

Background:

As Victoria (Vic) approaches its initial 70% target for double vaccinated citizens, R&CA has proposed a series of restrictions which would be introduced once the Vic Government is ready to re-open the hospitality sector across greater Melbourne. While R&CA welcomes the announcement today of a cautious re-opening in regional Victoria, it remains vital that a broad-scale re-opening of businesses within greater Melbourne be developed and communicated as soon as possible. While case numbers may have dictated the relaxation of rules in regional Victoria, it is clear that vaccination rates will be the variable which will allow the re-opening of hospitality businesses across greater Melbourne.

The Victorian Government, in conjunction with councils across Greater Melbourne, should be rolling out solutions to begin to welcome diners back into hospitality businesses as early as October. The release of a clear and sensible roadmap for hospitality business to return to dine in for vaccinated customers should govern the first easing of restrictions once vaccination rates reach 70% double dosed. R&CA believes that while outdoor should remain a focus, it is vitally important that a roadmap allow for indoor dining based on capacity, especially under vaccinated conditions.

1. 'Caulfield Cup Freedom Trial'-from 16 October

- R&CA recommends trialling a re-opening in a sample of LGA's in Greater Melbourne which have the combination of low case numbers and high vaccination rates with the following settings for all hospitality venues:
 - Max 100 Patrons Indoors (or 1 person per 4sqm)
 - 1 Person per 2sqm outdoors, with no patron cap
 - Mandatory mask wearing in place for both customers and staff
 - Check-ins are mandatory – both for QR 'Check-In' Feature and Vaccination Status unless in an exempt area (e.g. Regional Victoria) or for exempt patrons
 - Rapid Antigen Testing to be utilised for larger functions and events

NOTE: The policy settings outlined would only apply to double vaccinated patrons and staff.

2. 'Vax Up for the Melbourne Cup'-70% Re-opening

Restaurants & Cafes

- **1 person per 2sqm Outdoor-with no patron cap** (Note this rule does not apply for the first 25 patrons)
- **1 person per 4sqm Indoors-with no patron cap** (Note this rule does not apply for the first 25 patrons)
- **Mandatory mask wearing** in place for both customers and staff
- **Check-ins are mandatory** – both for QR 'Check-In' Feature and Vaccination Status unless in an exempt area (e.g. Regional Victoria) or for exempt patrons
- **Rapid Antigen Testing** to be utilised for larger functions and events
- **Alcohol must be consumed** by seated patrons

Functions & Events

- **1 person per 2sqm Outdoor** (Note this rule does not apply for the first 25 patrons)
- **1 person per 4sqm Indoors** (Note this rule does not apply for the first 25 patrons)
- **Mandatory mask wearing** in place for both customers and staff
- Check-ins are mandatory – both for QR ‘Check-In’ Feature and Vaccination Status unless in an exempt area (e.g. Regional Victoria) or for exempt patrons
- Rapid Antigen Testing to be utilised for larger functions and events
- Dancing is only allowed at weddings, and only the bridal party, or a maximum of 20 people, may dance.
- Alcohol must be consumed by seated patrons

NOTE: The policy settings outlined would only apply to double vaccinated patrons and staff, as enforced by Public Health Order on individuals.

3. Further Grant support to facilitate re-opening:

R&CA believes that hospitality venues should be able to access re-opening grants of \$5,000 for small business and \$10,000 per larger business under a hospitality specific top-up to support re-opening.

To assist businesses in making the transition to re-opening under a Roadmap, R&CA believes that the below should be made available immediately to assist businesses with meeting the significant cost of moving to outdoor dining:

- Fast-tracking outdoor dining permits to ensure businesses have the permits to set up outside
- Having the State Government waive or meet the cost of permits to local governments
- Making grants available for hospitality businesses to purchase or hire outdoor equipment such as tables, chairs and umbrellas

4. 80% Re-opening

- **Removal of all density rules and limits**
- **Re-open venues** to both vaccinated and non-vaccinated patrons and staff
- **Removal of mask mandates** for staff and customers
- QR Check-ins only for a reasonable period into 2022
- Dancing allowed for all attendees at weddings
- Vertical Consumption of Alcohol permitted

5. Inconsistencies with re-opening rules & grant programs

Recent restrictions announced by the Victorian Government have been confusing and contradictory in the way they deal with catering and events. R&CA strongly believes that catering and events should be treated as a separate sub-section of the hospitality guidelines, similarly to food and drink and food courts.

Common points of feedback from R&CA Catering Members

- **There is a real lack of clarity in Hospitality restrictions for functions and caterers.**

For example, having outdoor dining and indoor dining separated for functions and events, similar to other categories in the table of restrictions with similar levels of risk, for example Physical Recreation and Sport, Entertainment and Leisure, Creative Studios, Ceremonies & Religious Gatherings, Community Facilities.

- **Ensure business support packages do not let caterers fall through the cracks**

Current support packages completely insufficient as are not tailored to the business size. Catering businesses do not fit into the current one size fits all funding package. This could be resolved if there was a pathway for funding consideration for those that do not fall into the one size fits all, or if there was a way for businesses that applied for catering liquor licenses (temporary license) to be considered in the current Licensed Hospitality Support Fund. This could be solved by including catering liquor license (temporary license) within the current Licensed Hospitality Support Fund.

- **It is not financially viable for many functions and caterers to run events for any less than 150 people**

For many of R&CA members, they have clearly said that functions and catering were not able to begin at all between lockdown 5 and 6. The maximum party size of 10 guests means that businesses cannot hold events for up to weeks after restrictions begin to ease for other businesses. R&CA Members have expressed that a maximum party size of 10 per table, but up to 150 per group would be feasible, and they are prepared to add additional requirements to those events. For example, check in marshal, allocated seating, negative covid test, proof of double vaccination, staggered arrival time.

- **'Minor' Rules severely impact events' abilities to proceed.**

For example, no dancefloor rules mean that many functions do not proceed due to harsh rules. Functions with dancing then cannot proceed, even though the risk should be seen as the same across various event types and interactions. For example, many patrons feel that with the Delta variant, eating and drinking at a table with 10 others poses a similar risk of transmission as dancing. Health orders should not distinguish between weddings and other functions in terms of how minor restriction rules are implemented.

R&CA Recommendations:

1. Utilise 150/300 (indoor/outdoor) like others or even 150/150 across all event types.
2. Expand the Licensed Hospitality Support Fund to include Caterers, or provide opportunity to apply for this fund.
3. Remove the 'group limit' of 10.
4. Ensure that dancing is not restricted to weddings.