Due to COVID, there has understandably been plenty of confusion about whether it is safe or even legal to accept or use reusable cups and other items.

For Plastic Free July, the team at Sunshine Coast Council Living Smart, #BYOSunshineCoast have consulted with all the important folks like government departments, Responsible Cafes and other industry bodies, and local businesses to find out what is happening on the ground and what it means for businesses.

This quick guide is designed to clear up confusion and build confidence so you can safely reintroduce reusables to your business when you’re ready. Of course, this is a constantly changing landscape so we will update this guide as new information comes to hand.

Can reusable cups be accepted by cafés and restaurants in Queensland?
The short answer is yes, if you follow the relevant guidelines. It is neither mandatory nor illegal to use or service reusable cups or other reusable systems. However, the rules depend on the pathway you have taken to re-open your business.

**“While the Industry Covid Safe Plan recommends that BYO items should be refused, it is not mandated. It is a matter for the business to decide when considering the risk.”**

– Email from QLD Health on 23 June 2020.
Covid Safe Plan and Covid Safe Checklist requirements

Restaurants and cafes can choose one of two pathways for reopening: an approved Industry Covid Safe Plan or a Covid Safe Checklist (which requires staff to undertake either a TAFE or industry training course).

The table below outlines the different pathways and their impacts on reusables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>APPROVED INDUSTRY COVID SAFE PLAN</th>
<th>COVID SAFE CHECKLIST (TAFE COURSE GUIDELINES)</th>
<th>COVID SAFE CHECKLIST (RCA COURSE GUIDELINES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of patrons</strong></td>
<td>Can exceed 20 person limit</td>
<td>Up to 20 seated customers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td>No training requirement.</td>
<td>Staff to complete mandatory training within 2 weeks of reopening (TAFE or RCA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dine in Service:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cutlery, utensils and</strong></td>
<td>Permitted if cleared after each course and washed in a commercial dishwasher.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>reusables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Takeaway:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cutlery and utensils</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>All cutlery and utensils provided for self-service takeaway are single use (directive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Takeaway: Reusables</strong></td>
<td>Businesses should refuse to accept reusable cups, BYO alcohol bottles or containers; but is not a mandatory requirement*</td>
<td>No advice</td>
<td>Course advises to provide single use items</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“We just need someone to say that we can return to reusables. We just need some guidance or advice and currently we just aren’t sure.”

– Kunara Café, Forest Glen

What does the science say?

Food Standards Australia, the World Health Organisation and the Centres for Disease Control have all issued statements indicating there is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through food or packaging.

Over 115 scientists and health experts from across the world including United States, Canada, France and Italy issued a statement in June saying “based on the best available science and guidance from public health professionals, it is clear that reusable systems can be used safely by employing basic hygiene.”
How to support a safe return to reusables.
If you are keen to bring back reusables, here are some helpful tips that other local cafes have adopted to accept reusables by:

- Communicating effectively with staff and customers
- Accepting only clean reusable cups
- Having the customer hold onto their lids
- Pouring the coffee/milk directly into the cup without contact (some cafes have used trays)
- Using a swap cup system

Every business is different so it’s important to do what is right for you, your business and your staff.

Keep it clean
Only accept clean, washed and dry cups or containers. Display clear information of this policy and inform staff on how it should be applied. Here is a great example from Responsible Cafes

“Didn’t think it was the right thing to do because of hygiene. People who bring in their cups often don’t bring them in clean.”
– Café Nurcha, Maroochydore

Contactless pour
Avoiding contact with a customer’s cup is possible with a little preparation using contactless pour techniques.

5 steps to perfect contactless coffee:
1. Pour coffee shot into an in-house vessel
2. Have the customer set the cup on counter
3. Pour the shot into cup without touching it
4. Pour steamed milk on top
5. Have the customer place their own lid

“We saw a video of a ‘contactless pour’ from another cafe on Instagram. This gave us the confidence, and a method, to do it ourselves.”
– Pioneer Coffee Roastery
Set up a swap cup system

A great way to serve contactless coffee in a reusable cup is to implement a reusable swap-cup system in your cafe. Simply swap out cups and put them straight into your commercial dishwasher. Check out:

- Green Caffeen
- Huskee Swap

Not ready for reusables? Go plastic-free!

If your business is not quite ready to return to reusables, consider using plastic-free or a compostable alternative. Natural packaging materials like wood, paper, palm leaf or sugarcane are not as expensive as you might think. Here are some great local resources for alternative packaging options.

- Guide to Takeaway Packaging
- Compostable Catalogues and Local Suppliers

Communicate with your staff and customers.

Whatever path you choose, be sure to train your staff and let your customers know. Use your social media channels to get the word out. Put up signs. Make sure they understand the processes ie drop zone, hold your lid. For the most part, customers understand that this is a time of change and we’re all doing our best to adapt.

For those keen to read the more detailed background document, please drop us a line to theteam@livingsmartqldcom.au

The research to inform these fact sheets has been conducted by Chad Buxton, Circular Communities on behalf of Sunshine Coast Council, Living Smart #BYOSunshineCoast. All efforts have been made to provide the most up to date, useful and accurate information. They will be updated as required.