

# Indoor dining returns Friday. Here's what suburban restaurants are doing to prepare.



Arnie Krause, co-owner of The Claim Company in Northbrook, prepares the indoor dining room for reopening by installing distancing stickers on the floor to remind patrons to remain 6 feet apart. (Mark Welsh | Staff Photographer)



**Barbara Vitello**

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For diners and restaurateurs, another new normal begins this weekend.

After months of carryout, curbside pickup and al fresco service, suburban restaurants are preparing to welcome diners indoors as the state enters phase 4 of Gov. J.B. Pritzker's plan to resume activities curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Just because this new phase permits indoor dining doesn't mean crowds will immediately descend on suburban eateries, says Arnie Krause, co-owner and operator of The Claim Company (<https://www.theclaimcompany.com/>) restaurants in Northbrook and Vernon Hills.



**Disinfecting wipes instead of mints greet patrons to Northbrook's The Claim Company, which opens its indoor dining room to patrons beginning Friday, June 26.** - Mark Welsh | Staff Photographer

"The wild card is how quick people will come out," said Krause, who co-owns the restaurants with Ted and Michael Holleb. "My gut tells me that we're going to see more foot traffic in Vernon Hills than in Northbrook."

Still, restaurant owners and managers seem to greet this next phase with measured enthusiasm and cautious optimism. They say the health and safety of patrons and employees is paramount. To that end, owners will rearrange seating to increase the distance between tables, require employees and patrons to wear face coverings and increase the frequency of cleaning high-touch areas, among other precautions.

The Claim Company went a few steps farther, said Krause, installing glass partitions between booths, placing hand sanitizer dispensers every 20 feet or so and removing the Northbrook restaurant's self-serve salad bar.

That said, Krause acknowledges it will take time for patrons to become truly at ease dining out again.



**Arnie Krause, co-owner and operator of The Claim Company in Northbrook, gets his restaurant ready to welcome patrons inside beginning Friday, June 26. To that end, employees have installed partitions between booths to help keep diners safe. - Mark Welsh | Staff Photographer**

"Behavior is driven by different factors," he said. "Until (diners) feel comfortable they won't go out ... It's a gradual thing and it will take a long time."

The Clubhouse Oak Brook (<https://www.theclubhouse.com/>) will limit parties to tables of 10 people or fewer and will require diners to wear

face coverings while in the restaurant unless they are seated at a table. Additionally, diners will be able to access the menu from their cellphones.

According to a prepared release, employees will be screened and have their temperatures taken before they enter the restaurant.

Mago Grill & Cantina (<https://magogrill.com/>) restaurants in Arlington Heights and South Barrington are among the establishments screening employees, said co-owner/manager Rick Munoz.

"We will have hand sanitizer at strategic points in the dining room for employees and guests to use," Munoz said.

Employees will continuously clean frequently touched surfaces, including doorknobs, to "make sure everything is spick and span," Munoz said.

Unlike some restaurants that have adopted cashless payment, Mago will accept both paper currency and credit cards but will require employees to wash their hands after every transaction.

"We haven't considered not taking cash," Munoz said.



**The Claim Company, which has locations in Northbrook (seen here) and Vernon Hills, is among many suburban restaurants prepared to reopen indoor dining rooms as the state enters Phase 4 of the revitalization plan.** - Mark Welsh | Staff Photographer

Like The Claim Company, Jameson's Restaurant Group (<http://jamesons-charhouse.com>) which operates restaurants in Algonquin, Bloomingdale, Crystal Lake, Huntley, Mount Prospect, Skokie, Vernon Hills and Woodridge, has installed plexiglass between booths, said Christina Angelos, manager of Jameson's social media and marketing. The Arlington Heights restaurant is not part of the restaurant group, Angelos said.

Restaurant party rooms will be repurposed for general dining to allow for proper distancing, she said.

Face coverings are required for servers, she said, while patrons must wear them in common spaces.

"The challenging part is getting customers to adhere to (safety guidelines)," Angelos said. "But we're definitely doing our part."

The pandemic changed the way the group operates, Angelos acknowledged, but the chain has learned how to adapt in the 30 years since it opened its flagship in Mount Prospect.

That restaurant "never missed a beat" as it transitioned to carryout and curbside service during the initial weeks of the pandemic, Angelos said.

"That was an indicator to us that we'll be fine in the long term," she said.

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