

Dining Scene

Outdoor and Online: CCD Survey Tracks COVID Dining, Shopping Trends

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

This summer, the Center City District (CCD) surveyed residents of Center City and adjacent neighborhoods to learn how their dining and purchasing behaviors had changed with the COVID-19 emergency stay-at-home order and how they might change in the future.

According to the survey findings, residents' use of restaurant takeout and delivery services increased dramatically. (In a separate survey of restaurants, CCD found that almost 40 percent of them remained open since March to provide takeout or delivery of meals.) Prior to COVID-19, only about one-third of residents relied on restaurant takeout or delivery services. After the stay-at-home order, about three-quarters used these services; almost one-quarter ordered takeout or delivery several times a week, and over half a few times per month.

Residents expected that their dining-out behavior would change going forward. The majority planned to dine out less often than before and expected to continue to rely on takeout or delivery, some more often than previously. For those who expect to dine out, almost all would be more likely to dine at restaurants where outdoor seating is provided.

The stay-at-home order also led to more online shopping at local retailers. Over 80 percent of residents ordered merchandise for delivery, and about one-third ordered for curbside pickup. When retail stores reopen, about half of those surveyed expect to continue to purchase online, some more often than they did before.

Expectations about when they would return to restaurants and stores ranged from immediately to two months; people over 65 planned to wait the longest.

Comfort level in a restaurant or store would be affected primarily by spacing, masks, health-safety training for staff, limits on diners or shoppers inside, signage for spacing

and masks, and contactless payment. For restaurants, many residents also wanted staff to wear gloves, and some wanted shields between tables. Respondents were most concerned about whether all customers and employees would consistently adhere to safety measures.

Zagat, in partnership with the James Beard Foundation, conducted a national survey of diners, and reported similar findings. In addition, diners said they miss restaurants for more than just the food; they miss the social aspect. More than half said they miss their favorite neighborhood spot, and one-third miss their favorite fine-dining restaurants. One respondent said, "I miss the company of great friends and family while enjoying a good meal and a bottle of wine."

Center City District distributed a questionnaire on Survey Monkey to 17,000 residents living river to river and between Girard Avenue and Tasker Street, as well as to civic associations and residential managers in that area. The questionnaire was completed between June 8 and 15, by 1,910 people ranging in age from 25 to 65 or older. About 70 percent were female, and about 30 percent were male.

For the Center City District's report, "Reopening Restaurants and Retail: The Customer Perspective," please click on <https://www.centercityphila.org/uploads/attachments/ckbhzyqq0xel-hxqdyh01o49h-retail-restaurant-reopening-r4.pdf>

Zagat's findings were based on a national survey conducted online from May 13 to May 27, among 6,775 adults who dine out at least once a week, drawn from Zagat's national lists of newsletter subscribers and other restaurant diners.

For Zagat's "The Future of Dining Study," this link provides a summary and a link to download the full report. <https://stories.zagat.com/posts/the-results-of-the-zagat-future-of-dining-study>

Shop Talk

Update: Plastic Bag Ban in Philadelphia

The effective date of the single-use plastic bag ban was pushed from July 2 to January 1, 2021. Businesses will be prohibited from providing single-use plastic bags to customers for checkout or delivery starting on April 1.

Retailers will be permitted to provide reusable bags made from plastic or cloth, as well as paper bags made from at least 40 percent recycled content. Exemptions are dry-cleaner bags, packaged garbage or waste bags, or plastic bags used at point of sale for perishable items such as meat, fish, unwrapped prepared foods, bakery goods, flowers, or potted plants. <https://cleanphi.org/plasticbagban/>

Editor's note:

If you are concerned about transmission of disease from reusable bags, we recommend bringing your own washable cloth bags.