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 3.30.20

Limiting self-service feeding stations such as salad bars and buffets. We have been advising our members to clean surfaces and utensils frequently and offer a way for sanitizing between customers. Several states and local jurisdictions are either banning or asking that buffets be closed down. Ohio issued a notice yesterday as well as a regional health commission in NJ and we also heard that Michigan was doing something. We are concerned that it will send a message that the food is unsafe and also limit options for customers. I have asked the CDC for guidance and they stated they were not aware of this being a source of transmission. 229520 3.30.20

Food establishments need to follow protocols, including closure and cleaning 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 regarding requirements so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where they have operations.

Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. 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. However, infected persons may have touched surfaces, including food and food packaging, and transferred viruses to these surfaces. The virus will degrade over time. The best way consumers can protect themselves is to follow CDC guidelines on how to protect yourself, especially the advice to frequently wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. We recommend that businesses review CDC’s interim guidance for businesses and employers for planning and responding to coronavirus disease.
Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 to persons from surfaces contaminated with the virus has not been documented, but CDC advises you to clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. View the EPA-registered disinfectant products 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.

Additional resources:
FAQs from FDA
FAQs from the USDA
FAQs from the CDC
CDC Situation Summary

Are there FDA “thoughts” on the CDC “guidance” for disinfecting your facility if someone is sick? The CDC general document isn't really practical in large settings such as manufacturing environments and retail stores. Hospitals aren’t WAITING 24 hrs. what FACILITY are they “referring” to? Is there anything available for food manufacturing / retail facilities can leverage?

-- Close off areas used by the sick person.
-- Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area.
-- Wait 24 hours (or as long as possible) before you clean or disinfect.
229983  3.30.20

FDA is regularly updating its website with resources available to industry members and consumers on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and food safety. The QAs below from the webpage referenced above may be of most interest to you.

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 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 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.

- 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 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: 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.
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).

Q: 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 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).

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).


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: 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). 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 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.
• 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: If a worker in my food processing facility has tested positive for COVID-19, should I test the environment for the SARS-CoV-2 virus? Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. Therefore, we do not believe there is a need to conduct environmental testing in food settings for the virus that causes COVID 19 for the purpose of food safety. Cleaning and sanitizing the surfaces is a better use of resources than testing to see if the virus is present. Facilities are required to use personnel practices that protect against contamination of food, food contact surfaces and packaging and to maintain clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces. Although it is possible that the infected worker may have touched surfaces in your facility, FDA-regulated food manufacturers are required to follow Current Good Manufacturing Practices (CGMPs). Maintaining CGMPs in the facility should minimize the potential for surface contamination and eliminate contamination when it occurs. With the detection of the coronavirus in asymptomatic people and studies showing survival of coronavirus on surfaces for short periods of time, as an extra precaution, food facilities may want to consider a more frequent cleaning and sanitation schedule for high human contact surfaces.

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 health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where they have operations. For additional information, visit FDA’s main page Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

End of Query 229983

What advice do you have if an employee’s mom has symptoms but is not sick enough to be tested? Do we allow the employee, who lives with her mom, to work?  229466  3.30.20

Thank you for your inquiry regarding an employee whose mother has symptoms, but not sick enough for a test. Your inquiry is outside the scope of this office, which covers food
and cosmetic safety. For specific information to address your inquiry, please refer to the CDC webpage: Coronavirus Disease 2019: Frequently Asked Questions.

**How will this affect people with pre-existing conditions, such as COPD?** 229462  3.30.20

Thank you for your inquiry regarding how the COVID-19 virus will affect people with pre-existing conditions, such as COPD. For specific information to address your inquiry, please refer to the CDC webpage: Coronavirus Disease 2019: Frequently Asked Questions.

**Reusable bags – this seems to be a common question. We use PFSE advise on reusable bags as well as have our own that states that bags need to be clean. Some jurisdictions have fees and/or taxes and stores. Others simply do not have the inventory of paper or plastic bags that they used to.** 229460  3.30.20

You stated that that stores do not have sufficient inventories of bags or charge fees or taxes. You asked iabout the safety of reusing bags.

As stated on FDA's website Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): "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. CDC notes that in general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient, refrigerated, or frozen temperatures. It is more likely that a person will be exposed by person-to-person transmission involving close contact with someone who is ill or shedding the virus.

"Consumers can follow CDC guidelines on how to protect yourself, especially the advice on frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; and frequent cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces.

"If you are concerned about contamination of food and food packaging you have purchased from the grocery store, wash your hands after handling food and food packages when you return from the grocery store and after removing packaging from food. In addition, it's always critical to follow the 4 key steps of food safety—clean, separate, cook, and chill – to prevent foodborne illness. FDA also has advice about safely selecting and serving raw produce."
Questions answered on 3.27.20

Another question is whether or not a business owner should be worrying about the possibility/probability of transmission of Covid-19 by the inspector either at retail or manufacturing regarding food or the employees. 229502 3.27.20

FDA has an unwavering commitment to protecting the health of FDA, state, and local personnel on the front lines of food safety as well as the health of the workers on farms and in human and animal food facilities all over the nation who play critical roles in helping to feed Americans and our animals every day.

We’ve taken steps to help reduce the risk of infection for FDA investigators and state inspectors in ways that won’t interrupt the process of how safe foods reach the market. Specifically, we have postponed routine surveillance inspections of domestic human and animal food facilities and farms out of concern for the health and well-being of FDA investigators and state inspectors and to respect industry safety concerns about visitors. We will, however, continue to inspect “for cause” when a potential threat to public health (human or animal) is identified.

As FDA Commissioner Dr. Stephen Hahn announced last week, we have also postponed most foreign inspections through April 2020 because of restrictions on travel and concerns about the safety of our investigators. We have other tools and authorities to help ensure the safety of imported foods, including inspections at the ports of entry and the use of PREDICT, our risk-based import screening tool to focus our examinations and sample collections.

We have also issued guidance on the FDA’s intention to temporarily not enforce onsite audit requirements for supplier verification under the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). These audits are designed to confirm compliance with safety standards but travel restrictions will likely prevent receiving facilities and importers from obtaining them.

For verification that would include a domestic or foreign onsite audit, facilities are expected to temporarily select an alternative way to verify compliance with food safety standards, such as sampling and testing, or food safety records review.

For more information, please see our recent statements:
FDA Offers Assurance About Food Safety and Supply for People and Animals During COVID-19

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update: FDA Focuses on Safety of Regulated Products While Scaling Back Domestic Inspections

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Update: Foreign Inspections
For the latest information on COVID-19, please see [FDA’s Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) page](https://www.fda.gov/CoronavirusDisease2019).

Questions answered on 3.25.20

Is there any evidence or information about whether COVID-19 virus shed in stool is infectious, or if it is rendered non-infectious in the gut? Or is this a total unknown? 229507  3.25.20

The virus that causes COVID-19 has been detected in the feces of some patients diagnosed with COVID-19. The amount of virus released from the body (shed) in stool, how long the virus is shed, and whether the virus in stool is infectious are not known.

The risk of transmission of COVID-19 from the feces of an infected person is also unknown. However, the risk is expected to be low based on data from previous outbreaks of related coronaviruses, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). There have been no reports of fecal-oral transmission of COVID-19 to date.

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.

**CDC recommends 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.

The following indicated potential fecal transmission of COVID-19. Is this possible? Is a foodborne outbreak possible from this pathogen? 229508  3.25.20
The virus that causes COVID-19 has been detected in the feces of some patients diagnosed with COVID-19. The amount of virus released from the body (shed) in stool, how long the virus is shed, and whether the virus in stool is infectious are not known.

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- 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.

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’?”

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

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.

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/what-to-know-about.html).

**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.**


Hand sanitizers are not intended to replace [handwashing in food production and retail](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html) 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** 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 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).

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).


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.
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
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.


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. This is a 24/7 operation and they can assist in directing your inquiry to the proper contact.