

BACK TO BUSINESS IOWA PODCAST

A partnership of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and America's SBDC Iowa

SEASON 1 | EPISODE 16: Restaurant Reopening Guidance

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Description: *This timely webinar discusses the reopening guidance for Iowa restaurants in May 2020. Jessica Dunker, President and CEO of the Iowa Restaurant Association, offers a presentation that discusses the directives and recommendations when reopening a restaurant. Mark Speltz, Bureau Chief, Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals, answers viewer questions and provide additional insight on reopening. Hosted by Lisa Shimkat, state director of American's SBDC Iowa.*



Transcript:

[music]

Steve Adams, host 00:10

Hello, and welcome to the Back to Business Iowa podcast from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This podcast is a collaboration between Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the programs including Community and Economic Development, Farm, Food and Enterprise Development, and the Iowa Small Business Development Centers. These podcasts cover relevant topics for businesses and individuals related to education, research and technical assistance during and post COVID-19.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 00:54

Okay, thank you everyone for coming today. We're very, very excited. First thing I want to do is, please remember if you have questions as we're going through this, put that on the Q&A section so that we can make sure that we get these questions to our great speakers that we have for you today. Very, very timely topic as well. So our first speaker is Jessica Dunker, and she is the president and CEO of the Iowa Restaurant Association. We also have Mark Speltz, who is bureau chief of the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals. And we have a PowerPoint to go through as well. So Jessica, I'm going to go ahead and kick it off directly to you.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 01:36

Hi, good morning, everyone. I'm glad that you could join us today. It's an interesting and exciting time in our industry. From the standpoint of, obviously, we face devastation—that's not as interesting as it is upsetting. I think if you are a restaurateur online, you know that you've likely seen as much as a 90% drop in revenue. You very likely have laid off employees. Potentially you have applied for the PPE, or excuse me, the PPP. Perhaps you've gotten that, are trying to figure out how to do something with that, worried about getting employees back. I know that only 45% of our folks are telling us that they're going to be able to hire all their employees back.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 02:19

And so today we just, first of all, just want you to know, as an association, we're working hard at the state and federal level to try to help you navigate these times and advocate on your behalf. We are always interested in hearing things that can make it work better for you. So starting with that, I just would like to move forward through our guidance for reopening a restaurant in accordance with what is happening with at the state level.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 02:50

So as a reminder, on April 27, our governor, Kim Reynolds, issued a proclamation that allowed the gradual reopening of restaurants in 77 Iowa counties. Those counties were selected by the state of Iowa. And we did, as an association, request that all counties and all establishments, including the restaurants and bars, be opened at the same time. They chose not to do that. And so we were happy to get what we could, when we started looking at what was happening in other states. Bars in all 99 counties were not given the right to reopen or the privilege of reopen. And we can talk about what that definition looks like.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 03:32

The on-premise service restrictions for the 22 counties that were extended through May 15. And if you are in one of those counties, you know what those are, so I won't belabor reading those to you. If you are in one of the 77 counties that is allowed to reopen, a restaurant is defined in that—if you want to, yep, go to the next slide, that would be great. Restaurants in the proclamation can open to serve food and beverages on premises, but only to the extent that complies with a set of restrictions.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 04:09

The first one is capacity limitations: you must be operating at 50% of your normal operating capacity to ensure adequate spacing of groups. That includes your indoor and outdoor capacity. So if you are a restaurant that has a patio, it would be 50% indoors and 50% outdoors. Groups are limited—you must ensure that no group of customers that's seated together is larger than six people. That does mean if a family with six children comes in, Mom's gotta sit with one set of kids and Dad has to sit with another. That is one of the hard and fast rules. Third, that you need to do social distancing and that you must have at least six feet of physical distance between each group or individual dining alone.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 04:57

We will talk a little bit about bar seating later in this presentation. All self-service is prohibited. So the restaurant cannot have a machine where you go and refill your drink yourself. That is one of the things that's prohibited that we've seen a lot of questions about. And then of course, no buffets or salad bars. And then additionally, the restaurant needs to practice more social distancing hygiene and public health measures. And that just needs to be consistent with things that, if you're a restaurant, you're probably already doing because you have your Certified Food Protection manager. But we have some additional suggestions that are available in our presentation.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 05:42

So next, what is the definition of a restaurant. So best way to define a restaurant is a business that's primary purpose is food. But more importantly, it's based on how you prepare food. So if you're assembling and preparing food versus just reheating food, then you can be considered a restaurant. This is not a definition that's unfamiliar to most of you, if you are in the restaurant or bar business, because it is in line with Iowa's Smoke-Free Air Act. So you are defined as a bar if food service is incidental to your alcohol sales. And so food preparation, that's ice or prepackaged snack foods or popcorn or peanuts or reheating pizzas or sandwiches, you're a bar, if you are not creating food in an assembly style format.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 06:42

I want to emphasize though, that if you have that food preparation component, it is not based on revenues. And sometimes I know with DRAM insurance, as an example, your alcohol versus food sales is based on revenues. This is about how you prepare food. Typically an establishment meeting the criteria for bar will not contain food preparation equipment. And then an establishment that prepares food beyond the limited service described in these definitions is considered a restaurant.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 07:15

So, there it's really important, if you are on the cusp of deciding if you're getting ready to reopen, to understand what is a mandate and then what is really considered a best practice, or if you're strongly recommended to do. So let's just start with the mandates mandates. Mandates for reopen, it's limit that indoor and outdoor seating capacity to 50% of normal operating capacity. The good news is, is we're on the cusp of patio season, and so you can reopen at 50% indoor and outdoors. Again, limit that group size to no more than six people—arrange seating to provide that minimum of six feet between tables.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 07:56

Disallow any self-service of food or beverages including buffets or salad bars. And then again, implementing those reasonable measures to ensure social distancing for customers and employees. And so one of the things that people ask is, Okay, are we mandated to wear masks? That is not part of the mandate. Are we mandated to wear gloves if we're not doing food preparation? That is not part of the mandate. These are best practices, of course, but the five things on this list are the mandated things that you must do.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 08:30

So moving on, additional guidance has come from the Department of Inspections and Appeals and Mark is on the line. I will run through these quickly and I imagine he will answer most of the pop-up questions but. So additional guidance that is considered best practices by DIA and supported by the Iowa Restaurant Association with our own reopening guidance is to, to the extent possible, eliminate seating at bars within restaurants. Part of the reason for that is, where do you prepare mixed drinks? Or what are you doing behind the bar yourself? People have asked, Well, if we've got six feet between patrons sitting at the bar, what does it matter? Well, the second part of that is, are you six feet away from them when you're on the other side of the bar?

Jessica Dunker, IRA 09:14

Eliminate entertainment operations or activities—that would include pool, darts, anything that you might be doing inside of an establishment. Serve alcohol to a guest only if the guest is also ordering and consuming food items. This is not the time for restaurants to act like bars. It's not the time for bars to try to be restaurants, if they're not defined as such. But on the flip side, it's also not the time for restaurants to have people coming in and treating their establishment like a bar. Disinfect tables and chairs after each customer, clean and sanitize table condiments. And if you can, we prefer that you use single-use salt and pepper, single-use menus—anything that is commonly touched is a potential for transmission. So it's much better to just not pre-set the table and bring things as people request them.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 10:13

Moving on then, again using pre-wrapped silverware to eliminate those table presets and again with salt and pepper. Eliminate refilling customer beverages from common containers, like a pitcher. Discard single-use or paper articles such as menus after each use. Create and implement enhance sanitizing and cleaning schedule. And again, if you are a restaurant, you already have a Certified Food Protection manager, probably more than one. So I'm working with them to really establish these guidelines for your establishment. Disinfect commonly touched surfaces throughout your facility. And you know, this is things that we do, but we need to do more often, like door handles, like credit card machines. Go into the restrooms and really work hard to be disinfecting there.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 11:02

Next to what extent possible—and you know, not every establishment can do this—but if you can use a reservation system to time your arrivals so that you don't have people congregating in your entry, that is great. You can ask people, has anyone in your party have symptoms or been under quarantine or

been exposed to COVID-19? Post signage on the entrance door that no one with a fever or symptoms will be permitted in the restaurant. And one of the things you'll see later in this presentation is the Iowa Hospitality Promise. And that's a set of principles that restaurants are promising customers. But it's also a set of principles that we're asking customers to promise back to restaurants. So we've provided very positive-worded signage that you are welcome to just use to share this with your prospective customers.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 11:58

Screen all employees before each shift before entering the facility for symptoms, and immediately exclude anyone with symptoms from entering. And again, this is something very familiar to a Certified Food Protection manager. We talk about the big five when we're teaching ServSafe. Well, this is something that we now need to start screening for in addition to that. Where possible, have your workstations staggered so employees aren't standing directly opposite one another. So just taking every step you can to maintain that six feet of social distance for both customers and patrons.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 12:37

Require employees with direct customer contact to wear cloth or another mask that's laundered or replaced daily. And this may be the new normal for a while. Again, this is not a mandate, but it certainly is a best practice recommendation. Frequently monitor employee hand-washing and ensure no bare-hand contact with ready to eat foods. And again, this is something that you all know already if you're in the restaurant business and is a ServSafe mandate. Notify customers by signage to report concerns of social distancing to the manager. Be open to hearing concerns of customers. That's a guest relations as well as a health issue.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 13:16

Use technology solutions where possible to reduce person to person interaction. And that can be in mobile ordering, you can have mobile access to menu plans, text on arrival, receiving contact-less payment. So there's a lot of technology options, obviously, that you can look at there. Enhance employee safety training, emphasizing employee health, hand-washing and personal hygiene. This is the time to take the moment to really focus with your staff, and retrain them on how they're thinking about hygiene as well as sanitation within your establishment.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 13:53

Have hand sanitizer products readily available for employees and customers. That was a tough thing to ask people to do a month ago, but now products have become more available. And if you're struggling to find that, we actually have a resource on the Iowa Restaurant Association site of a number of alcohol companies that, as in alcohol as adult spirits, who are now making and offering hand sanitizer to industry. Designate with signage, tape or other means appropriate social distancing space. So you've all seen it in the stores, the Xs on the floors, if you want to put a walking pattern through your establishment to help people avoid that six feet contact. Same thing in front of your counter. People now recognize why those Xs are there and why they're six feet apart. Again, provide those distinct walking lanes to minimize close contact. Assign an employee each shift to monitor social distancing sanitation and hygiene protocols.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 14:56

So the governor's proclamation also continues temporary suspension. This was kind of a little hidden gem in the last proclamation that some people missed, because we're so focused on getting a at least a portion of our restaurants reopened. But the governor's proclamation did continue the temporary suspension of regulatory provisions requiring a food establishment to renew its license within 60 days of expiration. And so what that actually means is, if your food license has not yet been renewed, you

will not be shut down if you're operating outside the 60 day time period, and the DIA has waived every late fee, from whenever. So there is that little bit of relief as well.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 15:40

So just moving on to a couple of questions that we keep hearing from folks, and so we thought we would just go over. Is the restaurant required to physically remove tables or booths? If you can, great, but if you don't have a place to put them or they're attached to the floor, if just isn't possible, you can instead use signage and just identify a table is not in use for guests. A next frequently asked question is, What if my family group is larger than six members? Can we sit together in a larger group? Unfortunately, the answer to that is no. So I'm a very blessed family with a whole lot of children, or bringing Grandpa and Grandma to dinner, you must maintain that group of six as part of this proclamation.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 16:30

Are my employees or customers required to wear masks? There is no issued mandate for employees or customers to wear face masks, and obviously in our industry where people are eating and drinking, it's pretty difficult to request that your customers wear face masks, because how are they going to eat or drink? We do recommend that servers wear disposable masks, and if you wear cloth masks, that they should be changed as frequently as necessary and laundered and replaced daily. You know, there's some guidance on that, that has been offered by the FDA, and I would encourage everybody to go and look at that. The set of slides that we have here does include a link for that site.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 17:14

Are restaurants allowed to serve customers that are only ordering alcoholic beverages? This one's a little tricky, because the governor's proclamation allows restaurants to resume on-premise dining. So if customers are only ordering alcoholic beverages, they are not dining. So you know, not to mince words, we really want you to act like a restaurant, be a part...if you're in one of the 77 counties and you're allowed to reopen, make it possible for the other 22 counties to open up as well, by showing we can do this responsibly. Don't just serve alcoholic beverages to customers, do it with people who are consuming food. That is the spirit of the proclamation. And actually it's on-premise dining, it is the words in the proclamation. So not the time to act like a bar.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 18:06

Can a restaurant allowed dining customers to remain on premises and order additional beverages, including alcoholic beverages, after the completion of their meal? And you know, as the number one advocate for Iowa's restaurant industry from a legislative perspective, I love entrepreneurial spirit and creativity. And I'm not surprised at people looking for ways to expand the hospitality service they can provide. But we really want to encourage that we do this right, so that we make it possible for the restaurants and bars actually in all 99 counties to be open. And so we're being watched, and want to make sure that we can show that we were the right industry to choose to open first.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 18:50

I'm just reminding people that we were the first industry closed, but we were also the first industry reopened, which is unusual when you think about it from the standpoint of safety and sanitation. But on a logical level, we were the most obvious industry to open, first because we have that history of training ourselves in safety and sanitation, you know, related to food and our operations. So we have the opportunity to really lead the state in this regard. So can a restaurant allow customers to use pool tables, dart boards, arcades, amusement, et cetera? No, the use of these items by the public continues to be prohibited in the governor's proclamation. That actually appears in a different place than in the restaurant language of the proclamation, and so that is why this is one of those mandates.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 19:44

Can a bar or brewery taproom partner with a mobile food unit or restaurant and utilize restaurant delivery options to allow on-premise dining along with alcohol sales? Unfortunately, the answer to this is also no. Bars must remain closed to the public. And again, the definition a bar in this proclamation is based on your own operations and how you prepare food. So, having a second source come in and do food preparation to sell with your alcohol, that is not allowed under this proclamation.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 20:17

What type of disinfectants can be used for tables, chairs and other non food contact surfaces, allowing customer use? And there is a whole list of those available, we've put that link both on the DIA site and on the Iowa Restaurant Association site. We've been telling folks that if it kills norovirus, it kills COVID-19. But if you have any questions about that, I would be working with your purveyors to find a list of products. But you can also check the list of products on the EPA site. So questions are updated daily by the Department of Inspections and Appeals, I would highly recommend that you bookmark that on your own computer. That's DIA.iowa.gov. And look for the restaurant reopening, they actually updated that as recently as May 1. And as questions commonly come in, they are being answered.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 21:17

So just one quick thing to go through and then I know we need to get to question and answers. But in partnership with health officials across the state, we as the Iowa Restaurant Association, have launched a program called the Iowa Hospitality Promise. And while restaurants and bars have done nothing to lose the trust of the public, we still have to rebuild confidence in the public. And so this is a promise that we're asking restaurants and bars to take as they reopen, to help protect employees and customers and to show our leadership role in protecting our community.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 21:52

So if you want to move on to the next slide, so who can participate? Any restaurant, food service or drinking establishment who's willing to take the mandated steps, as well as deploy some of our best practice guidelines if they're feasible in your establishment. So next slide, please, would be, how long will it last? This is going to be through the duration of the COVID-19 recovery efforts. Over time, I think folks will regain their confidence. And again, we haven't done anything to lose trust. But we still are in a position where we have to help people regain confidence.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 22:30

So what is the promise? Our promise to customers is that we'll continue to be a leader with Certified Food Protection managers, we'll make sure staff isn't sick, that we will make sure we're using indoor and outdoor seating options with social distancing, that we make hand sanitizer available to folks, that we'll clean and sanitize common areas. Tables and chairs will be cleaned and sanitized, that everything will be either single-use or sanitized after use, like utensils, menus, et cetera. And that we will post our promise at our entrance. But the more important thing, I think, is the next thing, which is what we ask of patrons in return.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 23:11

This is not a one-way promise. We have to have the public step up and care about the safety and well being of our employees as well. So what we're asking in return is that, if somebody has recently been exposed to COVID-19, or has any symptoms, that they not come into the restaurant. We have lots of takeout and delivery options available. We are happy to do contactless delivery. If you have an underlying health condition, if you're in one of those high-risk populations, if you're vulnerable—please again, let us offer you hospitality through our delivery options.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 23:48

If you have questions about that promise, when you come in, ask a manager and they would be happy to assist you. So a couple of things that we have for ... well, first of all, why are customers included in the promise? Because this is everybody's responsibility, not exclusively the responsibility of business owners. And business owners have bore a huge financial brunt of this, but the recovery activities have to be shared by the public and business owners. So a couple of things that we make available to people on (if you want to go to the next slide), we have downloadable posters that are available on the Iowa Restaurant Association site. You can customize those to your business if you'd like to, or we can help you with that. That is what your promise is to them, but in exchange, the promise that you are asking customers to make.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 24:38

There's posters, there's signage, there's things that you can put on your tables if you can't move them, to explain why they aren't going to be able to be used. All of that is available at restaurantiowa.com. So what can hospitality establishments do to help customers meet those obligations? Again, publicize what you're asking people to do, do it in a positive way, share it at the door, and always emphasize that contactless delivery is still available.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 25:13

A couple of quick training things. So if you already are familiar with ServSafe, and the Certified Food Protection manager, you probably are aware that there is a two hour short course available, called Food Handler. That had been offered free through April 30, but that now has been extended to the end of May. So through the end of this month, the National Restaurant Association is offering the Food Handler program, which I'd encourage you to have every single employee take. And they can do that for free on the National Restaurant Association website. And just like Certified Food Protection manager, that comes with the certificate. You can't have just Food Handlers. You do have to still have your Certified Food Protection manager. But this is an easy way to get your employees trained on safety and sanitation. They also have some takeout and delivery training that's available for free till the end of the month.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 26:16

And then (I think if we can move to the next slide, okay). All right, some best practices restaurants can take. that are not specifically required to follow, are also in the hospitality promise, you'll find all that documentation up on the Iowa Restaurant Association site. And we do have a list of checklists that you can use in your establishment, ideas on what you can do to create strategies that increase safety and sanitation in both the front of the house and back of the house with your places.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 26:53

All right. Um, I might jump in. We are getting some questions coming in, and if it's okay with you, guys, why don't we go ahead and start hitting some of those?

Jessica Dunker, IRA 27:02

Sounds great.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 27:03

Okay, so the first one, how do establishments like Subway that you fill your own drinks in the dining room, how do you do that? Or do you just do, you know, single-serve bottle sales, then. How do you handle that?

Mark Speltz, DIA 27:20

Yeah, I think there are actually a couple of strategies that folks can use. So, in many cases, restaurants I know, as mentioned, Subway may not, but others have customer beverage stations in both kind of the

kitchen area and in the customer area. So for those that have it in both places, they may just want to close the customer one. Other things, like you had mentioned, if they only have that beverage dispensing system in the customer area, a couple of things. One is to only go to bottled and canned, I mean, I think that's one one strategy. But another strategy could be that you could station an employee at that beverage station to fill customer beverages, like you would if it were behind the counter. So I think everybody is going to maybe approach things a little bit different, but I think there are multiple strategies that folks can use.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 28:14

Great. Regarding admittance of customers and workers, if a person has recovered from COVID-19, what's the protocol for having them come back to work or having them come in the restaurant?

Mark Speltz, DIA 28:27

So I would encourage the business to look on the IDPH—Iowa Department of Public Health's—website, but so there are some, once they have fully recovered, or maybe they had symptoms and weren't even diagnosed, there's a there's a timeframe in which you would want to continue to exclude them until they're recovered. But once they have recovered and they're symptom-free, there really isn't an additional restriction on that employee or customer, for that matter. Certainly, it's something that, as we're bringing folks on or bringing customers in, and also bringing employees in, we want to have that daily conversation, though, about symptoms, and if possible, you know, take temperatures of employees as they arrive.

Mark Speltz, DIA 29:12

That's a strategy that I think, across the nation some folks are doing, whether it's a restaurant or whether it's a food manufacturing facility, or whether it's a retail operation that continues to open, is really, really focusing in on those symptoms. And it is something that the restaurants are used to doing. They're used to having those conversations with their staff. We don't want you here if you are sick. And this just kind of extends that to maybe a few more symptoms than we're normally used to. But it shouldn't be something that's too out of the ordinary for restaurants.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 29:45

You know, and Jessica, you had mentioned this too, I mean, this is a good way for, as we're doing some reopening for businesses, for restaurants to lead the way. Because you have had a lot of these regulations in the past when it comes to reopening. And we are having a lot of our manufacturers as well as our retailers also reference a lot of those opening guidelines.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 30:06

Yeah, yeah. And you know, one of the things that was a great frustration for our industry is, we have always received food from purveyors directly into sanitized kitchens and then prepared by Certified Food Protection managers. And we've been screaming that from the rooftops ever since March 17. And so, we are pleased that we are actually the industry that they're choosing to let open first, because of our reputation for safety and sanitation. So we're taking it extremely seriously.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 30:39

Absolutely. The next question. Has anyone offered to purchase or bring your own silverware?

Mark Speltz, DIA 30:50

I have not had that question come into come into our department. So that's a new one to me. But I guess that essentially would be something that the restaurant could allow, if people wanted to bring in their own silverware, there'd be no prohibition in that in the food code itself. Obviously, you know, they

would take that home with them as well, and not leave it there. So that could be something that the restaurants could allow.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 31:15

Yeah, I struggle I struggle to see restaurants where, if someone wants to bring their own silverware, they're probably not going to come into your 50% capacity establishment. I actually have been out and about a little bit. We kind of checked in with restaurants in the Anamosa area. I did Cerro Gordo County, and up in the Council Bluffs area, and customers looked very comfortable. They did come back, they did follow the 50% capacity lines, and they looked to be enjoying themselves. So my guess would be, if someone wanted to bring their own silverware, they're likely going to continue to use your takeout and delivery strategies for now.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 32:00

One of the questions that had popped up with the FAQs, I see in the chat section, Austin has posted for Mark from the DIA, the FAQs as of May 1, for restaurant reopening. So, attendees, feel free to copy that and paste it and definitely reach out to the Iowa Restaurant Association website as well for a lot of those downloadable items. Another question, some of the communities have had problems with enforcing these items. Does the association plan on helping putting teeth into the rules so communities can suspend the license of non-rule followers?

Jessica Dunker, IRA 32:38

Well, you know, that's an interesting question. And I would say the Association is rarely in the business of trying to create something where operators are facing license removal or having those taken away. So probably not, because we're in the advocacy business, and I think that the government is in the enforcement business. And we have been doing more to try to mitigate business damage than we have making our mission to chase folks who choose not to follow the rules.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 33:16

At this point in time, if somebody is not following these mitigation strategies or the rules, it's a law enforcement issue that neither the DIA nor the ABD [Alcoholic Beverages Division] is actually the reporting agency you should be going through. Right now, because it's in defiance to an emergency proclamation, it is a police department issue. And the idea that our industry would be creating non-necessary reasons for law enforcement issues. That would be disappointing. But we as the Association are not going to be pursuing punishments, that's just not the business we're in.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 34:00

One of the things that we have also been working with communities on in several areas across the state is taking a different view on it as, not so much a punishment, but working with the different restaurants or retailers on what those safety protocols are, and helping them find those solutions. So they can still remain open, but be adhering to what the different regulations are, so that everybody's safe. I mean, I think that's the intent as well as getting the economy rolling at the same time. So focusing more on how can we be part of that solution to help them get to that compliance level that they need to be at.

Mark Speltz, DIA 34:37

Yeah. And this is Mark, too, I mean, we are we are trying on our end as well to get the message out. So not everybody is as in tune to the media and things that are going on. We can't just assume that every restaurant knows exactly what the rules are. So we've been trying to get that message out. Jessica's been great with the Restaurant Association to help distribute that message. We have other industry partners that we've shared the message with, trying to get people to look at the FAQs, posting more FAQs as those come in. And actually on Saturday, we sent out a blast, email, text and voice message to all of our license holders in those 77 counties, letting them know where to go to find this information.

Mark Speltz, DIA 35:21

So hopefully that has at least been, for the most part people are aware of where they can look this information up. And if we do receive, say, complaints or concerns from from the public, we have made contact with facilities and just said, Hey, here's the guidance here. Here's the mandate. Here's the information that we have. We just want to make sure that you are educated on this and and can follow this. So that's essentially what our strategy has been to really just get the message out and we have great partners to help do that.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 35:55

Absolutely. One question, Jessica. We actually before we even started, we spoke about this a little bit, but something that had come in through some of our advisors, actually that is in one of the 22 counties. What about liquor license? What about the liquor license of somebody that is in those counties, they can't open up yet, they're hoping to open up soon. What's the verdict?

Jessica Dunker, IRA 36:19

Yeah, so people who have liquor license coming do, I mean, those are can be substantial costs. And right now, I would encourage you to directly call the Iowa ABD, and work with them. They're right now working with people on a case-by-case basis related to that. We are working together to try to do some either proclamation or legislative language to get some relief for folks. That hasn't been completed yet. But it's in the works. So until that happens, please call the Iowa ABD and talk to them about your license payment issue. They are working with operators on this. We know this from talking to people as well as directly from the ABD.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 37:04

Awesome, awesome. I know, as we've been moving through this, a lot of the state agencies have been very, very good to work with and understand that this is something new, that we need to look at the solution from a different angle. And that's been so appreciative for small businesses out there. Mark, one of the questions came for you. You spoke about the blast email to the 77. Is there maybe a blast email to the other 22 as far as hey, here's what you can be doing now to get ready?

Mark Speltz, DIA 37:37

So, when the initial proclamation came out that did close facilities, we did a blast email to everyone in the state on that. So as far as what they can be doing to reopening, we're trying to get that message out again, through the guidance that we're putting out. Also working with our associations and Iowa State University to try and put some information out there as well. It is something that we could do, if we had some published information to send out, as far as what they could be doing. But I think there are other ways to do that, that we really try not to use that. It's kind of our blast alert message, which is during floods and during things like that. So when we really need to get a message out as far as in preparation, what can they be doing now, I think there are a lot of other resources.

Mark Speltz, DIA 38:25

And to be honest, there are so many things that people could be doing. The information that we had put out, even the FAQs, and if they look at the current governor's proclamation for the 77 counties, looking at that, you know, does that mean that if they get staged to reopen at some point, it's probably going to look very similar unless the landscape really changes, right? So looking at those types of things, and saying, how would I prepare to fit what I do into those mandates and that guidance. So we're not planning to send blast emails out on things that they could be doing to prepare. But there is information out there and there is guidance for people that, if they're looking to say, what could I be doing now in anticipation of potentially reopening it at a later date or partial reopening, I think there are a lot of things business owners can be doing right now. And obviously, the Restaurant Association is

there and other industry associations are there to provide some of that guidance and best practice as well.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 39:28

Yeah, if you go to www.restaurantiowa.com. And at the top of the page, that's our homepage, this is at the Restaurant Association, you will see Iowa hospitality resources. And in there, there is a whole list of things that you can have. There is downloads, there are nine pages of recommendations with checklists from the Iowa Restaurant Association. That's everything from general suggestions to table service, guest relations to how to use technology. And you can use that list as one of the things you can look at to prepare. Additionally, there is from the National Restaurant Association in the ServSafe training a document that you can download that has very specific sanitation suggestions that you can use. So those materials are all available to members and non-members alike. Because we just want to get the industry up and running. And that can all be found at restaurantiowa.com.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 40:32

Awesome, thank you. Thank you. Someone just asked too, I may have missed this, but will these slides be available at the end? Absolutely. I'm just gonna assume, are they on your website as well? We're going to put them on ours. I'm having Stacy in the chat is going to put a link to where our webinars and podcasts will be. If you need it sooner than that, you can go ahead and put your email address in the chat and we'll be happy to email it directly to you. And also the restaurant association has a link on their page as well.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 41:07

Right, and we have it available in a PDF format that you can just download and print, as well as all the other documents we mentioned. and links to that free training. One of the best things you can be doing right now is getting your staff all Food Handler trained, that's free of charge. And it's a national industry standard and so, excellent way for people to ... if you're on the PPP, and you're trying to find ways to spend a little payroll money and get some hours to folks, so that you can have more of that loan forgiven have them do this training online.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 41:44

Absolutely, great advice. Another question: I have had a business reach out to the ABD and they have been told they take direction from the governor's office and can't help. Is there a specific area within there they should call when they have questions about their licensing and things like that?

Jessica Dunker, IRA 42:01

That's a curious question. You know, here's the thing. The ABD is filled with people who are there trying to help, and if you are struggling with a specific issue related to licensing, that is not the answer that they should be sharing with you, they should be assisting you. And so if you do not get the help you need, I would send you directly to Steve Larson who heads the agency. He will either get you to the right person or will solve the question himself. I do find that the licensing people have been quite helpful. So if you are not landing with them, I would call them back.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 42:42

Awesome. And I would...

Jessica Dunker, IRA 42:45

I would like to add though, there's something that can be frustrating when you're trying to work with any of the state agencies. And it seems like they have broad authority often, and they do have broad authority often. But there are some things they just cannot do for you because it hasn't been addressed legislatively. And sometimes when you hear that answer, that's what that means. And then if it has to

be addressed legislatively, and they tell you that, that's when you call the association, because our job is to seek legislative action on your behalf, so that those agencies are in a better position to help you. So if that's the answer you hear, I'd really like it if you would reach out to any one of us at the association. There's only five of us. And right now we've laid people off, like all of you, so there's actually only three and a half of us, but we will certainly try to help.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 43:37

Awesome. All right. Next question: is the normal operating capacity based upon fire code?

Mark Speltz, DIA 43:46

This is Mark, I'll take that one. So no, it's not. I mean, I think there was a lot of discussion as to how that actually would come to be in there. But it's really what your normal operating seating capacity is, when you were open prior to this, so it's not based on the fire code. That might be one place to start as a good point of reference, if you're not exactly sure what your capacity should be. But really, it's just half of what your normal operating capacity was before this incident took place.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 44:21

Okay, next question. If a new restaurant is planning on floor plan design, how much will the association plan on holding these new rules for time in the future?

Jessica Dunker, IRA 44:34

Well, these aren't rules by the Association. These social distancing rules are recommended, well, actually mandates right now, from the Department of Inspections and Appeals and the governor's office. But we will start to recommend as a best practice looking at a floor plan to be able to accommodate this, because we want to be better prepared for anything that might come our way in the future. So again, these aren't rules that are hard and fast for us. We want as many hospitality operators doing as much business as they possibly can with as many people as they safely can. So, you know, I don't know how long this will hold on. Mark, maybe you have a better sense of how long those social distancing practices will take.

Mark Speltz, DIA 45:19

I really don't and I think so much of it is dependent on what is going to occur within Iowa and our borders. And, you know, we're certainly taking our direction from the governor's office and Iowa Department of Public Health, who is up there daily crunching numbers and looking at figures and making decisions as we proceed. And we are taking, we're looking for them for guidance. And then once things are implemented or discussed, we have input into those types of things.

Mark Speltz, DIA 45:49

As far as like the restaurant reopening, you know, I know that we've worked closely with Jessica prior to this event. So when something like this happened, it was great to be able to just pick up the phone and call Jessica. And she's always been comfortable on calling me as well. So we had pretty decent and strong industry relations before. So that's made this, at least we know who to call and who to talk to. And we brainstorm together and we figure things out. And you'll notice that the Iowa Hospitality Promise and some of the guidance that we put out were very, very similar. And that's not by mistake.

Mark Speltz, DIA 46:25

You know, we have, we feel we have a pretty good understanding of the restaurant industry in Iowa as regulators, but we also have industry partners that can educate us more about the industry so we can regulate more appropriately. So when we do talk to each other, I think it makes everything a little bit easier. As far as your question related to the plans, I thought I maybe heard something a little bit

different there. Was it a new business opening or is it existing places that might want a floor plan looked at in lieu of ... in regards to 50% capacity, or that I did I maybe miss a part of that?

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 47:04

You know what, Mark, it sounded like a new restaurant, but could you answer both sides of that?

Mark Speltz, DIA 47:05

Sure. So from a new restaurant standpoint, we're continuing to do what we call high priority inspections. So the department has actually suspended our routine inspection work. But we are continuing to do high priority inspections. And one of those high priority inspections is new business. We call them pre opening inspections, so it's their license approval inspection. So as a part of that, we actually do plan reviews when people submit those with their application. So we look at a number of different things. We want to see what their menu is, we want to see their equipment layout, their facility layout, and we will look at that and provide them feedback on that plan.

Mark Speltz, DIA 47:50

You know, it's best if they submit that before they start construction, but once in a while we'll get a plan submitted, you know, when it's already been built. There's not a whole lot of benefit that the the restaurant is going to get there. But that plan that we've looked at, our inspector that is going out there will also have looked at that plan. So we know what we're walking into, and we know what kind of conversations we need to have. And, and potentially, you know, if we've identified a gap, we can let them know ahead of that pre operational inspection that, hey, we noticed that you don't have a hand sink in this area, for instance, and you know, we would expect that you would probably need one.

Mark Speltz, DIA 48:24

So sometimes we can expedite that process a little bit more. But we don't charge for plan reviews. If there has been an application filed and a plan submitted, we will review it—it does take us some time. And we are continuing even during the pandemic to complete pre opening or new business opening inspections. In fact, we devised a virtual inspection method to for business pre openings. So that's something that, you know, virtual inspections have always kind of been something that we've thought about, you know, once the technology's there, it makes sense for us to maybe do that for certain types of inspections.

Mark Speltz, DIA 49:03

Well, once this happened, we kind of fast tracked that process, and we got that in place. So we're already doing virtual new business inspections for restaurants and bars, and other food facilities as they open. So we're continuing that work. We do do plan reviews. We're not doing plan reviews for for existing facilities that are open that may want to say, hey, how does my plan look for 50% capacity? That's not something that we're doing. I think most folks can look at their facility say, Okay, I had 100 seats before, I can only have 50 now, and however that works and flows best for them is where they should be looking to make some changes.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 49:45

I would like to add that at the heart of that question, I believe, is how do we recover? And when you're looking, nobody has made a business plan based on 50% capacity. That isn't how you have a profitable business, we understand that. So a couple of things that we are pushing for, just to make people aware, is the extension of things that made some of the takeout and delivery more feasible. So for example, the Iowa ABD's relaxation on takeout and delivery of both mixed drinks and beer and wine for those who didn't have that permit. And we are asking for that to continue until we are up and running at full capacity in all counties in all establishments. That's one of the things that we're seeing.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 50:35

In addition to that, the Association is looking at trying to create some duress language that we can take to the legislature and ask for. If you were mandated closed, even if all the rest of the world ends up having to pay some of this unemployment, and you had to, you know, lay people off, you shouldn't be charged unemployment for that. And that could have a stress test related to the number, how many, what percentage your revenue was down. We're asking for, based again on a stress test, some language that would help us get some license fees either waived or extended. We're looking for ways on sales tax and state payroll tax, look for continued deferral or actual forgiveness of those things.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 51:21

So we're trying to seek ways that we can extend some of the privileges given under the proclamation language. And even as we start to reopen, what can we do in a package format to try to ask for recovery assistance? And actually, anybody who's on this call that has ideas related to that, as an Association, we're assembling that right now, and we'd be very interested in hearing from you. I'm going to put my own email address in the Zoom chat here and you can just send that to me.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 51:50

Great. All right, we are out of questions. What I would like to do is, as we wrap this up, Jessica and Mark—and Jessica, we'll start with you—if you just have a few bullet points or a few comments that you want to leave with everyone would be great.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 52:06

Yeah. So I think that there is no doubt that there's a healthcare crisis. But there's also a business crisis, and restaurants and bars, not just in Iowa but across the nation, has been the tip of the spear on this. We are literally the frontlines of the economic crisis. And we have been telling people and sharing with them from the beginning that, as goes our industry, goes the rest of the industry. And we're starting to see that now, in form of farmers who don't have any place to send their animals, in the form of meatpacking plants being shut down, in the form of truckers who are losing their jobs. Our food purveyors, our alcohol purveyors, are starting to lay people off.

Jessica Dunker, IRA 52:48

And as a result of that, you know, there's a lot more people besides our industry losing their jobs. As a state and the nation, we have got to save the hospitality industry. Because we are literally the employer of one in nine people in the state of Iowa who work. And so I just want to assure people that we are fighting hard at both the state and federal level, to be able to find solutions for that. And our ears and email boxes and phones are always open, for not just questions, but suggestions on things that you think could provide a solution to help your business. So please do not hesitate to reach out to us, whether or not you're a member. At this point, we are far more interested in saving this portion of the industry.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 53:34

Absolutely. Mark, what last words would you like to share?

Mark Speltz, DIA 53:39

First of all, thank you for the invitation to come and talk, and really to kind of open our agency up to folks visiting our webpages and things like that. So I know we've had lots of hits on our COVID-19 page, and I would encourage you folks out there to visit that page. We try and update our FAQs, there's additional information there. And we've linked and I know, Jessica, links to our page and those types of things as well. So look at the sources that you trust every day in Iowa, to find out what information is there. I know, at least I feel bombarded with with new information every single day, multiple times a day. I'm saying, Oh, I get an email from one source that says, Well, here's the newest and greatest thing

related to COVID and restaurants. And then, you know, five minutes later, I get the update from another place. So we're just bombarded with that kind of information.

Mark Speltz, DIA 54:41

So I would encourage folks to go to the, you know, the sources within Iowa that they trust. We have information posted. We have links to other places where we feel appropriate, and it's things that we've vetted, and the Restaurant Association and the Grocery Industry Association, those are great places to start your searches to find out what should I be doing? And then, you know, asking the questions when you either aren't clear, or we haven't maybe addressed it in one of our FAQs. You know, we're up to 52 FAQs now as of May 1 for this reopening. So we think we've answered almost every question that's out there. But we know as soon as we turn around, we'll get a new one. So we'll try and keep that updated. So, again, go to the sources that you trust in Iowa for your information related to your Iowa business.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 55:33

Absolutely. And thank you to both of you for taking the time first thing on a Tuesday morning, we sure appreciate it. I know we have lots of economic developers on this call as well as SBDC directors, and you're right, Mark. We are bombarded every day with different types of questions and different information. Jessica, you hinted to the PPP program and, as being affiliated with SBA, we are we are very aware that many times we are not in control of the information that flows to us and how it changes, so we appreciate your understanding on that.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 56:06

Everybody on the call, I encourage you to reach out to your local establishment and get them understanding the Food Handler training that is free right now—take advantage of that. Now is the time to really take advantage of those things that are additional opportunities to incorporate more safety and more understanding into the employees. And at the same time, every single one of us on this call has to assume additional personal responsibility for our part in maintaining the safety of the food establishment, and sharing that information with others and helping being part of the solution.

Lisa Shimkat, SBDC Iowa 56:40

So I thank all of you, Jessica, Mark, once again, thank you, and thank you to all of you who attended. I believe we are working on sending out the emails for the slides to the two that recommended it or requested it. Jessica, thanks for sharing your email address and we will make sure we get this information out there to everyone. So thank you, everyone.

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