



COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Retail Food Establishments

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) coronavirus. COVID-19 was first discovered in China in December of 2019 and the first case was reported in Arkansas on March 11, 2020.

How does COVID-19 spread?

It is believed that there is a low risk of spread through food. However, due to the close contact that occurs between customers and staff at a retail food establishment you should be proactive in preventing the spread of this illness.

The virus primarily spreads via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person sneezes or coughs. These droplets can travel up to 6 feet. 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 own mouth, nose, or possibly eyes, however this is not believed to be the main way the virus spreads.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can be mild, and in some cases can be severe enough to require hospitalization. Symptoms of COVID-19 can include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Severe complications can include pneumonia, multiple-organ failure and in some cases death. For more symptoms go here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/symptoms.html>

How can transmission of COVID-19 be prevented in my restaurant?

The best way to prevent transmission is to avoid contact with the virus. Therefore, you should ensure you and your staff:

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home if you are sick or have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Clean and sanitize surfaces that are frequently touched (counters, doorknobs, toilets, phones, etc.) Products with an EPA-approved emerging viral pathogen claims are expected to be effective against COVID-19. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for these products. For a list of EPA-approved emerging pathogen sanitizers: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
- Sanitize food contact surfaces in accordance with §4-501.114 of the Rules Pertaining to Retail Food Establishments.
- Sanitize non-food contact surfaces with 1/2 cup of regular, unscented bleach per gallon of water followed by a 5-minute contact time.

What do I do if an employee shows symptoms of a fever and cough in my retail food facility?

In addition to excluding employees who have symptoms as noted in §2-201.11 of the Rules Pertaining to Retail Food Establishments you should exclude any employee who has a fever and cough.

What do I do if a customer shows symptoms of COVID-19?

The spread of COVID-19 occurs when people are in close contact (less than 6 feet). Some recommended actions include:

- Clean and sanitize any objects or surfaces that the customer may have touched
- Make sure an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is available for customers
- Provide the customer additional napkins or tissues to use when they cough or sneeze

I have a buffet type restaurant where customers serve themselves. Are there any recommended preventions I can use?

At this time the Arkansas Department of Health recommends not using self-serve buffets and advises that staff be provided to serve patrons if necessary. If this is not feasible for your facility, you should:

- Frequently sanitize and replace utensils that are used for customer self-service.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers at the entrance to your restaurant and other areas throughout the facility where they would be easily accessible for customer use. *NOTE: Alcohol-based sanitizers should not be stored in areas where they may contaminate food.*

What do I do if one of my employees tests positive for COVID-19?

The employee should be excluded from working in the facility until they are symptom free and have been cleared to return to work by their primary care physician and the Arkansas Department of Health

ADH staff, as part of our contact investigation, will reach out to close contacts of the employee who tested positive to discuss further needed actions.

The Arkansas Department of Health also recommends that the facility close temporarily to clean and sanitize all surfaces.

Additional Resources:

Arkansas Department of Health COVID-19 website:

<https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/novel-coronavirus>

United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>



For More Information Contact:

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