

A cafe owner's guide to reusable foodware during Covid-19 (dine-in & takeaway)

We all want to keep safe during COVID-19, and for food outlets there is the extra onus to keep customers safe too.

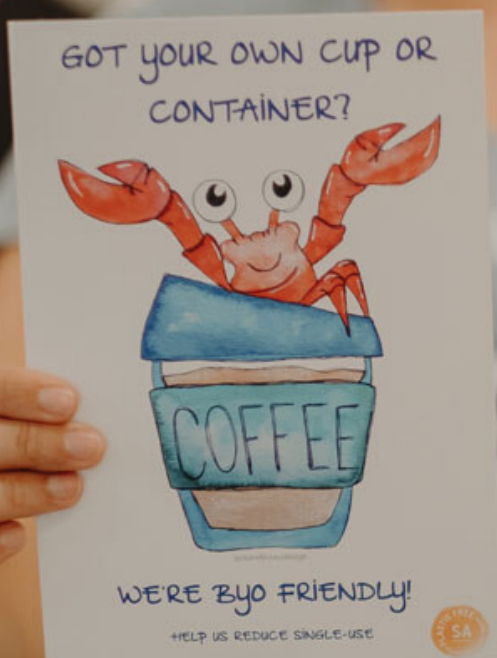
As many cafes and restaurants adapted to provide takeaway, and more recently prepared to reopen for dine-in, there has been **much talk about disposable vs reusable foodware, and what is the safest option.**

Unfortunately, there has been a great deal of rumour that single-use is safest, resulting in fears that **reusables were unsafe, something not supported by the facts.**

The rumour mill (prompted by the some industry associations and the [opportunistic petrochemical industry](#)) recently suggested that food outlets need to use plastic foodware when they reopen for dine-in.

We have researched the situation across all state jurisdictions and this rumour is simply not true. **There is NO suggestion or regulation anywhere in Australia that businesses must use single-use foodware in order to fulfill COVID-safe regulations.**

In this guide we answer the question... **How can cafes use reusables safely in a time of Coronavirus?**



The Victorian Government has released the [following information](#) in regard to using reusables during Coronavirus:

“**There is currently no evidence to suggest there is any benefit in switching to disposables.** The most effective measures you can take are practicing good hand hygiene and cleaning, with particular focus on shared frequently touched surfaces.”

They go on to say:

“**Coronaviruses are relatively sensitive to both heat and detergents (including soap).** For this reason, normal washing of dishes in hot water (or better still, a dishwasher) using detergent is likely to completely inactivate any coronavirus present.”

Therefore, it is not about what items you are using. **Single-use items are not cleaner or safer** - viruses and bacteria can exist on both alike. **Normal dishwashing practices can remove the virus** from reusables- the same cannot be said for single-use packaging, which usually cannot be washed.

Our team from across the country has been researching the official advice given to cafes, restaurants and food outlets as they reopen for business.

Below we have **summarised the key information for food businesses in Australia regarding reusables** for dine-in and takeaway services, and our tips on how cafes can reduce plastic waste during this time.



ADVICE FOR DINE-IN OPERATIONS

It is important that protocols are based on science and government guidance, not rumour. **All Australian State and Territory government advisories say essentially the same thing**, making your place COVID-safe is about practicing social distancing and following good hygiene protocols.

The key official messages are:

- **Follow social distancing** rules
- **Practice good hygiene** when preparing and handling food
- **Wash** your hands frequently
- **Clean and sanitise** food preparation surfaces and tables
- **Safe handling protocols** for menus, foodware and condiments will minimise risks



REUSABLES & HYGIENE, THE FACTS

Government advice follows the recommendations from Food Standards Australia's [Food safety checks for food businesses preparing to recommence pre-restriction operations](#):

“*Areas used for food preparation and serving will need to be thoroughly cleaned, and food preparation surfaces and utensils cleaned and sanitised before use to ensure there is no risk to food safety.*”

- **Clean packaged** (sealed) food if required, before opening it
- **Check all stocks** of food packaging materials are clean (e.g. takeaway containers)
- **Clean all food areas** and clean and sanitise food surfaces, utensils and equipment
- **Clean customer areas** and clean and sanitise crockery and cutlery etc

The usual task of **clearing foodware after each course and washing using a commercial grade dishwasher or glasswasher** is the perfect behaviour during the pandemic (and required under all state guidelines for reusables).

This means that your businesses can have **total control of foodware handling**, a situation that cannot be claimed for disposable items.

You can continue to use your own crockery and cutlery and you **do not have to purchase additional costly single-use items**.

When it comes to menus, we suggest **discarding table menus and using display menus** and giving customers access to on-line menus through their phones.

Bulk condiment containers (washed after each use) are safer than sachets, constantly handled, and not easily cleaned.

Note: some states require bulk condiments and self-service stations such as communal water to be removed – please check the advice of your relevant state government below. If unsure what replacements are allowed, it would be worth asking them what alternatives for these they recommend.



ADVICE FOR TAKEAWAY

COFFEE CUPS

● **Accept clean reusable cups** - this can be done without the customer's lid. If you're unsure, you can wash the cup before using it, or utilise a barrier while handling it.

● **Do a contactless exchange!** A safe option with no risk to customer or barista. This process can also be applied for reusable cold cups such as jars for smoothies or juices.



The Perfect Contactless Coffee

1. Pour coffee shot into an in-house vessel
2. Have the customer set the cup on counter
3. Pour the shot into cup without touching it
4. Pour steamed milk on top
5. Have the customer place their own lid

@SonderCoffeePerth

● **Make use of 'swap n go' cup network schemes**, where cups are stored and sanitised in-house. These are designed to be easily incorporated into your normal operation. Depending on the network, you may pay a fee for the service and charge a deposit and refund it when the item is returned. Or, like a library book, customers borrow the cup and return it, with the onus on them to return or they are charged by the network for the cost of the cup. Established cup network programs include [Returnr](#) and [Green Caffein](#).



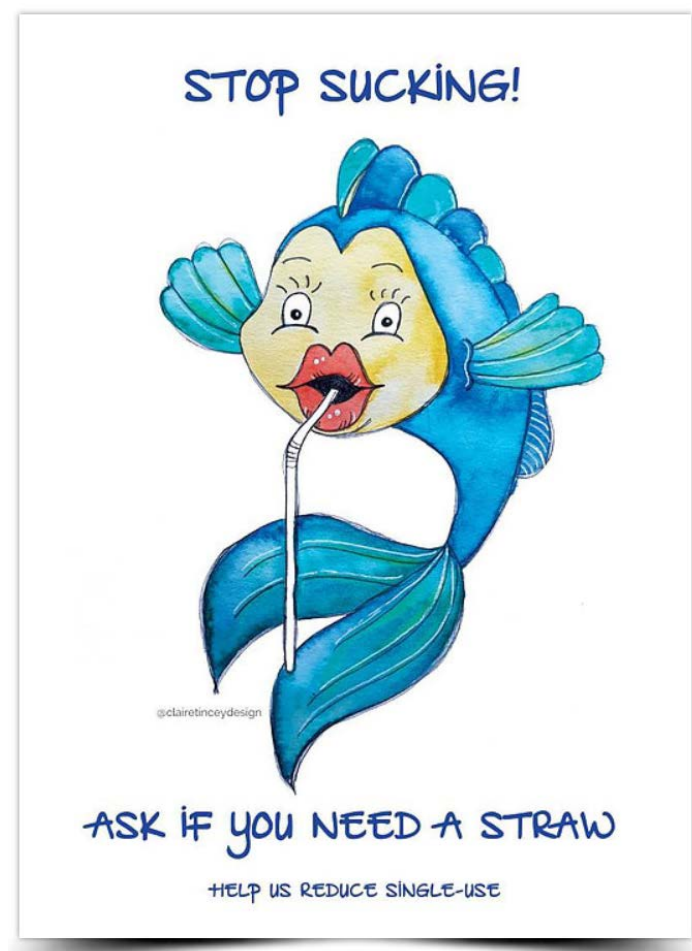
TAKEAWAY CONTAINERS

- **Permit customers to bring their own clean containers.** Like coffee cups, it's also possible to safely implement a 'contactless transfer' of food into a customer's reusable container.
- **Offer a container take-back program** - allow your regular customers to borrow a container and bring them back. This can be done on a deposit system.
- **Implement an external container network scheme** such as [Returnr](#) or [Retub](#). These work on the same basis as the 'swap n go' cup systems.



CUTLERY, BAGS & STRAWS

- **Don't provide cutlery or straws** unless specified by the customer - during lockdowns, food and beverages will be consumed at home where reusables are plentiful. If requested, have compostable wood utensils and paper straws.
- **Encourage your regulars to BYO** bag to pick up their takeaway.
- If you deliver independently, **don't provide disposable bags.** Instead, drivers can load food into returnable bags or boxes, and at the home, ask the customer to remove the items. While this may seem tedious, think about how wasteful it is for a bag to be used for 5 minutes! Not to mention the extra cost for you.



If choosing reusables - we recommend you incorporate signage to let your customers know **what you are doing to keep them safe**, and perhaps print any relevant details on your takeaway menus (e.g. encouraging BYO).

We fully acknowledge the predicament you're in, adapting day by day to an ever changing scenario. Whichever way you chose to fall on reusables vs compostables, it's an individual businesses decision.

Remember, there is also a **wide range of 100% compostable takeaway products** that can be utilised to service your needs.

Refer to our companion guide on [ordering compostable takeaway products](#) for help on choosing the right ones for you.

please note: we don't benefit commercially from any brands or products we recommend.

A NOTE ON FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS

Food safety continues to be governed by the [Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code](#).

Accepting reusable cups and containers from customers is allowable under the code, providing these are **suitable for use, clean and not single-use**. There is no government directive in Australia that requires you to stop accepting BYO reusable items during COVID-19.

A cup or container return service (as outlined above) ensures compliance with food safety rules. If in doubt, please consult your local food safety authority.



FURTHER INFORMATION

STATES & TERRITORY SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

- Health Vic: [Advice for Food Businesses](#)
- NSW Government Food Authority: [Food Businesses and COVID-19](#)
- QLD Government: [COVID-safe Checklist for Dining in](#)
- QLD Health: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- Safe Food QLD: [COVID-19 Advice for Food Businesses](#)
- SA Health: [Advice for Food Businesses and Industry](#)
- SA Government: [Roadmap to Recovery – Outdoor Dining](#)
- WA Health: [Food safety and COVID-19](#)
- ACT Government: [COVID-19 Information for Businesses](#)
- ACT Health: [COVID-19 Dine-in Checklist](#)
- Northern Territory Government: [Guidelines for Food Businesses](#)
- Tasmanian Government: [COVID-19 Food Safety Advice](#)
- New Zealand: [COVID-19 and Food Safety](#)

FOR GENERAL ADVICE

- World Health Organisation: [COVID-19 and Food Safety: Guidance for Food Businesses](#)
- Latest Australian COVID-19 updates, see the Australian Government Health [website](#)
- Food safety requirements, [Standards 3.2.2 and 3.2.3](#) apply to all Australian businesses.
- Safe Work Australia: [COVID-19 Information for Workplaces](#)
- Australian workplace laws: [Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

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