



COVID-19 & Food Safety

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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.

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.

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.

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.

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, 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.

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 an area. Check with local.

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. 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.

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?

At this time food products would not 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: 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.

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. Employers should consult with the local health department for additional guidance.

Q: What measures are FDA (and CDC, state partners, etc.) taking 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.