

**COVID-19 and food safety management at retail  
and food service**  
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# COVID-19 Food Safety Resources

- Resources are based on CDC, FDA and USDA guidance and best available science
- Peer reviewed by food safety and virology experts across the country
- Topical resources in flyer and social media formats
- Spanish translations available for many resources

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## COVID-19 Food Safety Resources

The following resources provide best practices for preparing for COVID-19 and managing risk for individuals at home and for food environments such as restaurants, grocery stores, food banks, gardens and farms. These resources are based on guidance and best practices as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), World Health Organization (WHO) and the best available science. All items are peer reviewed by an expert panel, and many are translated into Spanish. Check back frequently for updates to the guidance.

To stay up-to-date, check the following webpages:

- CDC [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

[go.ncsu.edu/covid-19](https://go.ncsu.edu/covid-19)



# Grocery Shopping and Take-out Food



## COVID-19 AND FOOD SAFETY FAQ IS CORONAVIRUS A CONCERN AT GROCERY STORES?

CDC, FDA and USDA are not aware of any reports at this time that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. Current evidence shows the biggest risk of transmission of COVID-19 is being around individuals who are symptomatic. Food businesses should be following employee health policies and local health department recommendations to keep these individuals home.

### CAN I GET SICK WITH COVID-19 FROM TOUCHING FOOD OR PACKAGING IF THE CORONAVIRUS WAS PRESENT ON IT?

- The risk of transfer of viruses from food or packaging is very low, based on current research.
- To further minimize risk, handling food packaging should be followed by handwashing and/or using hand sanitizer.

### HOW SHOULD PRODUCE BE HANDLED?

- If possible, use hand sanitizer before and after selecting produce items.
- Avoid touching multiple produce items when making selections.
- If concerned about fresh produce or other food being contaminated with coronavirus, wash hands before and after eating, and before touching your face.

### WHAT STEPS CAN SOMEONE TAKE TO MINIMIZE RISK WHEN SHOPPING AT THE GROCERY STORE?

- Use hand sanitizer when entering stores, and wash hands and/or use sanitizer as soon as possible after leaving.
- Try to maintain social distancing as much as possible while shopping.
- Avoid touching surfaces or items unnecessarily and avoid touching your mouth, nose or face.
- Do not go shopping when showing symptoms.

### WHAT IS MY GROCERY STORE DOING TO MINIMIZE MY RISK?

- Many grocery stores are following CDC guidelines on cleaning and sanitizing.
- Grocery stores may also be asking sick employees or customers to leave.

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Stay informed: [go.ncsu.edu/covid-19](https://go.ncsu.edu/covid-19)  
[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov)

Updated March 20, 2020

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## COVID-19 AND FOOD SAFETY FAQ IS CORONAVIRUS A CONCERN WITH TAKEOUT?

CDC, FDA and USDA are not aware of any reports at this time that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. Current evidence shows the biggest risk of transmission of COVID-19 is being around individuals who are symptomatic (and to a lesser extent, infected but not showing symptoms.) Food businesses should be following employee health policies and health department recommendations to keep these individuals home.

### WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF TAKEOUT OR DRIVE-THRU FOOD?

- There is no current indication that takeout or drive-thru meals will increase illness.
- This option is a good risk management choice, especially for high risk and elderly groups because it helps maintain social distancing and reduces the number of touch points.

### WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF FOOD DELIVERED TO HOME?

- Similar to takeout, food delivery helps maintain social distancing and reduces the number of touch points between preparation and serving of food.
- Many delivery programs have also instituted no touch/no interaction options, which further reduces risk.

### CAN I GET COVID-19 FROM TOUCHING FOOD OR PACKAGING EXPOSED TO CORONAVIRUS?

- The risk of transfer of viruses is very low, based on current research.
- To further minimize risk, handling food packaging should be followed by handwashing and/or using hand sanitizer.

### WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR BODY IF YOU DO INGEST CORONAVIRUS THROUGH FOOD?

- Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. It may be possible for a person to get COVID-19 by touching a contaminated surface or object and then touching their mouth, eyes, or nose, but this is not thought to be the major way the virus is transmitted.
- Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of the virus directly by eating food that might inadvertently contain virus.
- In commercial food production, processing, and preparation, there are many best practices that are routinely followed as per federal, state, and local regulations. These are all designed to prevent foods from becoming contaminated with microbes from the environment, including viruses.
- The best thing a consumer can do is to continue using good food safety practices before preparing or eating food, like always washing your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds after using the restroom, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

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Stay informed: [go.ncsu.edu/covid-19](https://go.ncsu.edu/covid-19)  
[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov)  
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# Food Banks



## COVID-19 FAQ FOR FOOD BANKS BEST PRACTICES AND COMMUNICATION

### WHAT BEST PRACTICES SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED?

- Staff and volunteers should practice hand hygiene, use gloves when handling money, and handle and package items for customers if possible.
- Consider increasing practicality of social distancing by staggering entry or only allowing small groups of people in at a time.
- Masks are not necessary, as they are not protective to healthy people, but prevent the spread of the virus from sick people.

### WHAT SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED TO CUSTOMERS?

- Staff, volunteers and customers should not come to the food bank if they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or have come in contact with someone who has had symptoms.
- Consider communicating to customers through signs, social media or newsletters.
- Proactively reach out to county health departments.

### IS THERE A PROTOCOL IN THE EVENT AN EMPLOYEE OR CUSTOMER IS DIAGNOSED WITH COVID-19 OR THINKS THEY HAVE IT?

- Each food bank should have policies and procedures in place for employee health and wellness.
- You should be sure that sick employees and volunteers do not report to work and you should suggest they see a doctor.
- If you have a sick employee or customer, report it to the health department. If the health department is not responding, be persistent.
- CDC advises that you should provide instructions to employees/guests on what to do if they develop symptoms within 14 days after their last possible exposure to the virus.



## COVID-19 FAQ FOR FOOD BANKS RECEIVING FOOD AND CLEANING

### CAN COVID-19 BE SPREAD THROUGH FOOD?

- Transmission of COVID-19 through food, food packages or even food handlers has not been identified as a risk factor for this illness
- Evidence suggests it may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces. CDC recommends cleaning followed by disinfection as a best practice for prevention of COVID-19

### IS IT SAFE TO ACCEPT FOOD FROM COUNTRIES OR STATES IMPACTED BY COVID-19?

- With decades of data related to influenza, another similar respiratory virus, there is no data to indicate that food distribution channels like grocery stores or distribution warehouses are transmission nodes.
- Currently, there is no data to suggest that accepting food from an area impacted by COVID-19 is a risk factor for disease spread.

### SHOULD FOOD PACKAGES BE CLEANED BEFORE THEY ARE USED?

- Continue routine operating procedures in evaluating the integrity of packaging as well as for any soil already in place.
- Follow risk management practices including hand hygiene regimens of handwashing followed by hand sanitizer according to CDC guidelines.

### HOW SHOULD CLEANING AND DISINFECTION BE HANDLED?

- Volunteers and staff should wash hands and use hand sanitizer regularly.
- Disinfect surfaces like railings, doorknobs, tables, baskets, etc on a regular basis.
- Use non-porous plastic tables that can be easily disinfected whenever possible.
- CDC is advising use of disinfectants on the EPA list, which can be found at: [go.ncsu.edu/epacovid-19](https://go.ncsu.edu/epacovid-19). (Note: this list is based on current data, but compounds have not been validated for inactivation of the virus causing COVID-19)
- Bleach may be used to disinfect surfaces, but the concentration is higher for COVID-19 than for everyday sanitation:
  - 5 tablespoons bleach per gallon of water





# Farmers' Markets and Produce



## COVID-19 FAQ FOR FARMERS MARKETS STEPS FOR MARKETS AND MARKET MANAGERS

### BEST PRACTICES

- Sampling should be suspended to minimize touch points.
- Vendors should practice hand hygiene, use gloves when handling money, and handle and package items for customers.
- Limit market volume by promoting pre-ordering, alternate pickup locations, or delivery.

### COMMUNICATION

- **Vendors and customers should not come to market if they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or have come in contact with someone who is sick. Anyone displaying symptoms at the farm will be asked to leave.**
  - Consider communicating this to customers through signs, social media or newsletters
- Proactively reach out to county health departments
- Market managers should communicate proactively about what steps the market is taking to prevent the spread of illness.
- Review CDC guidance about cleaning and disinfection and be ready to communicate if a known COVID-19 patient has been at the market recently.

### CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

- Markets should consider providing fully stocked handwashing stations and/or hand sanitizer at entrances, exits and restrooms.
  - Vendors should hand-sanitize after every transaction, and should wear gloves.
  - Masks are not necessary, as they are not protective to healthy people, but prevent the spread of the virus from sick people.
- Disinfect surfaces like railings, doorknobs, tables, etc on a regular basis
- CDC is recommending use of disinfectants on the EPA list found at: [go.ncsu.edu/epacovid-19](https://www.epa.gov/epacovid-19)
  - Note: this list is based on current data, but compounds have not been validated for inactivation of the virus causing COVID-19
  - Bleach may be used to disinfect surfaces, but the concentration is higher for COVID-19 than for everyday sanitation: 5 tablespoons bleach per gallon of water
- Use non-porous plastic tables that can be easily disinfected if possible.
- Think about touch points throughout the market. Eliminate or disinfect between uses.

### THE GOOD NEWS

COVID-19 is not a foodborne illness. It is extremely unlikely that someone will catch it through eating. The virus is most likely to cause illness through respiratory transmission, not eating. The routes to be concerned about include being in very close proximity to many people or coming in contact with high touch surfaces.



## COVID-19 AND FOOD SAFETY FAQ IS CORONAVIRUS A CONCERN ON FRESH PRODUCE?

CDC, FDA and USDA are not aware of any reports at this time of human illnesses that suggest coronavirus can be transmitted by food or food packaging. However, it is always important to follow good hygiene practices (i.e., wash hands and surfaces often, separate raw meat from other foods, cook to the right temperature, refrigerate foods promptly) when handling or preparing foods.

### IS THERE GOING TO BE A PRODUCE SHORTAGE IN THE UNITED STATES?

- There is no shortage of food in the United States, although local stores may not have normal inventory while supply chains adjust.

### SHOULD I TAKE ANY PRECAUTIONS WHILE EATING FRESH PRODUCE?

- COVID-19 is not known to be caused from eating contaminated food, so safety of fresh produce should not be a concern relative to this new virus.
- Follow good food safety practices whenever preparing, storing, or consuming foods.

### SHOULD PRODUCE BE WASHED BEFORE EATING? SHOULD SOAP OR A DISINFECTANT BE USED?

- Washing produce before consumption is always a good practice.
- It is **not** recommended to wash produce with dish soap or any detergent.
- It is **not** recommended to treat produce with chemical disinfectants at home.

### COULD EATING FRESH PRODUCE THAT HAS BEEN CONTAMINATED CAUSE COVID-19?

- There is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 is spread by eating food that might inadvertently contain small amounts of virus.
- Produce has not been identified as a risk factor in the transmission of other respiratory virus outbreaks.

### WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR BODY IF YOU DO INGEST CORONAVIRUS THROUGH FOOD?

- Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of the virus directly by eating food that might inadvertently contain virus.
- Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. It may be possible for a person to get COVID-19 by touching a contaminated surface or object and then touching their mouth, eyes, or nose, but this is not thought to be the major way the virus is transmitted.
- In commercial food production, processing, and preparation, there are many best practices that are routinely followed as per federal, state, and local regulations. Regulations are designed to prevent foods from becoming contaminated with microbes from the environment, including viruses.





# STAY INFORMED

## Want to stay up to date?

The data and guidance around COVID-19 is changing rapidly.

### Three steps you can take:

1. Follow our accounts @SafePlatesFSIC for daily updates on the best available science.
2. Bookmark [go.ncsu.edu/covid-19-resources](https://go.ncsu.edu/covid-19-resources)
3. Check the dates on the bottom of your info for most current edition

# Planning for Reopening

- Connect with industry trade groups as well as food safety and public health educators (extension/academia)
- Plan now for what this might look like
- Create a task force team with state partners for coordination



# Topic Areas to Consider

- Managing Dining Rooms and Patrons
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- Employee Health
- Cleaning, Sanitizing and Disinfection of front and back of the house
  - including condiments and menus and high touch surfaces





## BE HEALTHY, BE CLEAN



- Employees - Stay home or leave work if sick; consult doctor if sick, and contact supervisor
- Employers - Instruct sick employees to stay home and send home immediately if sick
- Employers - Pre-screen employees exposed to COVID-19 for temperature and other symptoms



- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- If soap and water are not available, use a 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer per CDC
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Wear mask/face covering per [CDC](#) & [FDA](#)



- Never touch Ready-to-Eat foods with bare hands
- Use single service gloves, deli tissue, or suitable utensils
- Wrap food containers to prevent cross contamination
- Follow 4 steps to food safety [Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill](#)

## CLEAN & DISINFECT



- Train employees on cleaning and disinfecting procedures, and protective measures, per CDC and FDA
- Have and use cleaning products and supplies
- Follow protective measures



- Disinfect high-touch surfaces frequently
- Use EPA-registered disinfectant
- Ensure food containers and utensils are cleaned and sanitized



- Prepare and use sanitizers according to label instructions
- Offer sanitizers and wipes to customers to clean grocery cart/basket handles, or utilize store personnel to conduct cleaning/sanitizing

## SOCIAL DISTANCE



- Help educate employees and customers on importance of social distancing:
  - Signs
  - Audio messages
  - Consider using every other check-out lane to aid in distancing



- Avoid displays that may result in customer gatherings; discontinue self-serve buffets and salad bars; discourage employee gatherings
- Place floor markings and signs to encourage social distancing



- Shorten customer time in store by encouraging them to:
  - Use shopping lists
  - Order ahead of time, if offered
- Set up designated pick-up areas inside or outside retail establishments

## PICK-UP & DELIVERY



- If offering delivery options:
  - Ensure coolers and transport containers are cleaned and sanitized
  - Maintain time and temperature controls
  - Avoid cross contamination; for example, wrap food during transport



- Encourage customers to use "no touch" deliveries
- Notify customers as the delivery is arriving by text message or phone call



- Establish designated pick-up zones for customers
- Offer curb-side pick-up
- Practice social distancing by offering to place orders in vehicle trunks

# Additional Topics

- Guidance on take out/delivery
- Food trucks
- Cleaning staff
- Staying up to date on science



