

COVID-19 Preventive Measures for Food Industry Professionals, Including Produce Farmers and Handlers



If an employee answers “yes” to any of these questions, send them home and advise them to contact their doctor.

1. Have you recently traveled to an area with known local spread of COVID-19?
2. Have you come into close contact (within 6 feet) with someone who had a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis in the past 14 days?
3. Do you have a fever (higher than 100.4°F or 38.0°C) OR [symptoms](#) of lower respiratory illness such as cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing?

Prevention for Individuals

Preventive measures against COVID-19 are the same as those for other respiratory viruses like the flu. To help [prevent getting and spreading disease](#):

- Stay home if you are sick, and avoid close contact with anyone who is ill.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes. When possible, cough, sneeze, or blow your nose into a tissue, and throw the tissue away.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- [Wash your hands](#) frequently and thoroughly, especially after coughing or sneezing, blowing your nose, using the bathroom, taking work breaks, making deliveries, and any other time you feel it’s important. [Effective handwashing](#) takes about 20 seconds. Clean under your fingernails and between fingers, and wash the back of your hands as well as the front.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects (such as doorknobs) that are touched often.
- **If you are sick**, especially with shortness of breath, cough, fever, or similar flu-like symptoms, **call a doctor or healthcare provider**.
- Avoid gatherings of 10 people or more, especially if there is evidence of transmission in your county or adjacent counties. If you do attend, remember to practice the hygiene and distancing steps above.
- Avoid unnecessary (not urgent) air, bus, or train travel.
- Limit visitation to older relatives or friends (especially in nursing or care homes).
- Avoid touching others (shaking hands, for example).
- Use a drying towel to turn off the sink faucet and open doors after washing your hands.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

How to Clean and Disinfect

Surfaces

- If surfaces are dirty, clean them with a detergent or soap and water before you disinfect.
- For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.
 - Diluted household bleach solutions can be used, if appropriate for the surface. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. **Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner.** Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.
- Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:
 - 5 tablespoons (½ cup) bleach per gallon of water, or
 - 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water.
- Products with [EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#) are expected to be effective against COVID-19, based on data for harder-to-kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfecting products (e.g., concentration, application method, contact time, etc.).
- For soft (porous) surfaces such as carpeting, rugs, and drapes, remove visible contamination if present, and use appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces. After cleaning:
 - If the items can be laundered, do so following the manufacturer’s instructions and using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items. Dry items completely.
 - Otherwise, use products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims.

Linens, Clothing, and Other Laundry Items

- Do not shake dirty laundry to minimize the possibility of dispersing the virus through the air.
- Wash items as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an ill person can be washed with other people's items.
- Clean and disinfect hampers or other carts for transporting laundry according to guidance above for hard or soft surfaces.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Hand Hygiene

- Cleaning staff should wear disposable gloves and gowns for all tasks in the cleaning process, including handling trash.
 - Gloves and gowns should be compatible with the disinfectant products being used.
 - Additional PPE might be required, based on the cleaning/disinfectant products being used and whether there is a risk of splash.
 - Remove gloves and gowns carefully to avoid contaminating yourself or the surrounding area. Be sure to **clean hands** after removing your gloves.
- Remove your gloves after cleaning a room or area occupied by an ill person. Clean your hands immediately after removing your gloves.
- **Cleaning staff and others should clean their hands often**, including immediately after removing gloves and after being in contact with an ill person, by washing their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and your hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60–95% alcohol may be used. However, if your hands are visibly dirty, always use soap and water.
- Follow normal preventive actions while at work and home, including cleaning your hands and avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Additional key times to clean your hands include:
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - After using the restroom.
 - Before eating or preparing food.
 - After touching animals or pets.
 - Before and after providing routine care for another person who needs assistance (e.g., a child).

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/cleaning-disinfection.html>

Frequently Asked Questions

For more information: https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19?utm_campaign=FSMA_COVIDcall_03172020&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua

To stay updated on the latest, see these frequently asked questions specific to food production, processing, and handling: <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

Is the U.S. food supply safe?

Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. However, it's always critical to follow the four key steps of food safety—clean, separate, cook, and chill—to prevent foodborne illness.

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. Produce farmers and handlers should contact [MDAC](#).

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 recommendations](#). Employers should consult local health officials for additional guidance.

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.

Employers should intensify their cleaning and sanitation efforts to control any risks 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](#) 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.

Food facilities may want to consider a more frequent sanitation schedule.

Do I need to recall food products produced in the facility during the time that the worker was potentially shedding virus while working?

We do not anticipate that food products will 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.

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.

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 hazard 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](#).

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. Sick employees should follow the [CDC’s guidance in on what to do if you are sick](#) with COVID-19. Employers should consult with the local health department for additional guidance.

Source: Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). FDA. (2020). https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19?utm_campaign=FSMA_COVIDcall_03172020&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua

Notes

The FDA has issued guidance on a temporary policy not to enforce requirements in three foods regulations to conduct onsite audits of food suppliers if other supplier verification methods are used instead. More at: <https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-temporary-policy-regarding-preventive-controls-and-fsvp-food-supplier-verification>

As of March 19, 2020, the FDA has suspended all routine domestic inspections until further notice. More at: <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-focuses-safety-regulated-products-while-scaling-back-domestic>

Although there are some reports (papers) that state that COVID-19 can survive on surfaces for hours to days, the FDA says that food is not a vehicle of transmission but that thorough sanitation/GMPs should be conducted, including worker health screening and hygiene.

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