

RALEIGH, N.C. — A new public health initiative called [Count on Me NC](#) will help travelers identify restaurants, hotels and attractions committed to best safety practices as North Carolina businesses reopen after Gov. Roy Cooper's stay-at-home order during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A collaboration led by the [N.C. Restaurant and Lodging Association](#) in partnership with [Visit North Carolina](#), the [N.C. Department of Health and Human Services](#) and [NC State Extension](#), the initiative centers on an [evidence-based training program](#) with specific guidance for sanitation and service. Upon completing the voluntary training, businesses will receive a certificate for display plus access to sea-green logos to use for signage, name badges and tabletop items.

Count on Me NC also includes a [consumer pledge](#) to use best practices for protecting the health of companions, fellow customers and hospitality workers. The pledge follows the "three Ws" advocated by Gov. Cooper: wearing a face covering, waiting at a distance of 6 feet from others and washing hands frequently.

"Count on Me NC conveys a sense of mutual responsibility as we welcome guests back into our dining rooms and other establishments," said Lynn Minges, NCRLA's president and CEO. "Customers will appreciate the commitment of our restaurants, hotels and other businesses to protect their health, the health of other patrons, and the health of our employees by following the guidance of top medical experts in cleaning and sanitizing public spaces. At the same time, the presence of hand sanitizer and other cues will remind them to do their part to limit risk to their companions, fellow consumers and the people serving them."

NC State Extension developed the training modules using its renowned team of experts in food safety training and adult education. NC State Extension responded quickly by anchoring the program, which is offered free of charge, on its existing system for delivering adult education online.

"The training incorporates the best available science," said Dr. Ben Chapman, professor and food safety specialist at N.C. State University. "All trainings and materials follow a rigorous content development and review process."

Training for restaurants began last week in preparation for reopening as early as Friday. The modules cover employee health checks and hygiene practices, dining room arrangement and waiting-area management, heightened sanitation of high-touch surfaces, cleaning product safety, menus, place settings and payment systems.

"All courses, as well as versions in Spanish, will be made available in the coming weeks," said Larry Michael, chief of the Environmental Health Section of NCHHS's Division of Public Health.

Visit NC, which markets the state to domestic and international travelers, will encourage involvement from local tourism leaders, museums, attractions, outfitters, retailers and other tourism-related businesses. Visit NC will draw on its vast network of travelers to build visitor awareness of the program.

"Research shows us that the public is eager to begin traveling and dining out," said Visit NC Director Wit Tuttell. "It also shows that they have very high expectations for cleaning and social distancing protocols."

NCRLA, which has direct access to thousands of hospitality businesses statewide, is leading the public-private initiative through its Hospitality Education Foundation. Count on Me NC will also include webinars for county health departments, which carry out state-mandated inspections of restaurants, hotels and other properties. The webinars will keep health departments informed of Count on Me NC's specific guidance and protocols for responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

Related: Food lovers can support restaurant workforce with [#CookItForwardNC](#).

About Visit North Carolina:

Visit North Carolina is part of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that oversees the state's efforts in business and job recruitment and retention, international trade, and tourism, film and sports development. The mission of Visit NC is to unify and lead the state in developing North Carolina as a major destination for leisure travel, group tours, meetings and conventions, sports events and film production. One of the state's most vital industries, tourism generates economic activity and employment in each of the state's 100 counties. Domestic travelers to North Carolina spent \$26.7 billion in 2019 and contributed \$2.16 billion in state and local tax revenues. Tourism spending creates \$551 in yearly savings for the average household. VisitNC.com.

About the N.C. Restaurant & Lodging Association Foundation:

The NCRLA Foundation enhances the hospitality industry's service to the public through education, community engagement, and promotion of career opportunities. It provides relief for displaced workers through its [NC Restaurant Workers Relief Fund](#), offers scholarships for hospitality- and tourism-based learning; supports educational programs via grants and school-to-career programs; develops and provides continuing education programs; and builds North Carolina's hospitality workforce through career exploration and development programs, scholarships and image enhancement. www.ncrla.org

About the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services:

The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services works to advance the health, safety and well-being of all North Carolinians in collaboration with a wide array of partners and stakeholders. Within NCDHHS, the Division of Public Health promotes disease prevention, health services and health promotion programs that protect communities from communicable diseases, epidemics, and contaminated food and water. Its Environmental Health Section works to safeguard life, promote human health, and protect the environment through the practice of modern environmental health science, the use of technology, rules, public education and above all, dedication to the public trust. www.ncdhhs.gov

About NC State Extension:

NC State Extension transforms science into everyday solutions through programs and partnerships focused on agriculture and food, health and nutrition, and 4-H youth development. In response to local needs and concerns, Extension collaborates with specialists and transfers research-based knowledge and practical applications to North Carolina residents. The state's two land-grant universities, N.C. State University and N.C. A&T University, coordinate Extension programs that work in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture as well as state and local governments. Extension's efforts improve the economy and enhance residents' quality of life. www.ces.ncsu.edu

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CONTACT:

Suzanne Brown
919-703-5351
media@visitnc.com

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