

Subject:

Working Together to Ensure Food Safety During the COVID-19 Emergency

Body Text:

As a precaution to prevent the spread of COVID-19, our staff is evaluating options for conducting essential food safety services while engaging in social distancing. During this stressful time for the food service industry, we are here to help. We will work together to ensure that the food customers are ordering from restaurants is safe. This need exists more during this event than any other emergency we have faced together.

The question we were facing was how to conduct food safety inspections while engaging in social distancing. Our normal routine and follow-up inspections do not allow for social distancing.

In response DHEC has developed an emergency procedure for conducting a virtual “food safety check” instead of our regular inspections. Our staff can conduct these checks utilizing a variety of video conferencing services including Microsoft Teams, Apple Facetime, Skype for Business and Android Video Call. A virtual visit will allow us to protect your employees by providing social distancing while conducting these important checks.

How will this approach benefit you? This process will be educationally focused on the food service risk factors **and are non-graded**. It will provide you with a food safety checkup. We will offer compliance assistance on any observed risk factor violations during the virtual visit to correct any food safety concerns. The virtual visit will allow us to talk about your current operational challenges and address any new processes you may be using under the current service restrictions. After the virtual visit, you will receive a document that shows you have completed a DHEC Food Safety Check. You can post this document on your door, your social media page, or anywhere else you choose to show your customers that you are providing them with safe food during the COVID-19 crisis.

You will receive the “Food Safety Check Complete” document the same way you receive your normal routine inspection report, via email. These checks will be posted on DHEC’s Food Grades site, along with a list of facilities that have completed the check on the DHEC food web page. These food safety check reports will not replace a routine inspection.

If you would like us to conduct a food safety check please contact your regional DHEC office <https://www.scdhec.gov/ea-regional-offices>