



April 14, 2020

The Honorable Tim Walz, Governor
State of Minnesota
130 State Capitol
75 Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: COVID-19/Coronavirus Mitigation--Hospitality Industry Best Practices

Dear Governor Walz:

As the state contemplates the prudence and timing of fully or partially opening businesses, we write regarding best practices in the hospitality industry to mitigate COVID-19. We submit this with the strongest assurance that our owner/operators are committed to the health and safety of their guests; it is the lifeblood for these businesses. At the same time, we cannot state plainly enough the urgency for resuming economic activity. We know from recent data collection that over half of these small businesses across Minnesota are at a great risk of closing permanently within one to three months. Given the challenges many are having accessing the capital opened through the FFCRA and CARES Act, that possibility is becoming more real by the day.

In normal conditions most hospitality businesses are almost entirely dependent upon human interactions, social gatherings and/or the transportation of workers and guests. With the extremely limited exceptions—providing food to-go, limited lodging/shelter services to long-term guests or essential workers still allowed to travel—hotels, resorts, campgrounds, and restaurants are effectively shut-down throughout Minnesota. Working from home is not an option. Seasonal businesses that would normally be ramping up for increased business on or around May 1 are instead facing uncertainty and unanswered questions about the viability of their season, which generally only lasts through September. They are faced with making difficult business decisions, but don't know when or to what degree they will be able to carry out their normal operations.

We understand drastic steps have been required to slow the spread of COVID-19 in Minnesota. We understand that data must drive public health decisions. As Minnesota explores relaxing some of the current limitations, our industry stands ready to do everything in our power to maximize safety and protect the public health through enhanced cleaning and sanitation practices and promotion of effective social distancing.

Hospitality business are highly regulated. Even in normal times they are held to very high standards of practice in cleanliness, sanitation and disease prevention. Even prior to Executive Order 20-04, hospitality businesses had begun to go even further to implement heightened cleaning and sanitation protocols and increased social distancing practices.

They are committed taking every precaution in order to safeguard their guests – and so their businesses. At the same time, they are acutely aware of their responsibility to the communities in which they operate and to which they contribute economic activity.

Our members already follow best practices from the Centers for Disease Control, the National Restaurant Association the American Hotel and Lodging Association and the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds. As an association, Hospitality Minnesota is providing daily updates to our members from these entities to provide hospitality businesses with critical information.

The leading guidance comes from the CDC, which includes the following information on its website regarding food safety and surface transmission [emphasis added]:

“Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person to person through respiratory droplets. **Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food.** Before preparing or eating food it is important to always wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds for general food safety. Throughout the day use a tissue to cover your coughing or sneezing, and wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing, or going to the bathroom.

It may be **possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object**, like a packaging container, that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, **but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.**

In general, because of **poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread** from food products or packaging.”

Local and national organizations serving the industry, including Hospitality Minnesota, have been providing frequent guidance through their dedicated web pages, daily updates and webinars. A selection of some of those resources can be found on the attached document.

In addition, members within our network are sharing best practices with each other. Many of these practices were already being implemented prior to executive order 20-04. Best practices are focused on enhanced cleaning and sanitation and promoting social distancing. These are the types of practices operators are using now and will continue to use to maximize public health when the current restrictions in Minnesota are relaxed or lifted. Some examples of best practices shared by our members can be found in the attached document.

This is by no means an exhaustive list and is provided only as an example of some of the practices hospitality businesses are deploying to provide heightened protection to both guests and staff in restaurant and lodging settings. As noted, our industry continues to place guest safety as a priority and wants to provide the best experience possible for customers no matter the circumstances.

We would be happy to discuss best practices further with you in more detail, including providing the perspective of individual operators and allied members that specialize in health safety practices. Please let us know how we may serve as a resource to you as you discern how best to strike the correct balance that both protects the public health, but still fosters hospitality commerce, provides jobs and promotes our Minnesota way of life.

Sincerely,



Liz Rammer, President & CEO

Enclosure: HM COVID-19 Best Practices

cc: Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka
House Speaker Melissa Hortman
Senate Minority Leader Susan Kent
House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt
Commissioner Steve Grove, Department of Employment and Economic Development
Commissioner Jan Malcolm, Department of Health