

What diners expect in 2021

From how often they want to eat out to the trends they want to see stay around



It's been a year. A year of closures and reopenings and more closures. A year of innovation and creativity and hustling like never before.

In February 2021, OpenTable and the James Beard Foundation teamed up to ask over 21,000 diners across the U.S. and Canada about their thoughts on dining now and looking ahead to the future as part of OpenTable's quarterly Diner Insights series.

In addition, nearly 300 restaurant industry professionals weighed in with what they're doing to meet ever-shifting diner expectations. We hope these insights—as well as the daily updated data on our State of the Industry hub—give you the information you need to help your business rebuild and thrive in 2021 and beyond.

Diners want to return to your tables— some already have



Plenty of people have already resumed their regular dining behavior

31%

say they've resumed their pre-pandemic regular dining out behavior, a 29% increase compared to October 2020.

And those who haven't say they expect to do so in spring or summer 2021

33%

expect they'll resume their regular dining out behavior between April and September 2021, a 32% increase compared to October 2020.



People look forward to going to a restaurant once a week or more, especially with the ones they love

54%

plan to dine out at a restaurant with table service in 2021 once a week or more.

1 out of 3

diners say the number one thing they're most looking forward to when eating out again is connecting with family and friends.

Prep for increased demand

- ✓ Open your online inventory so people can discover your restaurant when they're searching for a specific date, time, and party size.
- ✓ Keep your capacity up-to-date with current regulations. Get your shifts full and flowing with availability controls.
- ✓ Go the extra mile on your OpenTable profile—select applicable cuisine types, update menus, and upload photos of your food and space.
- ✓ Help your staff game plan for each service with the pre-shift digest.
- ✓ Manage an in-house waitlist and/or online waitlist to fill empty seats.
- ✓ Get your POS talking to OpenTable so you can know more about your guests, automate table statusing, and keep track of revenue.
- ✓ Highlight private dining and experiences for special days such as Mother's Day, graduations, and birthdays.

Outdoor dining is here to stay— and indoor will make a return



**People feel more comfortable
with outdoor dining**

74%

feel eating outdoors is low to somewhat low risk—up 14% from October 2020 and up 45% from July 2020.

**And they overwhelmingly want restaurants
to continue outdoor dining in 2021**

82%

want restaurants to continue to increase outdoor seating in 2021.



**They're gradually feeling more
at ease with indoor dining**

34%

feel eating indoors is low to somewhat low risk for putting them at risk for COVID-19, up 36% from October 2020 and up 79% from July 2020.

**And look forward to dining
indoors again**

22%

say they're most looking forward to eating indoors at a restaurant in 2021.

Gear up for indoor—and more outdoor—dining

- ✓ Make your restaurant an all-seasons destination by creating unique experiences from prix-fixe menus to tours, tastings, and classes.
- ✓ Offer various table types or run different floor plans with OpenTable table management tools, based on current regulations for indoor and outdoor dining.
- ✓ Talk with your landlord about your outdoor dining usage to avoid any interruption of outdoor service.
- ✓ Consider advocating for continued relaxed restrictions on outdoor space use.
- ✓ Plan your space for each season: consider shaded awnings for summer and plan ahead for fall and winter.

What trends will become the norm and should you say goodbye to



Takeout and delivery are winners among diners

91%

want restaurants to keep offering takeout and delivery after the pandemic ends. Ditto with offering wine and beer to-go (52%), cocktails and bar kits to go (46%), and meal kits (42%).

In the window

84% of restaurants say that takeout is the most popular dining option with customers and 71% of restaurants say they're offering takeout for dinner.



Contactless seems to be the way of the future

71%

want restaurants to keep offering contactless pay, ordering, or menus.

In the window

Restaurants say they would like to continue to offer contactless payment (51%) and contactless ordering/menus (47%) even when the threat of the pandemic is mitigated.



Virtual experiences are still gaining adoption

59%

don't know if they want restaurants to keep or stop offering virtual cooking classes or events.

In the window

Only 10% of restaurants say they're currently offering virtual cooking classes.



Prepayments and deposits are less popular

60%

want restaurants to stop requiring a deposit or prepayment for a meal.

In the window

Only 19% of restaurants say they want to continue requiring a deposit or prepayment for meals in advance post-pandemic.

Adopt more of what's working

- ✓ Make it easy for people to bring your restaurant home: offer online and in-app takeout ordering on OpenTable, and add delivery options to your OpenTable profile.
- ✓ Once you're set up, promote your takeout options and share your unique order link on your website and across your marketing channels so people can quickly order.
- ✓ Create DIY to-go kits, be they meal, cocktail, or bar kits.
- ✓ See how neighboring restaurants are performing and what's working for them with benchmark reporting.
- ✓ Create QR codes for guests to discover and experience your restaurant contact-free. Generate as many QR codes as you need on OpenTable with no expiration dates for any of your mobile-friendly URLs, at no additional cost.
- ✓ To minimize no-shows and cancellations and only when needed, secure reservations with credit card requirements and offer prepaid Experiences.
- ✓ Customize booking policies to set the right expectations with guests, and send automated SMS and email confirmations with OpenTable.

Safety remains top of mind



Diners care about safety efforts

More than 70%

say it's extremely or highly important for restaurants to require diners to follow safety precautions, have staff wear personal protective equipment (PPE), space tables 6 feet or more apart, or communicate strict cleaning policies.

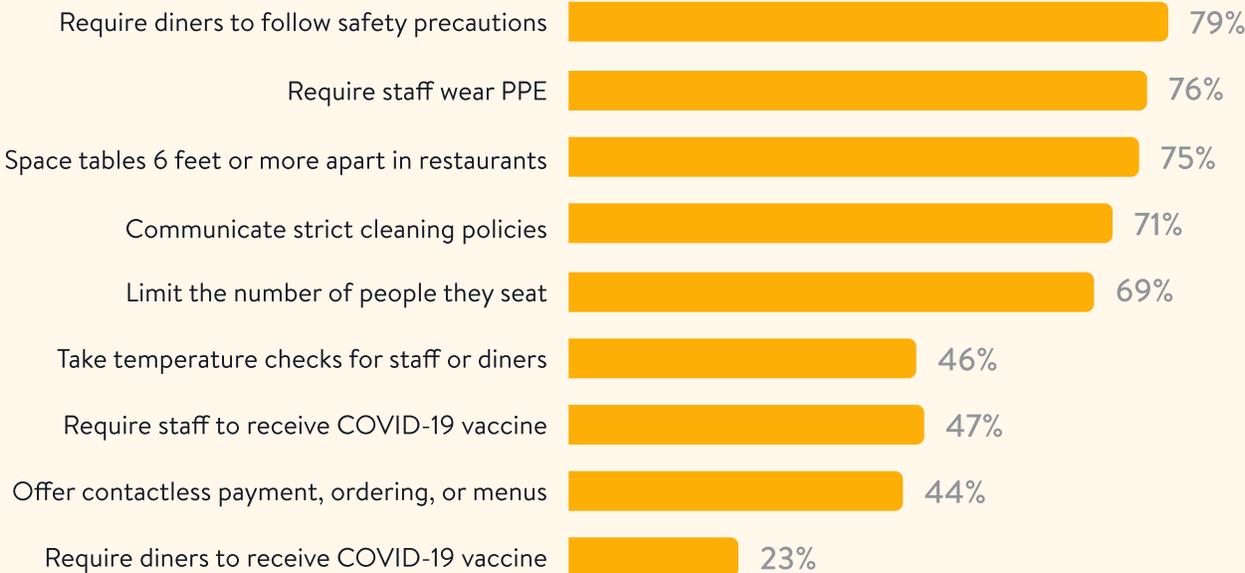
And less concerned about staff vaccinations

47%

feel it's extremely or highly important for restaurants to require their staff to receive a COVID-19 vaccine



What restaurants can do to help diners feel comfortable eating out



Help diners feel safe

- ✓ Post safety measures on your website and add a pop-up message.
- ✓ Capture behind-the-scenes photos and video to show how you keep employees and guests safe.
- ✓ Highlight safety precautions on your OpenTable profile and in booking policies to put guests at ease with dining out again.
- ✓ Arm your staff with answers to frequent questions about safety protocols.
- ✓ Explain safety measures on interior and exterior signs.

What goes on behind the scenes matters

Diners care about restaurant staff

3 out of 4

diners feel it's important that restaurants provide fair wages and benefits to their employees.

In the window

64% of restaurants would like to prioritize providing employees with health insurance in 2021.



They want restaurants to leave a small environmental footprint

52%

say it's important to them that restaurants implement environment-friendly practices.

And half want restaurants to give back to their communities

50%

say it's important to them that restaurants give back to their local communities.

In the window

84% of restaurants say they want to give back to their communities in 2021.



Showcase what you care about

- ✓ Share stories across marketing channels of how you support guests, staff, and the community.
- ✓ Capture environment-friendly packaging when you post food photos on social media, including takeout and delivery options.
- ✓ Give guests ideas for how they can help advocate at the local and national level in support of independent restaurants.
- ✓ Add fundraising links to your OpenTable profile to show diners how they can support you and your staff.
- ✓ Cross-promote with neighboring businesses to motivate people to dine and shop locally. Offer bounce back deals or specials for locals.
- ✓ Partner with nearby restaurants to hold local and community events.

Diners are staying up-to-date online

Online is the place to be to get seen by diners

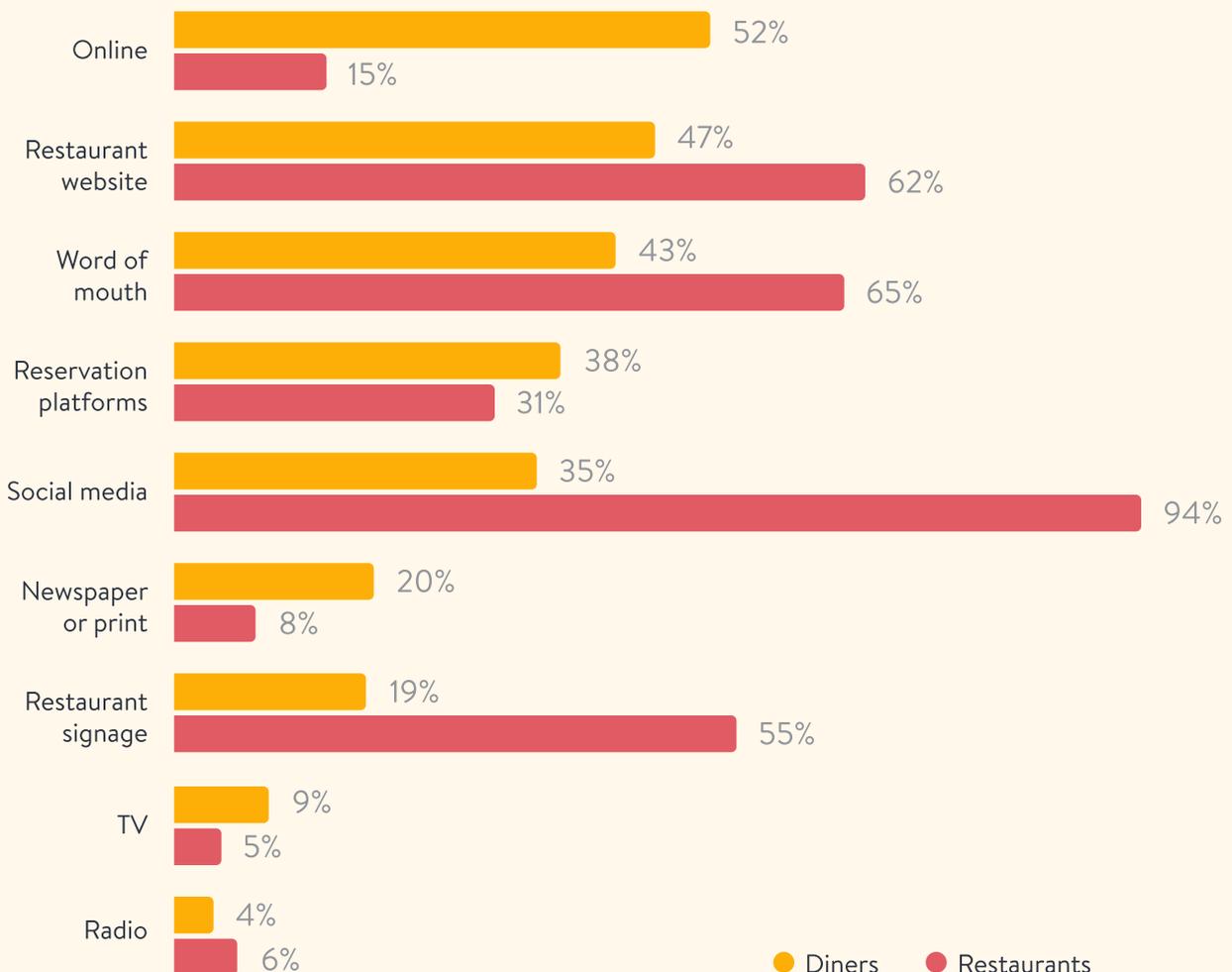
52%

find the latest information about restaurants online, followed by a restaurant's website (47%), word of mouth (42%), reservations platforms such as OpenTable (38%), social media (35%), and email (24%).

In the window

Yet, restaurants say the number one way they're keeping diners up-to-date is on social media (94%). Only 19% say the same for reservation platforms.

How diners find the latest information about restaurants



Get seen by diners online

- ✓ Update your online profiles across Google, Facebook, Yelp, and OpenTable, so people can easily discover everything you have to offer. You can also connect your content management tools like Yext with OpenTable to centrally manage all your business profile updates and maintain consistency.
- ✓ Strengthen your website to make it easier for people to find you online and reserve a table, order takeout, or book an experience.
- ✓ Build brand awareness and strong relationships with diners on social media, where they have an appetite to discover new restaurants and feel more connected to the ones they love. Get more tips in OpenTable's social media guide.
- ✓ Get in front of more guests who are searching on OpenTable and drive up bookings by launching an OpenTable boost campaign.
- ✓ Find meaningful ways to engage with guests, establish deeper connections, and build a loyal following using these email marketing tips from OpenTable and Emma.
- ✓ Know where your diners come from online. Track reservations and revenue from your digital and social channels—including Google Ads, Facebook and Instagram Ads, email, landing pages, and your website—using OpenTable marketing tracking.

Chart the future of your restaurant in 2021 using country, state, and city-level data and insights on [OpenTable's state of the industry hub](#) and [get additional tools and tips](#) to get back in action.

For more insights from OpenTable's quarterly Diner Insights series, see results from the [October 2020](#), [July 2020](#), and [April 2020](#) surveys.

For updates on James Beard Foundation programs and events, sign up for the [Beard Bites newsletter](#) for diners and [industry newsletter](#) for professionals.

About the surveys

OpenTable surveyed over 21,000 diners in the U.S. and Canada on the OpenTable network between February 7, 2021 and February 15, 2021.

The James Beard Foundation surveyed nearly 300 of its restaurant partners in the U.S. between February 8, 2021 and February 23, 2021.

