible. **(5,6)**

**The novel coronavirus lives on plastic surfaces for up to 72 hours** – and is likely to live longer than this. The virus is considered to have a longer ‘staying power’ on plastic than on any other materials tested. **(7)**

Increasing the use of disposable packaging increases the volume of material we encounter. Also, the contact that this material has had along the production line is unknown for hospitality. **(8)**

**Summary:** Single use plastic items are not in themselves a safer option against potential diseases. **Proper hygiene rules must be applied** in any case and washing our reusable items thoroughly should suffice. **(9)**



## 3. WHAT ABOUT MASKS AND GLOVES?

These items have become **widely used** in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, informed by extensive research on their relative effectiveness, we can do our best to **reduce our waste** while protecting ourselves.

### MASKS

**Reusable masks** are an important safety measure; they reduce the spread of the tiny respiratory droplets we emit when we breathe, talk, laugh and so on – on which the virus can hitch a ride. **Fabric masks** are considered to perform most of the tasks of a disposable surgical mask without the associated waste. Proper mask use is important for their effectiveness, along with regular washing and ironing. Correct mask use includes washing hands before applying and removing the mask, touching only the straps, and fitting it properly over nose, mouth and chin without gaps. For more detailed instructions, refer to the relevant WHO guidelines linked at the end of this document. **(10,11)**

### GLOVES

**Handwashing is a greater protective barrier** to infection than wearing disposable gloves. The table below outlines Greek Government guidelines as to when gloves should be worn (current 1st July). Proper hand hygiene must be practiced, **washing hands** before and after each pair of gloves is worn. Gloves should be changed after contact with items of high contamination risk (phone, doorknobs, clothes). **(12)**

## 4. UNDERSTANDING REQUIREMENTS FOR HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES CONCERNING MASKS, GLOVES AND DISPOSABLES

All these changing regulations can be confusing! Here are the main requirements extracted from the official Greek guidelines as of 1st of July (please see reference below for updated guidance).

|                        |                    |   |
|------------------------|--------------------|---|
| CAFES<br>(13,14)       | <b>Mask</b>        | Mandatory for servers   |
|                        | <b>Gloves</b>      | Mandatory <b>only</b> for placing and (a different pair) for removing tablecloths and dishes.   |
|                        | <b>Disposables</b> | Disposable menus or menus of a form that can be disinfected.<br><b>Individually wrapped straws:</b><br>No reference found.<br><b>Pre-packaged bar snacks:</b><br>No reference found.  |
| RESTAURANTS<br>(13,15) | <b>Mask</b>        | Mandatory for servers, cleaning crew  |
|                        | <b>Gloves</b>      | Mandatory only for placing and (a different pair) for removing tablecloths and dishes.<br>And for washers handling clean dishes   |
|                        | <b>Disposables</b> | Disposable menus or menus of a form that can be disinfected.<br>Disposable tablecloths, fabric must be used with strict cleaning protocols and changing between each customer.<br>Individually wrapped straws:<br>No reference found.<br>Individual packets of salt, pepper, sugar. |

|                      |                    |   |
|----------------------|--------------------|---|
| DELIVERY<br>(14)     | <b>Mask</b>        | Mandatory   |
|                      | <b>Gloves</b>      | Mandatory   |
| BEACH BARS<br>(16)   | <b>Mask</b>        | Strong mask recommendation for employees  |
|                      | <b>Gloves</b>      | No reference found  |
|                      | <b>Disposables</b> | Products will be sold only as takeaway and must be prepackaged<br><b>Individually wrapped straws:</b><br>No reference found   |
|                      | <b>Mask</b>        | Only when displaying symptoms or when in contact with someone who is infected, not recommended under general working conditions.<br>Mandatory for cleaning crew (preferable surgical mask), and room service. |
| HOTELS<br>(17,18,19) | <b>Gloves</b>      | Mandatory for cleaning crew and room service  |
|                      | <b>General</b>     | The establishment is obliged to offer protective gear to all staff.   |
|                      | <b>Reception</b>   | Staff must be able to provide personal protective equipment (masks, gloves) when requested.   |
|                      | <b>Disposables</b> | No reference found  |

## 5. WHAT ARE THE BEST WAYS TO USE AND ACCEPT REUSABLES?

For straws, cups, bags, bottles and other relevant items:

**Reusables are still the preferred and sustainable** option when proper hygiene precautions are taken. Essentially, all items should be thoroughly cleaned before use with soap and hot water, and contact should be minimized in all interactions. (20)

Evidence is mounting that increasing the use of throwaway plastics is unwarranted. This is backed by **119 scientists from 18 countries, who together released a signed statement that reusable containers are safe to use during the Covid-19 pandemic.** (21)



### WATER BOTTLES

- To **refill** your customers' water bottles, you can give them a cup of water and let them fill their own bottle.
- In establishments where bottles are provided, such as hotels and restaurants, **glass bottles must be thoroughly washed in a dishwasher between uses.** Then used bottles can be exchanged for clean filled ones. (24)



### BAGS

- Have a sign asking customers to **make sure their reusable bags are washed.**
- Allow customers to **bag their own produce** and items at the checkout counter.



### MENUS

- **Have the menu online** and direct customers there, a strategically placed **QR code** can also link to the menu page.
- Have a **large visible menu** board.
- If you already have printed and laminated menus, they can be cleaned with disinfectant and cloth.



### DELIVERY

- The same solution as for the take-away can work perfectly with a **deposit return scheme.**
- Customers can also deposit their own containers if they pass by or they can give a clean one for the next time when their food or coffee is delivered, if they do this regularly.

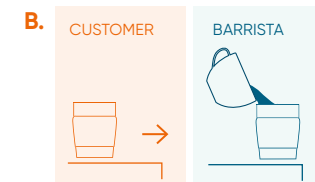


### CUPS

You can have a **contactless transaction** with your customers when they bring their own cup by:



Giving them a coffee 'to stay' and they pour the coffee into their **own clean container** themselves. **See how**, in [this](#) cool video from "Responsible Cafes". (22)



Place their **clean reusable cup** on the counter, let the barista pour the drink in without touching it. Apply the lid themselves. **See how**, by clicking [here](#). (23)

Of course, where is it safe to do so customers could have their **coffee to stay** and enjoy a nice break!

#### As a business you can:

- **Sell reusable cups** and encourage your customers to bring their own by giving a discount when they do. Even better, frame this difference in price as a "charge" on disposable plastic cups.
- You can also **provide clean reusable cups** with a deposit that will be given back when returned.



### STRAWS

**Businesses commonly ask** us whether straws should be individually wrapped according to Covid-19 guidelines. However, no regulatory indications have been identified for this.

#### Here is what you can do about straws:

- Sell **reusable straws** and encourage your customers to bring their own if they desire.
- This may be a **good time reduce unnecessary contamination and pollution** and stop serving straw all together.
- If you still offer straws, paper or wheat straws can be your best options. Offer them **only for frappe** or other drinks that are not easy to sip directly.



### TAKE AWAY

- Encourage customers to **bring their own clean containers.**
- You can also sell cool **reusable lunch boxes** and offer a discount for their first meal.
- Alternatively, a good solution can be to provide a clean reusable container **with a deposit** that will be given back when returned.



### What you can do as a business to encourage low waste preferences:

Inform your customers that you are happy to accommodate reusables that are thoroughly washed, in order to reduce waste. Place a sign in your establishment to say you are a Clean Blue business encouraging reusable items. Communicate through social media, and verbally invite customers to reuse. Consult our representatives for guidance in incorporating different reusable items into your business including cups, straws, etc.

Discuss with your staff about your efforts to **reduce waste** so that they can talk to customers about it too.



## 6. FURTHER WASTE REDUCTION

### DISINFECTANT CONTAINERS

Guidelines call for disinfectant dispensers to be placed liberally around establishments, in areas of high footfall, such as on both sides of reception desks and checkout counters.

The push top disinfectants are **not recycled** and create a lot of waste. But there are **refill solutions available**, such as through BIOTEV as described below.

In Paros many stores are supporting the local circular economy bio-enterprise 'Biotev' with its patented disinfectant formulated from reused olive press biomass.

The disinfectant comes in various sizes and dispenser types. Plastic containers can be returned to receive a 25c reimbursement. You can also refill your empty, clean, pre-used container in store.

They also make many other cleaning products.

[Visit their store, or contact them to find out more \(25\):](#)  
**6930431825**

### TABLECLOTHS

If you have to use table cloths consider fabric, or disposable but compostable paper with no plastic lining.

### GLOVES

In situations where gloves are mandatory, and you really cannot avoid them, keep in mind that they cannot be recycled and should go in the grey bin, not the blue.

The same goes for biodegradable gloves, as they need specific conditions to biodegrade that are not met in nature. This would require a proper industrial composting facility which is not available on the island. They can be harmful to wildlife both at land and in the sea.

### MASKS

If you use a non-reusable mask that contains synthetic fibres, make sure to dispose of it properly. The complexity of the material makes recycling problematic and therefore it should be disposed of in the grey bin.

# Join Clean Blue Paros

If your business is not already a member of Clean Blue Paros we would love you to sign up. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or if you want to become a Clean Blue Paros business and join us in our efforts to reduce plastic pollution. We will be happy to meet and support you with detailed solutions. We wish you all the best for this season.

## CONTACT US

By phone: **6987744250**

On messenger: <https://www.facebook.com/cleanblueparos>

Or by email: [cleanblueparos@commonseas.com](mailto:cleanblueparos@commonseas.com)







Printed on 100% recycled paper.

Please reuse then recycle.

Photography: Unsplash

Thank you