



COVID-19 GUIDANCE: Retail Food/Manufacturing – Procedures for Sanitization and Diagnosed Employees

Good retail and manufacturing practices should be emphasized for all food establishments including handwashing procedures, cleaning and sanitizing using appropriate chemicals, and personal hygiene to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This document serves as guidance to food facility operators, owners, and other individuals to incorporate into their procedures in addition to regular operational protocols.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has stated that currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. The virus is thought to mainly spread from person-to-person. Governor Wolf has identified the food supply chain as life-sustaining businesses, and it is critical that these businesses implement social distancing and regular cleaning throughout their standard operating procedures to protect and maintain their workforce. Any business operations that can be conducted remotely should transition to telework whenever possible to limit possible exposure to employees who must report to work. Life-sustaining businesses should review their standard operating procedures to incorporate social distancing of at least 6 feet between employees whenever possible.

Although this document is targeted for retail and manufacturing facilities, the below information is applicable to all food preparation and distribution entities. All life sustaining businesses producing, processing, packaging, or distributing food (food banks, grocery stores, soup kitchens, and others) should utilize the below best practices. It is important to note that the FDA has stated that foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission. COVID-19 is spread by human to human contact and therefore personal hygiene is critical to limiting the spread of this virus.

In industry guidance updated on March 23, 2020, FDA addressed how to maintain social distancing in a food production/processing facility and food retail establishment where employees typically work within close distances. This FDA guidance references CDC recommendations. 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 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.

What sanitation procedures need to be put in place with COVID-19?

HANDWASHING

- Use warm water, apply soap and lather for at least 20 seconds, and rinse. Use single-use paper towels to dry and use paper towel to turn off faucet.
- Wash hands frequently including:
 - ✓ After using the restroom
 - ✓ Before and after eating
 - ✓ Before handling food
 - ✓ After removing gloves and before re-applying
 - ✓ After touching shared equipment, touching face, cellphone, or personal items
 - ✓ After sneezing, coughing, or blowing nose

PERSONAL HYGIENE

- Use social distancing. Remain 6 feet or more away from others when possible.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow
- Dispose of soiled products immediately after use.

CLEANING AND SANITIZING

- Ensure high contact surfaces and priority locations are being cleaned and sanitized on a routine basis. Time needs to be allocated for all cleaning, with greater and more frequent emphasize on commonly touched surfaces.
- Cleaning removes dirt and soiled residue while sanitizing kills germs remaining on surfaces. Both are required to effectively disinfect surfaces.
- Employees cleaning should be trained on how to properly clean and sanitize the type of surface they are working on.
- Examples of high priority surfaces:
 - ✓ Restroom/locker room areas
 - ✓ Registers/keypads/remotes
 - ✓ Computer/telephones
 - ✓ Any shared electronic device
 - ✓ Door handles
 - ✓ Floors and walls
 - ✓ Light switches
 - ✓ Shopping and push carts
 - ✓ Tables and chairs
 - ✓ Shared food equipment
 - ✓ Handrails

Cleaning and sanitizing of high contact areas are a priority NOW to prevent the spread of COVID-19 if an area would become affected by an individual with the virus. According to FDA, 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 should consider a more frequent cleaning and sanitation schedule for high human contact surfaces.

- **Restrooms:** All surfaces including toilet seats and handles, door knobs, faucets, paper towels dispensers, floors, mirrors, soap dispenser.
- **Food equipment:** Common shared equipment include scoops, deli slicers, can openers, keypads, thermometers, tables, floors, refrigeration handles, pot and pan handles.
- **Customer and employee common areas:** tables, chairs, shopping carts/baskets, counters, breakrooms
- **First Aid/health and utility areas:** first aid kits, laundry equipment, linens
- **Locker rooms:** disinfect at least daily-lockers, tables, chairs, surfaces
- **Other frequently touched surfaces:** clean and disinfect frequently, at least daily.

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](#)

Chemicals

- All sanitizers must be EPA approved. 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.
- All chemicals being used on food contact surfaces must be approved for food equipment on the label and utilized at the proper concentration per the label instructions.
- Make sure all chemicals containers and spray bottles are labeled.

What to do if an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19?

COVID-19 is known to be spread via respiratory droplets among close contacts, generally within 6 feet. Although there is currently no CDC evidence that the disease is spread by food, and no *documented* evidence that the virus is transmitted to persons from contaminated surfaces, however evidence does suggest that the virus may live on surfaces for several hours to days depending upon the environment. Therefore, foodborne exposure is not considered a route of transmission. CDC and FDA continue to update their guidance and recommendations as more is learned about COVID-19 during this dynamic and changing situation. Once an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19, priority is to prevent further spread to other individuals through person to person contact or through contaminated surfaces.

- If you have not already done so, send employee home.
- Contact your county or state health department and follow protocols discussed.
- Close off areas visited by the ill persons. Open outside doors and windows and use ventilating fans to increase air circulation in the area. Wait 24 hours, or as long as practical, before beginning cleaning and disinfection.
- Find out who was in contact with the employee while symptomatic and contact them, but maintain confidentiality.
- Sick employees should follow CDC’s [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).
- Employers should consult with the county or state health department for additional guidance.

PA Department of Health advice on returning to work after a diagnosis

- Your county or state health department will monitor the affected individual during quarantine until their recovery and will be involved clearing the employee to return back to work.
- DOH is recommending that persons with COVID-19, under home isolation be released from isolation after a minimum of 7 days after symptom onset and after 72 hours of feeling well and without a fever.
- People with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 who have not had ANY symptoms may discontinue home isolation when at least 7 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test and have had no subsequent illness.
- After returning to work, employees must maintain good personal hygiene including hand washing procedures and frequencies.

Other employees or household individuals:

People who had close contact* with a person with COVID-19 must be quarantined for 14 days from the date of last contact with the person with COVID-19. Household contacts of persons with COVID-19 must be quarantined for 14 days after their last household exposure. For most, this will be 14 days after the person with COVID-19 is released from isolation.

If someone had close contact* with a COVID-19 case, more than 48 hours prior to the case becoming symptomatic, there was no exposure and no quarantine is necessary. This clarification is based on updated CDC guidance on [Community-Related Exposures](#) in which the CDC changed the period of risk from “onset of symptoms” to “48 hours before symptom onset.”

**Close contact: a) being within 6 feet/close care of an individual with covid-19 for a prolonged period of time or b) having direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g., being coughed on)*

For more information: We recommend regularly checking the FDA, CDC, and PA DOH websites for updates as information continues to be updated.

- FDA: [Food Safety and COVID-19](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Interim Guidance for Business and Employers](#)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Health COVID-19 Information for Businesses](#)