



## The FDA Continues to Release Answers to Questions That Have Been Pending

The Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Food and Cosmetic Information Center (FCIC)/Technical Assistance Network (TAN) has prepared responses for questions of interest to AFDO members that were posed during the recent webinar on COVID-19. Answers appear with the newer answers first. After each question is the TAN answer reference number and date the answer was released by TAN.

Real time updates of the FDA's Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) page can be found at <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>. Updates are dated so you are able to tell what information has been added each time.

### ***Questions answered on 3.24.20***

***What guidelines do you recommend for condiments on each dining table? Is it necessary to increase distances between dining tables? Or should we encourage 'take out' or 'pick up?'*** 229517 3.24.20

Food establishments need to follow protocols set by local and state health departments (and/or departments of agriculture), which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in a particular area. These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission - not based on food safety. We encourage coordination with [local health officials](#) for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where they have operations.

The President's [Coronavirus Guidelines for America](#) recommends citizens avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people. 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. Instead of eating and drinking at bars, restaurants, and food courts, individuals should use drive-thru, pick-up or delivery options.

***What do you do when the food employee is positive (salad preparer, waitress, dish staff)?*** 229493 3.24.20

Employees who have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 should stay home. Employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately.



Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available). CDC recommends that employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.

We recommend that businesses review CDC's [interim guidance for businesses and employers](#) for planning and responding to coronavirus disease. Also see the FDA's [Retail Food Protection: Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook](#) for additional information.

### **Questions answered on 3.23.20**

#### ***What do you do when a restaurant customer is coughing?* 229497 3.23.20**

In general, everyone should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available). Employers need to follow guidelines set by state and local authorities.

If a customer or an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform 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 \(COVID-19\)](#). Employers should consult with the local health department for additional guidance.

#### ***I have had several questions regarding transmission possibilities and probabilities regarding and relating to eating at retail food establishments, drive thru, or delivery. Basically, should people eat and prepare food at home and not go out to eat?* 229499 3.23.20**

Currently, FDA is not recommending that food establishments shut down as there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19 at this time.

However, in line with the President's [Coronavirus Guidelines for America](#), we encourage citizens to avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people. 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. Instead of eating and drinking at bars, restaurants, and food courts, individuals should use drive-thru, pick-up or delivery options.



Food establishments, like other work establishments, need to follow protocols set by local and state health departments (and/or departments of agriculture), which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in a particular area. These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission – not based on food safety. We encourage coordination with local health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where they have operations. *For more information, see [FDA answers to frequently asked questions on COVID-19](#).*

***Are there recommendations for when in this situation the food handling guidance needs to be more specific? For example, limiting self-serve operations, salad bars, etc. 229464 3.23.20***

Currently, FDA is not recommending that food establishments shut down as there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19 at this time.

However, in line with the President's [Coronavirus Guidelines for America](#), we encourage citizens to avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people. 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. Instead of eating and drinking at bars, restaurants, and food courts, individuals should use drive-thru, pick-up or delivery options.

Food establishments, like other work establishments, need to follow protocols set by local and state health departments (and/or departments of agriculture), which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in a particular area.

These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission – not based on food safety. We encourage coordination with local health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where they have operations.

*Read [CDC's interim guidance for business and employees](#).  
Access [FDA answers to frequency asked questions on COVID-19](#).*

***As food service regulators, we now focus on the fecal-oral route for transmission of disease from food workers or customers. Should we emphasize reducing droplet transmission of this disease by these sorts of actions? 229477 3.23.20***



It is important to emphasize reducing droplet transmission, since the virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. This includes transmission between people who are in close contact with one another, and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

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 emphasize the following four key steps of food safety when communicating with retail food establishments—clean, separate, cook, and chill – to prevent foodborne illness.

It is also important to emphasize as an extra precaution to help avoid the transmission of COVID-19 through surface contact, 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. In communities with sustained transmission of COVID-19, state and local health authorities have implemented social-distancing measures which discourage or prohibit dining in congregated settings. We also recommend discontinuing self-service buffets and salad bars until these measures are lifted.

The following resources can be used in the planning and response efforts to coronavirus:

- [CDC's interim guidance for businesses and employers](#)
- [FDA's Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [New food-specific FAQ website](#)

***We have a food establishment employee test positive for COVID-19, the employee had worked in the establishment recently. What should be done with the establishment? 229471 3.23.20***

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 \(COVID-19\)](#).

Employers should consult with the local health department for additional guidance. CDC recommends that employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual. We recommend that businesses review [CDC's interim guidance](#)



for businesses and employers for planning and responding to coronavirus disease. Also see the FDA's Retail Food Protection: Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook.

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 be maintain clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces.

Food establishments 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 that have qualified under EPA’s emerging viral pathogen program for use against SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Be sure to check the product label guidelines for if and where these disinfectant products are safe and recommended for use in food establishments.

We encourage coordination with local health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside. Food establishments may want to consider a more frequent cleaning schedule.

***In school salad bars, even child-height sneeze guards are over the heads of kindergarten and first graders. Should we suggest these age children instead be served these items from behind the serving counter? They are also more likely to touch salad bar food, etc. Of course in small children the disease is less severe, but children could pass it on to babysitting grandparents, etc.*** 229484 3.23.20

In communities with sustained transmission of COVID-19, state and local health authorities have implemented social-distancing measures which discourage or prohibit dining in congregated settings. During this time, we recommend discontinuing self-service buffets and salad bars until these measures are lifted. We also recommend reviewing the CDC guidance for schools and childcare programs.

As always, it is important 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. We encourage coordination with local health officials for all food establishments so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where they have operations.



***In the event that a food handler tests positive and worked while symptomatic; what, if anything should be done to minimize risk to coworkers and consumers? (e.g. identifying the food handler duties; customer notification?) 229513 3.23.20***

Employees who have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 should stay home. Employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available). CDC recommends that employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.

We recommend that businesses review [CDC's interim guidance for businesses and employers](#) for planning and responding to coronavirus disease. Also see the FDA's [Retail Food Protection: Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook](#).

***We had a food worker, who had a roommate that tested positive for COVID-19 should that employee be allowed to continue working? Should there be any restrictions? 229473 3.23.20***

Thank you for your inquiry to the FDA Food & Cosmetics Information Center concerning employees with a member of their household known to have COVID-19.

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

We encourage coordination with local health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where they have operations.

Currently, the [President's Coronavirus Guidelines for America](#) recommends individuals who have someone in their household that has tested positive for the coronavirus to stay home. CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available).





We recommend that businesses review CDC's interim guidance for businesses and employers for planning and responding to coronavirus disease. Also see the FDA's Retail Food Protection: Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook. Thank you.

## **Questions answered on 3.20.20**

### ***Is Coronavirus foodborne?* 229516. 3.20.20**

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.

### ***What do you do when a food employee is in the same household as someone under quarantine for exposure to a positive individual?* (229491) 3.20.20**

Employees who have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or a person under quarantine for exposure to a positive individual should stay home. Employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available). CDC recommends that employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual. We recommend that businesses review CDC's interim guidance for businesses and



employers for planning and responding to coronavirus disease. Also see the FDA's Retail Food Protection: Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook for additional information.

***In self-serve areas like at a buffet, utensils like spoons and stacks of plates are usually right next to customers and susceptible to sneezes. Should we ask food services to place these items behind the counter, as much as possible? 229488 3.20.20***

FDA encourages establishments to store utensils like spoons and stacks of plates in ways that prevent them from being susceptible to sneezes from customers. Therefore, FDA does not object to placing utensils behind the counter as much as possible during the current COVID-19 crisis. In line with the President's Coronavirus Guidelines for America, we encourage citizens to avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people.

Food establishments, like other work establishments, need to follow protocols set by local and state health departments (and/or departments of agriculture), which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in a particular area. These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission - not based on food safety.

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. We encourage coordination with local health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses.

We recommend that businesses review CDC's interim guidance for businesses and employers for planning and responding to coronavirus disease. Also see the FDA's Retail Food Protection: Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook for more information. There is additional information available at FDA answers to frequency asked questions on COVID-19 .

***Food warehouse-Is there any recommendations for food warehouses with exposed produce? 229470 3.20.20***

Currently, there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. Generally, FDA-regulated food facilities are required to follow the Current Good Manufacturing Practice, Hazard Analysis, and Risk-Based Controls for Human Food rule (21 CFR part 117), which has requirements for maintaining clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces. 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](#) that have qualified under EPA’s [emerging viral pathogen program](#) for use against SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. (You should 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.) 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](#) health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where they have operations.

For the latest information on COVID-19, please see [FDA’s Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) page](#).

***Should grocery stores shut down the self-service salad bars and hot food bars? If so, it is acceptable to switch to grab-N-go prepackaged items?*** 229463 **3.20.20**

Currently, FDA is not recommending that grocery stores shut down as there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19 at this time. However, in line with the President’s [Coronavirus Guidelines for America](#) we encourage citizens to avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people. 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. Food establishments, like other work establishments, need to follow protocols set by local and state health departments (and/or departments of agriculture), which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in a particular area. These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission – not based on food safety. We encourage coordination with local health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where they have operations.

*FDA supports the interim guidance issued by CDC for business and employees available at: [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fguidance-business-response.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fguidance-business-response.html)*

***What do you do when a restaurant customer is determined to be positive?*** 229495 **3.20.20**



Employers need to follow guidelines set by state and local authorities. If a customer or an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform 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 \(COVID-19\)](#). Employers should consult with the local health department for additional guidance.

We recommend that businesses review [CDC's interim guidance for businesses and employers](#) for planning and responding to coronavirus disease. See [FDA answers to frequency asked questions on COVID-19](#) for more information.

***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](#), 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](mailto:NBEOC@fema.dhs.gov). This is a 24/7 operation and they can assist in directing your inquiry to the proper contact.