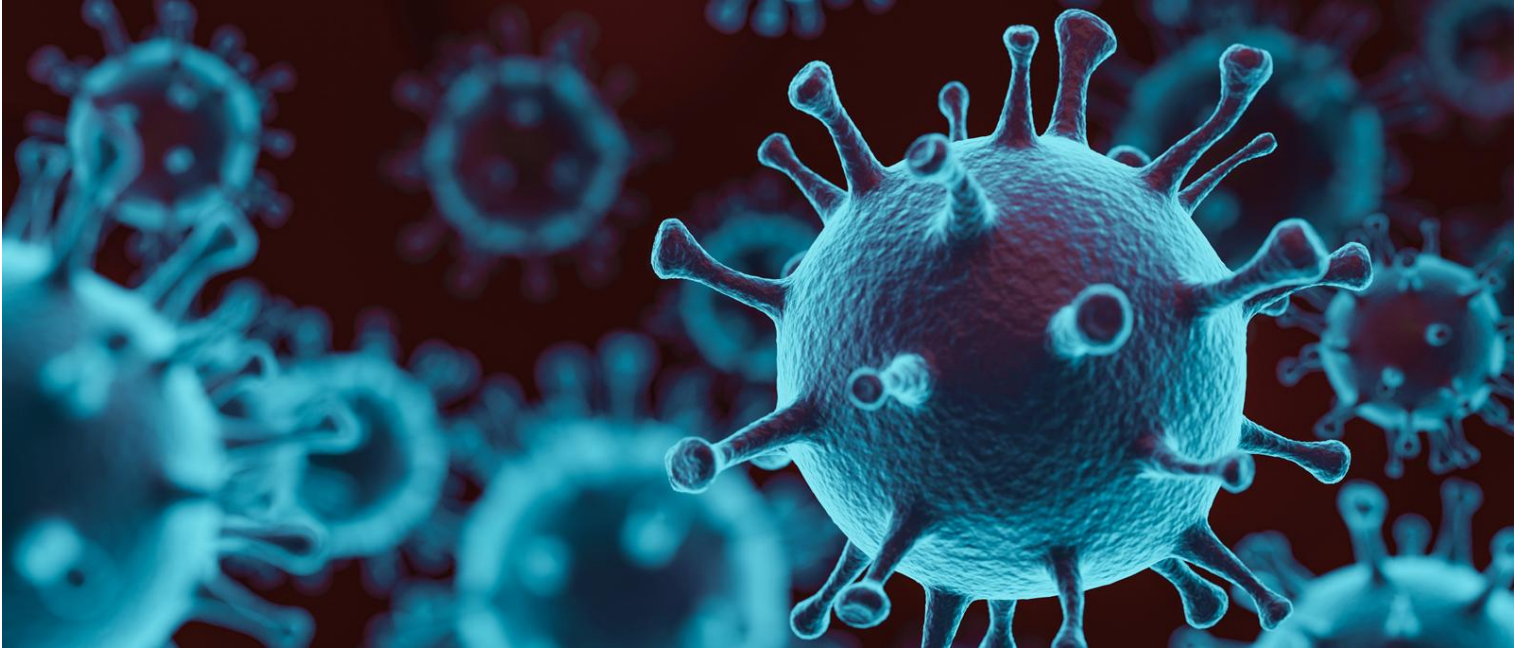


Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)



The following are resources available to industry members and consumers on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and food safety.

For additional information, visit FDA's main page **Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)** (</emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>).

Contact FDA

*Those who have **symptoms** (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>) should contact their health care provider to report their symptoms and receive care. For additional information, see CDC's *What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)* (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>).*

COVID-19 is a priority for FDA. Submitting your question online enables us to appropriately and efficiently triage and respond to each inquiry, allowing us to improve our overall customer service and increase our ability to provide accurate and timely responses.

Submit an inquiry at <https://cfsan.secure.force.com/Inquiry> (<https://cfsan.secure.force.com/Inquiry>) [↗](http://www.fda.gov/about-fda/website-policies/website-disclaimer) (<http://www.fda.gov/about-fda/website-policies/website-disclaimer>)

For additional assistance from the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) on food safety matters, visit Industry and Consumer Assistance from CFSAN (</food/resources-you-food/industry-and-consumer-assistance-cfsan>).

Industry Guidance

Guidance for Industry: Temporary Policy Regarding Preventive Controls and FSVP Food Supplier Verification Onsite Audit Requirements During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-temporary-policy-regarding-preventive-controls-and-fsvp-food-supplier-verification)

Guidance to communicate FDA's intention to temporarily not enforce supplier verification onsite audit requirements for receiving facilities and importers under the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (/food/guidance-regulation-food-and-dietary-supplements/food-safety-modernization-act-fsma) (FSMA) in response to the global pandemic of COVID-19

Questions & Answers

March 23, 2020

How do I maintain social distancing in my food production/processing facility and food retail establishment where employees typically work within close distances?

To prevent spread of COVID-19, CDC is recommending individuals employ social distancing or maintaining approximately 6 feet from others, when possible. In food production/processing facilities and retail food establishments, an evaluation should be made to identify and implement operational changes that increase employee separation. However, social distancing to the full 6 feet will not be possible in some food facilities.

Workers in the food and agriculture sector fill critical and essential roles within communities. Promoting the ability of our workers within the food and agriculture industry to continue to work during periods of community restrictions, social distances, and closure orders, among others, is crucial to community continuity and community resilience. This was reinforced by DHS in its Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce: Ensuring Community and National Resilience in COVID-19 (<https://www.cisa.gov/identifying-critical-infrastructure-during-covid-19>).

The risk of an employee transmitting COVID-19 to another is dependent on distance between employees, the duration of the exposure, and the effectiveness of employee hygiene practices and sanitation. When it's impractical for employees in these settings to maintain social distancing, effective hygiene practices should be maintained to reduce the chance of spreading the virus.

IMPORTANT: Maintaining social distancing in the absence of effective hygiene practices may not prevent the spread of this virus. Food facilities should be vigilant in their hygiene practices, including frequent and proper hand-washing and routine cleaning of all surfaces.

Because the intensity of the COVID-19 outbreak may differ according to geographic location, coordination with state and local officials is strongly encouraged for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside.

Sick employees should follow the CDC's What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>)) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>)).

Will FDA/EPA approve off-label use of quaternary ammonium sanitizer at 200 ppm as a hand sanitizer for checkers and customers? It is currently on the EPA approved list for use in retail to sanitize food prep areas, dishes etc., and we would like to use it instead of gel hand sanitizer due to the lack of availability.

We are aware of temporary out-of-stock conditions of alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Several manufacturers of these products have indicated that they are working to replenish supplies. In addition, the FDA has issued guidance for the temporary compounding of certain alcohol-based hand sanitizers by pharmacists in state-licensed pharmacies or federal facilities and registered outsourcing facilities. See Immediately in Effect Guidance for Industry: Policy for Temporary Compounding of Certain Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizer Products During the Public Health Emergency (</media/136118/download>). FDA has also issued guidance for the temporary preparation of certain alcohol-based hand sanitizer products by firms during the public health emergency (COVID-19). See Guidance for Industry: Temporary Policy for Preparation of Certain Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizer Products During the Public Health Emergency (COVID-19) (</media/136289/download>).

Hand sanitizers are not intended to replace handwashing in food production and retail (</food/retail-food-industryregulatory-assistance-training/retail-food-protection-employee-health-and-personal-hygiene-handbook>) settings. Instead, hand sanitizers may be used in addition to or in combination with proper handwashing. CDC recommends that everyone wash their hands with plain soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers may be used if plain soap and water are not available.

As an interim measure, we understand some food establishments have set up quaternary ammonium hand-dip stations and sprays at 200 ppm concentration. These products are intended for use on surfaces, and as such, may not be formulated for use on skin. FDA is aware of adverse event reports from consumers using such products as a replacement for hand sanitizers and advises against using these products as replacements for hand sanitizers.

Should employees, such as cashiers, baggers, and cleaning personnel in food retail settings wear face masks to prevent exposure to COVID-19?

CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms. This is to protect others from the risk of getting infected. The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone with COVID-19 in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).

CDC recommends (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>) everyday preventive actions for everyone, including service industry workers and customers:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

A worker in my food production/processing facility/farm has tested positive for COVID-19. What do I need to do to continue operations while protecting my other employees?

All components of the food industry are considered critical infrastructure and it is therefore vital that they continue to operate.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19 (<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>) that includes information on how a COVID-19 outbreak could affect workplaces and steps all employers can take to reduce workers' risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) (<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>).

Food production/processing facilities/farms need to follow protocols, including cleaning protocols, set by local and state health departments, which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in a given area. These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission – not based on food safety.

If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality about individual employees' identities. Sick employees should follow the CDC's What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>)

CDC's Interim US Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Managements of Persons with Potential Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Exposures: Geographic Risk and Contacts of Laboratory-confirmed Cases, provides a framework for assessing and managing risks of potential exposures to SARS-CoV-2.

March 20, 2020

Are workers in the human and animal food and feed sector considered part of the essential critical infrastructure workforce?

Yes, in a guidance issued by Department of Homeland Security on March 19 Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure workforce: Ensuring Community and National Resilience in COVID-19 (<https://www.cisa.gov/identifying-critical-infrastructure-during-covid-19>), workers in the Food and Agriculture sector – agricultural production, food processing, distribution, retail and food service and allied industries – are named as essential critical infrastructure workers. Promoting the ability of our workers within the food and agriculture industry to continue to work during periods of community restrictions, social distances, and closure orders, among others, is crucial to community continuity and community resilience.

Where should I send questions if we are having problems moving food or getting food through areas that have curfews and restrictions because of the coronavirus?

If you are experiencing issues regarding your supply chain, delivery of goods, or business continuity, please contact the FEMA National Business Emergency Operations Center at NBEOC@fema.dhs.gov. This is a 24/7 operation and they can assist in directing your inquiry to the proper contact.

March 17, 2020

Q: Is the U.S. food supply safe?

Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19.

Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses like norovirus and hepatitis A that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a virus that causes respiratory illness. Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission.


The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. This includes between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. However, it's always critical to follow the 4 key steps of food safety—clean, separate, cook, and chill – to prevent foodborne illness.

Q: Will there be food shortages?

There are no nationwide shortages of food, although in some cases the inventory of certain foods at your grocery store might be temporarily low before stores can restock. Food production and manufacturing are widely dispersed throughout the United States and no widespread disruptions have been reported in the supply chain.

FDA is closely monitoring the food supply chain for any shortages in collaboration with industry and our federal and state partners. We are in regular contact with food manufacturers and grocery stores.

Q: Where should the food industry go for guidance about business operations?

Food facilities, like other work establishments, need to follow protocols set by local and state health departments, which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in a particular area. We encourage coordination with local (<https://www.naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory>)  (<http://www.fda.gov/about-fda/website-policies/website-disclaimer>) health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where they have operations..

Q: A worker in my food processing facility/farm has tested positive for COVID-19. What steps do I need to take to ensure that the foods I produce are safe?

Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 by food. Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses like norovirus and hepatitis A that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a virus that causes respiratory illness. Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission.

If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality. Sick employees should follow the CDC’s What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>). Employers should consult with the local health department for additional guidance.

While the primary responsibility in this instance is to take appropriate actions to protect other workers and people who might have come in contact with the ill employee, facilities should re-double their cleaning and sanitation efforts to control any risks that might be associated with workers who are ill regardless of the type of virus or bacteria. For example, facilities are required to maintain clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces.

See: FSMA Final Rule for Preventive Controls for Human Food (</food/food-safety-modernization-act-fsma/fsma-final-rule-preventive-controls-human-food>).

- Food facilities are required to use EPA-registered “sanitizer” products in their cleaning and sanitizing practices.
- In addition, there is a list of EPA-registered “disinfectant” products for COVID-19 on the Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 list (https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/sars-cov-2-list_03-03-2020.pdf) that have qualified under EPA’s emerging viral pathogen program (<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/guidance-registrants-process-making-claims-against-emerging-viral-pathogens>) for use against SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.
- **IMPORTANT:** Check the product label guidelines for if and where these disinfectant products are safe and recommended for use in food manufacturing areas or food establishments.

Q: Do I need to recall food products produced in the facility during the time that the worker was potentially shedding virus while working?

We do not anticipate that food products would need to be recalled or be withdrawn from the market because of COVID-19, as there is currently no evidence to support the transmission of COVID-19 associated with food or food packaging.

Additionally, facilities are required to control any risks that might be associated with workers who are ill regardless of the type of virus or bacteria. For example, facilities are required to maintain clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces.

Q: If a worker in my food processing facility/farm has tested positive for COVID-19, Should I close the facility? If so, for how long?

Food facilities need to follow protocols set by local and state health departments, which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in a given area. These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission – not based on food safety.

Q: How do I handle self-service food buffets such as salad bars in a retail setting related to COVID-19?

Restaurants and retail food establishments are regulated at the state and local level. State, local, and tribal regulators use the Food Code ([/food/retail-food-protection/fda-food-code](#)) published by the FDA to develop or update their own food safety rules. Again, there is no current evidence to support the transmission of COVID-19 associated with food or food packaging.

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or possibly eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. The coronavirus is mostly spread from one person to another through respiratory droplets. However, it's always critical to follow the 4 key steps of food safety—clean, separate, cook, and chill—to prevent foodborne illness.

As an extra precaution to help avoid the transmission of COVID-19 through surface contact, we recommend frequent washing and sanitizing of all food contact surfaces and utensils. Food-service workers also must practice frequent hand washing and glove changes before and after preparing food. Include frequent cleaning and sanitizing of counters and condiment containers. Consumers should wash their hands after using serving utensils.

In communities with sustained transmission of COVID-19, state and local health authorities have implemented social-distancing measures which discourage or prohibit dining in congregate settings. We also recommend discontinuing self-service buffets and salad bars until these measures are lifted.

Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses like norovirus and hepatitis A that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a virus that causes respiratory illness. Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission.

Q: What steps do I need to take to clean the facility/equipment to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

FDA-regulated food manufacturers are required to follow Current Good Manufacturing Practices (CGMPs) and many have food safety plans (/food/food-safety-modernization-act-fsma/food-safety-plan-builder) that include a hazards analysis and risk-based preventive controls. CGMPs and food safety plans have requirements for maintaining clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces. See: FSMA Final Rule for Preventive Controls for Human Food (/food/food-safety-modernization-act-fsma/fsma-final-rule-preventive-controls-human-food).

- Food facilities are required to use EPA-registered “sanitizer” products in their cleaning and sanitizing practices.
- In addition, there is a list of EPA-registered “disinfectant” products for COVID-19 on the Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 list (https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/sars-cov-2-list_03-03-2020.pdf) that have qualified under EPA’s emerging viral pathogen program (<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/guidance-registrants-process-making-claims-against-emerging-viral-pathogens>) for use against SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.
- **IMPORTANT:** Check the product label guidelines for if and where these disinfectant products are safe and recommended for use in food manufacturing areas or food establishments.
- We encourage coordination with local (<https://www.naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory>) ↗ (<http://www.fda.gov/about-fda/website-policies/website-disclaimer>) health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside.
- Food facilities may want to consider a more frequent cleaning schedule.

Q: Do I need to ask other workers who may have been exposed to a worker who tested positive for COVID-19 to self-quarantine for 14 days?

Employers need to follow guidelines set by state and local authorities. If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality. Sick employees should follow the CDC’s What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>). Employers should consult with the local health department for additional guidance.

Q: What measures are FDA (and CDC, state partners, etc.) taking to ensure that we remain able to address foodborne illness outbreaks during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses like norovirus and hepatitis A that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a virus that causes respiratory, not gastrointestinal, illness. Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission.

With respect to foodborne pathogens, CDC, FDA, and FSIS continue to work with state and local partners to investigate foodborne illness and outbreaks. FDA's Coordinated Outbreak Response and Evaluation (CORE) Network manages outbreak response, as well as surveillance and post-response activities related to incidents involving multiple illnesses linked to FDA-regulated human food products, including dietary supplements, and cosmetic products. During this coronavirus outbreak, CORE's full-time staff will continue to operate to prepare for, coordinate and carry out response activities to incidents of foodborne illness.

FDA's Center for Veterinary medicine manages outbreak response for animal food and is similarly staffed and prepared to respond to incidents of foodborne illness in animals.

CDC, FDA, FSIS and state and local public health partners are maintaining routine public health surveillance for infections and outbreaks that may be transmitted through foods. CDC continues to lead and coordinate investigations of multistate foodborne events, consults with states as needed on events within a single state, and works closely with FDA and FSIS investigators so that contaminated foods are traced back to their sources and controlled.