Is it safe to eat out? | India Today Insight

Contactless menus, regular sanitisation and reduced seating capacities besides other checks are helping make dining out possible

Shelly Anand

Delhi

October 25, 2020

The food court at DLF Promenade mall in New Delhi on Oct. 24.(Chandradeep Kumar)

Family outings are incomplete without dining out. Watching movies followed by a nice meal is one of the most sought-after recreational activity. Under unlock 5.0 guidelines multiplexes have been allowed to reopen, so eating out at restaurants is expected to go up. As are the chances of catching the deadly virus. The hospitality sector, though, is doing its part to ensure the safety of its diners. So how safe is it really to eat out?

High on hygiene

There is a long list of SOPs (standard operating procedures) being strictly followed by almost all food joints to ensure minimum contamination and spread of the virus. Governed by bodies such as FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India), apart from mandatory measures such as thermal checks, hand-sanitisers, gloves and masks and reduced seating

capacity (to 50 per cent), some of the joints are even redoing their interiors for enhanced protection. Ophelia, a restaurant in Delhi, has a new food and beverage along with fresh decor. Akshay Anand, owner, Ophelia, says, "We have created air-conditioned cabanas that have glass walls and sheer curtains in between to maintain distance between two groups." The restaurant is also sanitising its crockery with a chlorine solution before final use. Use of digital menus for ordering food and for payments and use of disposable cutlery are some of the other measures being followed by the restaurant. "Prior reservations are preferred and takeaway options are available. We have also come up with customised takeaway boxes that can cater to groups of as large as 10," says Anand.

According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, there is no evidence that Covid-19 can be transmitted via food, making outside food safe for consumption. "It is safe to step out for a dine-in experience but one should wear a mask and follow the basic rule of social distancing and sanitisation," says Deepak Bhatia, vice-president (operations), Lite Bite Foods. "We have also responsibly been making changes in how we conduct our business and manage on-ground activities." At the Delhi outlets of Punjab Grill and YouMee, that come under the Lite Bite Foods' umbrella, complete sanitisation of hands and shoes at the door is mandatory for diners. "Timed intervals have been fixed for full sanitisation of the restaurant as well as the kitchen area throughout the day with compulsory disinfecting of seats and tables after a customer leaves," says Bhatia. The use of menus has been barred and a barcode is placed at every table which a customer can scan using any scanner app on their phone to view the menu and order from. Once the food has been prepared, the staff is not supposed to touch it with bare hands, which is monitored through CCTV cameras.

Before eating out

While restaurants and eating joints are doing their part in ensuring their customers' safety, it is equally important that diners hold themselves responsible for their safety too. According to Pallavi Bhardwaj, health and lifestyle coach and founder of Save Well Being, a wellness products company, "If one can avoid eating out, they should, but as long as the vendor can be trusted, it should be fine. It is safe as long as the food is handled well and people serving the food are careful about their and the client's basic hygiene." Some key checks to do before deciding on the place are necessary—are employees wearing face and hair coverings? Are they following social distancing rules and regularly disinfecting high touch surfaces? "Try not to order uncooked food such as salads and avoid high sugar diet

and carbs loading," advises Bhardwaj, since too much sugar can lead to acidity which can potentially reduce immunity.

After months of isolation, it's time to bring back life on track slowly and these checks can ensure that your dine-out experience remains safe.