

Are dining tents a safe way to eat out during the pandemic?

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Are dining tents a safe way to eat out during the pandemic? AP Illustration/Peter Hamlin

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Health experts say outdoor dining tents are generally safer than dining inside, but caution that they're not all equal.

Many restaurants are erecting individual tents, igloos and other outdoor structures that let people who are dining together avoid being indoors, where the [coronavirus](#) spreads more easily.

Experts say the structures should be well-ventilated. A [tent](#) with four walls and a roof, for example, might not have better ventilation than an indoor dining room.

"The more airflow through the structure, the better it is," says Dr. Isaac Weisfuse, a public health [expert](#) at Cornell University.

Igloos and individual tents are a creative solution but shouldn't be shared with people who aren't in your household, says Craig Hedberg, a professor at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health.

"If it's keeping you from being in a common airspace with other people, then that's a good thing," he says.

Between parties, tents should be cleaned and left open for at least 20 minutes, says Aubree Gordon, an associate professor at the University of Michigan School of Public Health. She also suggests servers should be able to leave food on a tray outside to minimize contact with diners.

Tents are helping many restaurants get through lean times. But they may cost extra. In Detroit, Lumen restaurant charges \$30 per person to reserve a heated structure with windows for two hours. Lumen's igloos and greenhouses can each seat six people, and the party must spend at least \$300.

Once a party leaves, the structure is cleaned, sprayed with sanitizing fog and aired out for 30 minutes, says Gabby Milton, the [restaurant's](#) managing partner.

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