

# COVID-19 FAQs Archive

This document contains an archive of frequently asked questions and answers from the food industry that were posted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Information here may be outdated and links may no longer function. Please contact [foodsafety@cornell.edu](mailto:foodsafety@cornell.edu) if you have any questions.

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## Employee Policies

### Q: Should my employees wear masks or cloth face coverings to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread?

**Updated 6/2/21** – The term ‘mask’ or ‘face mask’ captures surgical masks, and N-95 respirators. N-95 respirators are considered critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current [CDC guidance](#). A ‘cloth face covering’ or ‘facial covering’ is any fabric or cloth that covers the mouth and nose. It can be [made using household items](#) (including neck gaiters, scarves, bandannas, t-shirts, sweatshirts, towels, turtlenecks, or other fabric), can be [sewn by hand](#), or factory-made.

According to NYS Government ([Enforcement of Social Distancing Measures](#)), any person or employee who is not vaccinated, over the age of two and able to medically tolerate a face covering shall be required to cover their nose and mouth with a mask or a face covering when in a public place or workplace and not maintaining social distance. This is in accordance with [CDC recommendations to use simple cloth face coverings](#) as a voluntary public health measure where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.

Workers on farms, and in food production, processing, and retail settings should consider the following precautionary measures from the [FDA](#) and [CDC](#):

- Cloth face coverings should fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face and be secured with ties or ear loops.
- Cloth face coverings should include multiple layers of fabric but should allow for breathing without restriction.
- Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing the cloth face covering and wash hands immediately after removing.
- Cloth face coverings should be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.
- Keep cloth face coverings clean of food residues or any other soils.
- Launder the cloth face coverings in a washing machine and machine dry before each daily use or whenever they become wet, sticky or visibly soiled.

We also recommend:

- To test the cloth face covering before using it to:
  - Make sure it covers both the mouth and nose while still allowing proper breathing; cloth face coverings are only effective if covering both the mouth and nose.
  - Make sure it will stay on the face during work without the need to touch and re-adjust it; employees should wash their hands for 20 seconds with soap and water before and after touching their face or cloth face covering.
  - Make sure PPE can be used together with cloth face coverings, i.e. employees should make sure their glasses do not fog-up while being used with a cloth face covering.

- Employees that are required to wear beard-nets should wear them over their cloth face covering.
- If cloth face coverings are re-used before washing, to store them in a paper bag to allow them to dry until the next use; replace the paper bag after each use.

It is critical to remember that wearing cloth face coverings is only effective if correctly implemented in addition to practicing social distancing to best of your abilities, regularly washing your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, and not touching your face. A cloth face covering is not intended to protect the wearer but may offer some protection to others in the case that wearer is pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic spreader. If wearer is symptomatic, they need to self-isolate and inform their employer, primary care provider and local department of health. A cloth face covering does not allow a symptomatic individual to work or venture out.

### **Q: I'm confused about CDC's recommendations for when an employee can return to work; is it after 10 or 14 days?**

**Updated 1/19/21** – To answer this question it is necessary to distinguish between two concepts: (i) how long does it take for a person to develop illness after being infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, (ii) once that person develops illness, how long will they be able to infect other people.

The majority of people will develop first symptoms [2 to 14 days](#) after being exposed to the virus. Even if the person that was exposed to the virus does not develop any symptoms and remains asymptomatic it will take 2 to 14 days for the person to start shedding enough virus to (i) be infectious to other people, and (ii) to be positive when tested for the virus. A person that was recently infected with the virus will most likely not test positive for the virus; the virus needs to multiply to sufficient numbers in the body first. Because the majority of infected people will develop symptoms or test positive within 14 days, CDC recommendations are for a person that had close contact with COVID-19 positive person to 'quarantine' for 14 days after the last exposure. CDC updated the quarantine guidelines to include options to reduce the quarantine time to (i) 10 days without COVID-19 testing, or to (ii) 7 days with a negative COVID-19 test (sample for testing has to be taken on day 5 or later). The person has to keep monitoring the symptoms closely for 14 days even if the quarantine time was reduced. Talk to your local Department of Health to get information if any of the two options were adopted by your State regulation; for example, [NY State only adopted the first option](#) of reducing the quarantine to 10 days. Besides staying home during quarantine, a person should stay away from other people who are at higher-risk of developing COVID-19 and also closely monitor for any symptoms.

A person with COVID-19 will typically shed active viral particles, that can infect others, up to 10 days after the symptoms first started; CDC is referencing [six different studies](#) to support this information. CDC is recommending, based on this information, that a person with COVID-19 should '[isolate](#)' them self for at least 10 days after the first symptoms occurred or after the first positive test. Make sure you are without fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medications) and you don't have any other symptoms before returning to work, regardless if it has been already 10 days since the symptoms first started. There are reports of some severe COVID-19 cases that were shedding active viral particles for 20 days, however these were rare occasions. [A study on severe and critical COVID-19 cases](#), for example in immunocompromised patients, showed that approximately 15 days after the symptoms started the probability of detecting active viral particles in these cases was less than 5%.

A person that had close contact with an infected person might have to stay home and restrict from any interaction with other people for up to 24 days; it can take up to 14 days to develop illness and start shedding the virus, and up to 10 days to stop shedding the virus after the illness developed. If you think or know you had close contact with an infected person contact your local Department of Health for specific instructions on quarantine, isolation, and other procedures specific for your local area.

## **Q: I offer an essential service that requires me to go to other businesses. How can I protect myself against COVID-19?**

**Updated 6/2/20** – COVID-19 is spread mainly from person-to-person and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The best ways to avoid the spread is to get vaccinated, clean your hands often, avoid close contact with others (maintain 6 feet of distance), wear face coverings and clean frequently touched surfaces.

Clean your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public space. If soap and water are not readily available, you can use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Be sure to wash your hands and avoid touching your face, especially after touching frequently touched surfaces including tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, phones, keyboards, faucets, etc. You may consider bringing your own cleaner and disinfectant with you when traveling to different sites. This way you can disinfect frequently touched surfaces that you must come into contact with.

## **Q: I am not able to maintain a social distance of 6 feet; does it make a difference if I keep a distance of 5 or 3 feet?**

**Posted 5/21/20** – Social distancing is preventing several risk factors:

1. Prevents physical contact with another person; considered to be one of the main risk factors.
2. Prevents large respiratory droplets from reaching your face, mouth, nose and eyes when another person sneezes or coughs because these large respiratory droplets fall to the ground or land on surfaces within 6 feet; also considered to be a large risk factor.
3. Prevents contact with surfaces that were recently contaminated with respiratory droplets by cough, sneeze or touch; because the virus is unstable outside of the human host only recently contaminated surfaces (like frequently touched surfaces) are considered a risk.

If you keep a distance of 6 feet the risk of infection is still not zero, however it is low enough to be considered highly unlikely to happen. In the same sense, if you keep a distance of less than 6 feet this does not automatically mean that you will get infected; however, the risk of infection is high enough for CDC to consider it too high. The shorter this social distance is the higher the risk is; the closer you are the more large respiratory droplets can reach your face, nose, mouth and eyes, you are also in reach of more fresh respiratory droplets on surfaces, and more likely to come into physical contact with the other person. The same relation exists with time; the longer time you spend within 6 feet the higher the risk is.

**If you are not able to maintain social distancing you should still do your best to reduce the risk as much as possible by maximizing the distance that you can keep and by minimizing the time when proper social distance of 6 feet is not maintained.**

Face coverings can help reduce the risk by restricting the spread of some of the large respiratory droplets that could otherwise reach your face or land on surfaces. Where face coverings are less effective in reducing the risk is preventing the respiratory droplets that do reach your face from contaminating your face and eyes. Face coverings are also not effective at all in reducing the risk when it comes to touching contaminated surfaces, or touching another person; some might even consider face coverings an increased risk because a person wearing a face covering might be more likely to touch their face by frequent re-adjusting of the face covering.

**Face coverings are not a replacement for social distancing and should be used together with proper hand-washing and avoiding touching your face.**

## **Q: Should I check my employees' temperature to screen for COVID-19?**

**Updated 4/21/20** – If your employee has visible symptoms of COVID-19, you do not need to take their temperature. Immediately segregate them from other employees, send them home, and have them reach out to their primary care provider for evaluation.

It is critical that the employer communicates well with employees. Employees should know the symptoms to watch out for, who they should notify if they show symptoms, what they should do if they come into contact with someone who has or may have COVID-19, and that they will still be paid if they must leave work due to COVID-19.

If your employee has come in contact with someone who is being tested for COVID-19 or with someone who has already tested positive for COVID-19, consider sending them home for 14 days or until the results of the test comes back negative. If this employee is essential to your operation and you cannot send them home, you must implement a pre-screening of the employee's temperature and assess symptoms prior to them starting work. Ideally, you would do the temperature and symptoms check before the individual enters the facility.

The employee must also:

- Wear a face mask or appropriate cloth face covering at all times while in the workplace for 14 days after last exposure.
- Self-monitor for symptoms under the supervision of your occupational health program.
- Maintain 6 feet and practice social distancing as work duties permit in the workplace.
- Routinely clean and disinfect their workspaces, i.e. shared electronic equipment.

Taking employees' temperatures as a condition of entering the facility is currently permissible due to the risk presented by COVID-19 to the food production. Employer's are encouraged to review the US Equal Employment Opportunity laws as well as consolidated information that were recently updated in response to COVID-19. According to these laws, employee temperature screening must be done on a nondiscriminatory basis. The information collected during the screening should be kept confidential and be available to only key members of the company management that are responsible for organizing the production. Employee with a normal body temperature (below 100.4°F) still needs to follow all rules that are in place to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 inside and outside of the workplace; a person can still be infectious even without exhibiting fever or any other symptoms.

### **Q: How do I encourage social distancing even though my employees work together every day and are very familiar with each other?**

**Posted 3/30/20** – The exposure to COVID-19 can be greatly minimized by social distancing (maintaining 6 feet or greater distance). The key here is thinking that even though you work with the same people every day, you don't know who they've been unintentionally exposed to when they are not at work. Social distancing can present a problem among employees because familiarity of workers tends to result in them dropping their guard. A conscious effort needs to be instituted and supervisors should be ensuring these practices are always happening. A training session of all employees should be initiated to encourage social distancing and provide the benefits of it. While the term is 'social distancing' it should be emphasized that social interaction between workers is allowed as long as it is done from a recommended safe distance of 6 feet.

### **Q: Are there guidance documents for how to do social distancing in food processing facilities?**

**Posted 3/24/20** – Food manufacturers are encouraged to develop a site-specific social distancing plan. In order to manage risks to employees it is critical for food manufacturing facilities to closely review current policies and procedures relative current knowledge of the risks. Companies should review and amend current policies based on our knowledge of the virus and CDC and FDA guidelines. Ultimately, each facility will need to implement their own policies tailored to their specific facilities and risks.

Examples of guidance include our [Food Facility COVID-19 Strategy Checklist](#), and [Food Northwest's Social Distancing in Food Manufacturing Facilities](#). Technical, Organizational, and Personnel measures all need to be considered in a plan. Examples of topics to include in a social distancing plan are: change management; a list of frequently touched surfaces; mitigating risks through shift adjustments; meal/snacking considerations; streamlining monitoring activities; and office and clerical work.

- [Download a checklist of frequently touched surfaces.](#)
- [Download an SOP for actions when a worker is tested for and/or tests positive for COVID-19.](#)
- [Download an SOP \(Spanish Version\) for actions when a worker is tested for and/or tests positive for COVID-19.](#)

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## Workforce

### **Q: I need to hire temporary workers to help out during this crisis; how can I minimize the risk of hiring people with COVID-19?**

**Posted 4/14/20** – US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recently updated the [rules for hiring during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) and also provided [consolidated information](#) for Equal Employment Opportunity laws. Employers should carefully read both of the documents in order to prepare for the hiring process. One of the updates to the rules is that while laws like The Americans with Disabilities Act and The Rehabilitation Act still apply during the COVID-19 pandemic, they do not prevent the employers from following the CDC, State and Local public health guidelines for COVID-19. Some of the actions that employers, temporary staffing agencies and contractors can take as part of this rules are:

- Employers may screen applicants for symptoms of COVID-19 when hiring.
- Employers may take an applicant's temperature as part of a post-offer, pre-employment medical exam.
- Employers may delay the start date of an applicant who has COVID-19 or compatible symptoms.
- Employers may withdraw a job offer when it needs the applicant to start immediately, but the individual has COVID-19 or compatible symptoms.
- A temporary staffing agency or a contractor that places an employee in an employer's workplace can notify the employer if it learns the employee has COVID-19.

### **Q: I am concerned that my employees will not show up to work because they are worried that they will acquire COVID-19 at work. What should I do?**

**Posted 4/9/20** – Go through the following steps:

- Be open-minded and listen to their fears and concerns. Consider utilizing outside subject matter experts to answer employee questions.
- Explain to the employee that the risk is low if they follow the facilities GMP policy, including frequent hand-washing, keeping surfaces clean and social distancing where appropriate.
- Explain the measures your business is currently taking to protect employees from acquiring COVID-19 in the workplace and clarify early on that identification of a COVID-19 positive employee will not necessitate a full plant shutdown.
- Consider offering financial incentives.
- Consider implementing a sick pay policy (if not already in place).

Points to make when explaining how COVID-19 is transmitted: COVID-19 is a respiratory virus that spreads similarly as any other respiratory virus. Cough is the most characteristic symptom of respiratory infection and through this cough, droplets are generated that carry the active virus to the next person that is close by. These droplets can travel less than 6 feet from the source before settling towards the ground in [less than 5 min.](#) [World Health Organization](#) is reporting that the number of these droplets that make it beyond 3 feet before falling to the ground is already too low to cause infection. There is no evidence that COVID-19 infection can be transmitted through air beyond those 6 feet. This means that a person is sufficiently protected if staying 6 feet away from any potentially infected person which is the current recommendation from [CDC on social distancing](#). If 6 feet is not fully achievable, introducing temporary barriers around employees can be used to protect the person from generated water droplets and infection. Barriers around employees as well as proper use of [cloth face coverings](#) will also limit the spread of the water droplets and protect other employees from infection.

Once the water droplets generated by the person with COVID-19 land on the surfaces around this person or when a person transfers the virus contamination from their mouth, nose and eyes onto different surfaces there is a small window of time when these water droplets and contaminants still contain active virus particles that can infect other people. Therefore, additional measures (described below) are taken to protect employee from infection.

### **Explain Measures to Take to Prevent the Spread:**

Surfaces that are frequently touched by different people are frequently cleaned and sanitized. If surfaces are not typically soiled (i.e. doorknobs); they can be sanitized between regular scheduled cleaning and sanitizing procedures.

All employees must practice frequent hand-washing. You have to emphasize that before and after a person touches their face (i.e. mouth, nose, eyes or when touching their cloth face covering) they have to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water; the same rule should be followed when touching another person. Some additional examples when hands have to be washed are any time an employee leaves their work station, before coming back to the work station, after using the restroom, and after touching frequently touched surfaces (avoid touching these surfaces altogether; use elbow or other parts of clothes and body if possible).

Let the employee know that contamination with active viruses on their hands or clothes is not going to get them infected, it is when this contamination and virus are transferred to their face (i.e. mouth, nose, eyes). This is why hand washing is so important: if they accidentally touch their face. Emphasize that employees need to get into a habit of not touching their face, including mouth, nose, eyes and cloth face covering. This protects the individual from infection and it also protects other people from infection. If you happen to be the infected person, by not touching your face you are not transferring virus from your face to other surfaces that people touch. If you are touching your face it has to be performed consciously and it has to be deliberate; (i) you remove the cloth face covering if you are using one, (ii) you wash your hands, (iii) you touch your face and readjust your cloth face covering (preferably replace the cloth face covering), and (iv) you wash your hands again before continuing your work.

Reassure your employee that food you produce, and the food other processors produce does not represent a risk of transmission; the same goes for the air in the processing plant and the clothes they are wearing.

Make sure you also have the following key safety control points in place and that employees are aware of it: increased sanitation, worker wellness checks, keeping ill employees at home, separating workers who become ill during the day, staggering shift changes, and social distancing.

### **Financial Incentives:**

Workers are under higher stress during these times and although still low, if all precautions are followed, the potential for them getting infected is still higher than those staying at home (e.g., because they have to travel to work). Businesses should seek ways to increase financial security for their workers. Financial incentives, although not always feasible, are a very simple solution. Processing and retail companies are already temporarily increasing the pay for the workers who must come in and many are also adding sick pay policies for workers who had previously not had the benefit.

### **Open Communication:**

Talk to your workers about individual steps and changes before you implement them; this includes explaining why certain steps will be taken and how these steps will help. You should also consult with your employee on how feasible individual steps are and how to best implement them. This will build a rapport with your employee and not only keep them safer but also make them feel safer because they have a word in all the changes. Creating a space where employees can talk freely will go a long way towards reducing the number of people walking off the job. Reassure employees that you are all in this together and that they will be covered if they do become infected. Most importantly, be open-minded and listen to their fears and concerns so you can address them on time before they become a problem that prevents them from coming to work.

## Facility Procedures

**Q: The CDC recently determined that the risk of contracting COVID-19 by touching virus-contaminated surfaces is low. Will the EPA continue to maintain its “List N” of disinfectants to combat the virus that causes the disease?**

**Posted 5/13/21** – In short, yes! You should continue to select products from [EPA's List N](#) to combat SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) though, as always, use the more restrictive state-specific list if your state has one. With either list, follow the product's use instructions for the pathogen indicated on the list.

When the pandemic began in 2020, no registered disinfectant pesticides had been tested for efficacy against SARS-CoV-2. In response, EPA activated its [Emerging Viral Pathogens Guidance for Antimicrobial Products](#), allowing the Agency to quickly create List N by expediting emerging viral pathogen claims for existing products and the registration of new products that would be effective against SARS-CoV-2.

The EPA will continue to register new products for use against COVID-19, and will continue to update List N. However, in light of the [recent information from the CDC](#) regarding risk of surface transmission and because there are now hundreds of products available on List N, EPA will no longer expedite emerging viral pathogen claims or new product registrations intended to mitigate SARS-CoV-2 on surfaces. This will allow EPA to shift resources toward evaluating novel products such as those that kill airborne SARS-CoV-2. Find out more about the [EPA's response to Coronavirus here](#).

When using disinfectants in New York:

- Make sure the product you are using is legal in NYS! In NY, disinfectants for use against COVID-19 must be listed on the New York State Department of Environmental C (based off [EPA List N](#)) for use against SARS-CoV-2.
- Always read the label and follow the safety directions for SARS-CoV-2 or the specified similar pathogen and pay attention to dwell time so that you are using products effectively. Illegal disinfectants and inaccurate health claims surrounding SARS-CoV-2 are still cropping up across the country, with the EPA having to intervene in [NV and CA to stop illegal sales](#) and in [PA to stop inaccurate claims](#).
- Reach out to the experts! For questions about pesticide safety: [Cornell's Pesticide Management Education](#). For questions about pesticide regulations/compliance: [NYSDEC Bureau of Pesticide Management](#).

**Q: Our processing plant has a COVID-19 Control Program in place; how do we know this program works and is sufficient to protect the workers from COVID-19?**

**Posted 11/19/20** – Up to this point, the majority of food processing companies have managed to continue operations without having a single positive case among employees. As we enter the fall/winter season and the number of positive cases continue to increase across the country, it is very likely that some of these companies will at one point have to deal with a positive case among their employees. For example, the current daily average in New York is 4,500 cases (11/19/20), which means that a processor with 100 employees can expect to have two positive employees in the next three months. A functional COVID-19 Control Plan is what will make a difference between preventing or propagating the spread of COVID-19 from a positive employee.

What each company can do, before the first cases are identified among employees, is to ‘Pressure Test’ the COVID-19 Control Program they have in place and identify the weak points in the program that can increase the risk. The same way companies are performing mock recalls to make sure everything is in place for when the real recall happens, the companies can stage different positive case scenarios and follow the individual steps of the control plan being performed.

Some examples of staged scenarios that can be used as ‘Pressure Tests’ would be:

- *A specific employee calls in and reports they are experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19.*
- *A specific employee walks to the production manager and reports that they just found out that they tested positive for COVID-19.*

- A specific employee talks to a co-worker on the line about his or her partner (or child) having COVID-19.
- A specific employee acts out coughing or loss of taste during lunch.

Some of the questions that the company should address in the steps that follow this staged event of the 'Pressure Test' are:

- How are positive tests, symptoms, and potential close contacts initially handled and how effectively is this information communicated to appropriate staff responsible for COVID-19 Control?
- What are the instructions given to the positive employee about what to do and who to contact next?
- How is the positive employee, as the main risk of transmission, removed from the food processing plant?
- How is the potential shortage of employees addressed to facilitate uninterrupted production?
- When and how is the information about potential close contacts in the processing plant and other key information collected from the positive employee?
- How is the information about potential close contacts used to inform the steps to follow after the positive employee is removed from the processing plant (e.g., screening, cleaning, quarantining, etc.)?
- How are other employees and company management informed of the positive employee?
- What was the plan for contacting government agencies about the positive employee? (**IMPORTANT: Make sure the key person responsible for contacting any government agencies is aware of the 'Pressure Test' and staged scenario**).
- How is the privacy of the positive employee protected during entire process?
- Are other aspects of the operation, like procedures that assure safety and quality of the food, maintained unaffected during the entire process?

The information collected during this type of 'Pressure Test' should be used to identify the weaknesses, define the roles individual employees have, introduce additional steps if needed and update the overall COVID-19 Control Plan. Performing a 'Pressure Test' will also address the COVID-19 fatigue, people are experiencing after nearly a year of this pandemic, and also represent a record of the company's commitment to protecting its employees and consumers.

### **Q: Should I use ozone in my food processing facility to control the spread of COVID-19?**

**Posted 4/9/20** – No. Ozone is generated by a device and as such it is considered a [pesticidal device](#). A pesticidal device is an instrument or other machine that is used to destroy, repel, trap or mitigate any pests, including bacteria and viruses. Unlike chemical pesticides, US EPA does not routinely review the safety or efficacy of pesticidal devices, and therefore cannot confirm whether, or under what circumstances, such products might be effective against the spread of COVID-19. Accordingly, [List N](#) only includes chemical disinfectants registered by EPA and does not include devices. Some devices have limitations in how they are used and often can only be used as an adjunct to routine disinfection, cleaning and sanitation practices. Others are used with EPA-registered products and have legitimate claims and use directions associated with them.

In addition, Occupational Safety and Health Administration of US Department of Labor is strictly regulating the employee exposure to ozone due to health hazards associated with ozone (See [29 CFR 1910.1000](#) for details).

### **Q: Should food processing facilities put disinfection tunnels at the facility entrance?**

**Posted on 4/9/20** – No. Disinfecting tunnels are spraying disinfectants on persons skin, clothes, and shoes; an infected person going through the disinfection tunnel is still able to transmit the infection to another person on the other side. Disinfection tunnels are not addressing the main risk when it comes to transmission of COVID-19; the person-to-person transmission through respiratory droplets. This risk is still best addressed by practicing [social distancing](#), [frequent hand-washing](#), [wearing cloth face coverings](#), and [not touching your face](#).

Products currently approved by US EPA to be effective against COVID-19 (see [List N](#)) are only approved to be used on hard, nonporous type of surfaces; these products are not approved to be used on clothes or skin and have a high potential to be harmful.

**Q: Our facility is over 500,000 square feet. Accordingly, do you have a perspective on whether a confirmed case would require complete cleaning of the facility or only those areas the employee may have had contact with?**

**Posted 3/30/20** – Continue performing your regular cleaning and sanitizing procedures of your facility according to your regular schedule. This is a good time to review and verify you have proper cleaning and sanitizing procedures and frequencies in place. After you receive information about your employee being positive for COVID-19, perform additional cleaning and sanitizing of those areas the employee had contact with.

The key is to prevent transmission of COVID-19 among your employees. Evaluate who are other employees that the positive person had contact with. [See our SOP](#) on when an employee is tested for or tests positive for COVID-19. Use this case to make sure your employees are following the recommendations for social distancing, frequent hand washing and avoiding touching their face.

**Q: I am afraid my third-party cleaning and sanitation company will be shut down due to COVID-19. How do I prepare for that?**

**Posted 3/30/20** – As coronavirus cases increase, third-party cleaning companies may be faced with difficulties in cleaning a variety of businesses and may even refuse to undertake the work if there is a positive case. Thus, to remain operational, it is imperative that your business has a cleaning/sanitizing protocol (conducted in-house by in-house employees) ready before this situation occurs. The steps to prepare for this would be a review of your Master Sanitation Schedule. Commonly touched areas should be added to this schedule: door handles, light switches, counters, etc. A cleaning and sanitizing procedure should be developed based on traffic in these areas. Frequency and a cleaning procedure should be determined and an SOP should be developed. You may have to assign and train more than one person to this task. You know your business best and will be best able to accommodate for any irregularities that may be missed by third-party companies.

**Q: Can cleaning and sanitizing supplies still be used after the expiration date?**

**Posted 3/20/20** – In most cases cleaning and sanitizing supplies can still be used after the expiration date however this depends on the type of chemical and the time since it expired. You should always consult with your supplier to make sure the chemicals are still performing as intended and for the ways of testing activity.

**Q: How much can I delay my scheduled preventive maintenance and still be safe?**

**Posted 3/20/20** – It is strongly recommended to not delay your scheduled Preventive Maintenance. Make a plan of how to prioritize different parts of Preventive Maintenance based on your experience and risk and consult with an expert on your final plan.

**Q: Can ingredients that are close or past the expiration date be used to make my product?**

**Posted 3/20/20** – Anytime there is a substitution or change in formulation, the food safety of your product should be evaluated, as inherent food safety characteristics may have changed. Changes in formulation should be reviewed by a process authority. Anytime you want to use an ingredient that is close or past the expiration date you also need a process authority review. Our team can provide process authority services in case you need to change processes and/or formulations due to COVID-19 related challenges. For more information visit the [Cornell Food Venture Center](#) and for dairy-related process authority services contact [Rob Ralyea](#). For those outside of New York, the Association of Food and Drug Officials has assembled a list of food process authorities around the country by state and territory. [It can be found here](#). If you have problems getting help, contact us and we will attempt to assist.

## Vaccination

### Q: How will the newly developed vaccines for COVID-19 impact the food industry?

**Updated 6/2/21** – There are a number of pharmaceutical companies that are developing vaccines for COVID-19; there are currently three vaccines that received [Emergency Use Authorization \(EUA\)](#) and are currently being used in the US. There are also at least 28 other vaccines in advanced stages of testing around the globe.

Currently, we know that the three approved vaccines are effective at preventing the development of disease, which will substantially reduce the number of hospitalizations and deaths. The information that is currently still missing is how effective the three vaccines are at preventing the shedding of the virus; for example, the vaccine might limit the replication of the virus in the body and prevent development of the symptoms but still allow sufficient replication that the person starts shedding the virus and potentially infects others around them. This is the reason why, if not all employees are vaccinated, it is still recommended that people keep practicing all the essential mitigation strategies, including keeping a social distance of 6 feet, wearing face coverings, avoiding touching their face, avoiding crowded places, and regularly washing their hands.

It is essential at this moment that each member of the food industry takes the necessary steps to make sure all COVID-19 Control Strategies are in place, consistently followed, and compliance verified on all levels. The necessary steps also include (i) appropriate training of employees, (ii) regular verification of social distancing and correct wearing of face coverings, and finally (iii) ‘pressure testing’ the written procedures that describe what to do when an employee either tests positive for COVID-19, develops symptoms compatible with COVID-19, or is potentially exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19.

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## Testing

### Q: May an employer administer a COVID-19 test (a test to detect the presence of the COVID-19 virus) before permitting employees to enter the workplace?

**Posted 4/27/20** – The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that any mandatory medical test of employees be “job related and consistent with business necessity.” Applying this standard to the current circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, employers may take steps to determine if [employees entering the workplace have COVID-19](#) because an individual with the virus will pose a direct threat to the health of others. Therefore an employer may choose to administer COVID-19 testing to employees before they enter the workplace to determine if they have the virus.

Consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act standard, employers should ensure that the tests are accurate and reliable. For example, employers may review [guidance from the US Food and Drug Administration](#) about what may or may not be considered safe and accurate testing, as well as guidance from CDC or other public health authorities, and check for updates. Employers may wish to consider the incidence of false-positives or false-negatives associated with a particular test. Finally, note that accurate testing only reveals if the virus is currently present; a negative test does not mean the employee will not acquire the virus later.

Based on guidance from medical and public health authorities, employers should still require – to the greatest extent possible – that employees observe infection control practices (such as social distancing, regular hand-washing, and other measures) in the workplace to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

### Q: Do I need to test my water for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19?

**Posted 4/14/20** – No, SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 has not been detected in drinking water. The use of conventional water treatment methods, such as those used to treat municipal water, should remove or inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19. There is also no current evidence that suggests Coronavirus is present or transmitted through surface or ground water.

- [CDC – Water and COVID-19 FAQs](#)
- [WHO – Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Waste Management for the COVID-19 virus](#)

### **Q: Is environmental sampling essential during this time of crisis?**

**Updated 3/23/20** – Even with this COVID-19 crisis, environmental pathogens remain a potential risk in the processing environment and to food. Environmental pathogens like *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Salmonella* species continue to represent a threat to the consumer. It is more essential than ever to keep your environmental monitoring program functional. Consult with your laboratory to find out what is their testing capacity. If their testing capacity is reduced adjust your sampling plan to prioritize higher risk areas within your sampling plan.

### **Q: Should we test surfaces in our processing facility for COVID-19?**

**Posted 3/20/20** – It is not advised to test surfaces for COVID-19. General Cleaning and Sanitizing procedures that are part of every food processing operation are sufficient to remove and inactivate COVID-19. COVID-19 is not an environmental pathogen or considered a foodborne risk. COVID-19 is spreading mainly through person-to-person contact including through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. However, now is a good time to review and if needed update your cleaning and sanitation verification procedures, including ATP testing to verify cleaning. Visit the following pages to find information on verifying your Cleaning and Sanitation.

- [Food Safety Magazine – Verification of Effective Sanitation Control Strategies](#)
- [Food Quality & Safety – Verifying Your Cleaning and Sanitation](#)
- [Food Safety Tech – Using ATP-based Methods for Cleaning and Sanitation Verification](#)

### **Q: Our routine lab cannot process all of my samples. How do I decide what to test and what not to test?**

**Posted 3/18/20** – In the event of limitations on the volume of laboratory testing available to a manufacturer (for example, due to supply shortages) it may be necessary to prioritize which routine samples should be tested. Taking a risk based approach is appropriate in this circumstance and may include prioritizing testing of high risk environmental locations (for example, high hygiene areas) within a food processing facility over low risk environmental locations.

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## **Audits & Inspections**

### **Q: My facility is GFSI certified. How will audits be handled for the next 2 months?**

**Updated 3/30/20** – All of the GFSI-recognized food safety certification programs (SQF, BRC, FSSC 22000, etc.) have issued official positions on how they are handling new certifications and re-certifications in response to the current pandemic and these are posted on their websites. We recommend contacting your certification body to discuss your options as they are in direct communications with the certification program owners.

SQF has in place a means to defer certification due to extenuating circumstances. This system was used recently for the Australian bushfires and it is used for individual extension requests when facilities have floods and fires. All requests for certificate extension must come from the certification body. At this time, SQF is only reviewing requests that are within 30 days of the certification audit date. Unannounced audits can be changed to announced for 2020, but you will have to have a mandatory unannounced audit in 2021. Additionally, SQF sites scheduled to have an audit before April 30 can ask for an extension of up to 3 months. These requirements can also change based upon how the situation continues to unfold.

Another thing to keep in mind is the message you may be sending out to your customers and employees by postponing your audit, certification or re-certification; some may see this as a sign that typical food safety practices can be relaxed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This option should be used as a last resort.

- [SQF – Coronavirus and Pandemic Preparedness for the Food Industry](#)

### **Q: Is New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets still conducting inspections?**

**Posted 3/25/20** – New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets continues its operations and inspections and is in constant contact with NYS farms and agri-businesses. Consumers are encouraged to remain strong in their support of local farms and agri-businesses during this time. [To access guidance documents that are specific to the food industry in NYS click here.](#)

### **Q: Will I still be inspected by the FDA during this time period?**

**Posted 3/22/20** – The FDA has temporarily postponed all domestic routine surveillance facility inspections. These are facility inspections traditionally conducted every few years based on a risk analysis. Importantly, all domestic for-cause inspection assignments will be evaluated and will proceed if mission-critical. The FDA will continue to respond to natural disasters, outbreaks and other significant public health risks such as Class I recalls and other emergencies involving FDA-regulated products. During this interim period the FDA is evaluating additional ways to conduct inspection work that would not jeopardize public safety and protecting both the firms and the FDA staff. This can include, among other things, evaluating records in lieu of conducting an onsite inspection on an interim basis when travel is not permissible, when appropriate.

The FDA is postponing most foreign inspections through April, effective immediately. Inspections outside the US deemed mission-critical will still be considered on a case-by-case basis.

- [FDA Focuses on Safety of Regulated Products While Scaling Back Domestic Inspections](#)
- [Foreign Inspections](#)

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## **Delivery & Shipping**

### **Q: With trucking pick-ups and deliveries scheduled daily at my food processing and/or farm facility, how do I take steps to protect myself, my employees, and my workplace from potential infection COVID-19?**

**Posted 3/30/20** – The primary concern here is transferring the virus from person-to-person; this includes protecting employee from potentially infected delivery person as well as protecting the delivery person from potentially infected employee. Delivery person and employees working on receiving the deliveries should follow the basic rules for reducing the risk of transfer of COVID-19.

#### **Social Distancing:**

- Keep distance of 6 feet from all people involved during all items. Establish a protocol of receiving and make sure your delivery company is aware of it. Delivery person should stay in their vehicles as much as possible.
- If delivery person is responsible for unloading the delivery vehicle make sure they are (i) using their own tools to do so, (ii) if you have to provide tools like trolleys and dollies make sure these tools are designated only for that purpose, are clearly marked, stored away from other tools employee use, and available to the delivery person without the need for assistance from employee. The delivery person should not enter the facility but instead only unload the material out of the transport vehicle. After unloading the delivery person should continue on their way or if needed to stay, do so in the transport vehicle. Employee from the facility should bring the material into the facility using their own tools. If possible, the outer layer of the transport packaging, i.e. shrink foil and cardboard, should be removed before bringing the material into the facility. There is no need to sanitize any part of transport packaging, inside packaging or working gloves. Consider providing separate working gloves to each employee working on the receiving.

- If facility employees are responsible for unloading the delivery vehicle, the delivery person should first open the vehicle using their own tools, i.e. working gloves. After the delivery person returns to the vehicle the employee should start unloading the transport vehicle using their own tools. If possible, the outer layer of the transport packaging, i.e. shrink foil and cardboard, should be removed before bringing the material into the facility. There is no need to sanitize any part of transport or inside packaging.
- Establish a protocol to have all paperwork done electronically without the need for close interaction.

### Personal Hygiene:

- Employee should wash their hands before receiving the material, after removing the outer layer of transport packaging, and after the material has been placed in its designated area. If soap and water are not available, employee should use a hand sanitizer with minimum 60% alcohol. Delivery person should have their own hand sanitizer which they should use before starting to unload the material and after they finished unloading. Delivery person should also use the sanitizer to sanitize the handles of any tools you are providing to delivery personnel. A hand sanitizer can be provided to delivery person to make sure the protocol is being followed; in this case make sure the hand sanitizer is clearly marked and designated to be only used by delivery company personnel.
- All employee and delivery personnel should avoid touching their face during receiving of the material.
- All employee and delivery personnel should use a handkerchief or a sleeve to limit the spread of liquid droplets in case of sneezing or coughing. Wash your hands immediately after or use a hand sanitizer with minimum 60% alcohol.
- All employee and delivery personnel should self-assess for any symptoms before starting the work day and before starting the delivery and receiving.

### Q: Can I still get product to my customers through FedEx?

**Posted 3/24/20** – FedEx is considered an essential business and may continue to operate under state of emergency and shelter in place orders recently issued in the US Prior to shipping, check to see if your recipient’s location is open, as many commercial businesses are now closed. In the event a delivery location is closed, FedEx will follow their current operating procedures to attempt to complete delivery at a later time. You can also consider selecting a HOL (Hold on Location) address, close by to your recipient’s location. Your recipient will get a notification to pick up packages from the HOL. Given the time/temperature sensitive nature of many food products, it is important to coordinate with your customers/suppliers to ensure deliveries are received at the appropriate time.

## Dairy-related

### Q: My local dairy farm is forced to dump their raw milk; is it safe to take some raw milk and drink it at home?

**Posted 4/7/20** – Dairy farms are dumping raw milk because they are producing more than what is demanded due to the sudden net loss in overall demand. While milk in the grocery store is flying off the shelves, the demand for milk at places such as restaurants and institutions has decreased dramatically. Economic weakness in China and other countries has impacted dairy exports. Home stockpiling has provided some dairy support, but not enough to offset the losses related to food service.

We are strongly advising against the consumption of raw milk. It is even more important to follow this advice during this pandemic since hospitals are overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients, which results in (i) available help is limited, and (ii) the need to visit a hospital would put you in additional risk of contracting COVID-19.

If a person decides to use raw milk, we strongly advise boiling the raw milk before any storage or consumption. You can support local dairy farms by buying milk and dairy products at the grocery store. If you see a store (in PA, NY, MD, DE, NJ or north east VA) that is still limiting milk sales, please take a picture, note the location, date and time and send to Beth Meyer ([bmeyer@milk4u.org](mailto:bmeyer@milk4u.org)) so American Dairy Association Northeast can work

with the chain to rectify the situation. If the store is in NY you should also send the information to Michael Durant ([mdurant@fiany.com](mailto:mdurant@fiany.com)) at Food Industry Alliance of NYS; this way the issue will be dealt with from both the dairy processor and retail side.

Raw milk is considered a high-risk food commodity due to the number of food pathogens that can be present within it. It is especially risky to those that are young, elderly, immunocompromised, or pregnant women. A number of US States either completely prohibit or strongly restrict sales of raw milk. For example, NYS regulation prohibits dairy farmers from giving away any raw milk that they produce without a '[Raw Milk Sales Part 2 permit](#)'. To obtain the permit in NYS the farm needs to perform the following monthly tests:

- Have a Brucellosis ring test on file with the Department's Division of Animal Industry.
- Have a tuberculosis test performed on each animal.
- Be enrolled in the Quality Milk Production Services (QMPS) program and must have a report showing that each animal was tested for pathogens, including but not limited to Staph. Aureus and E. coli.
- Have a milk sample tested for Salmonella, Listeria, Escherichia coliform, E. coli 0157:H7, Campylobacter, and Staphylococci.
- Have a satisfactory farm water test on file.

There are also strict rules and regulations the dairy industry must follow in order to eliminate the risk associated with raw milk that make pasteurized fluid milk and other dairy products as safe as they are.

- [Position Statement on Raw Milk Sales and Consumption, Cornell University](#)

### **Q: We bottle milk into glass bottles and take in returns to be washed and re-used. Should we be concerned about contracting COVID-19 by handling these returned bottles from our customers?**

**Posted 3/19/20** – No. Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. COVID-19 is a respiratory virus, most likely to be transmitted person-to-person. Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. Like other viruses, it is possible that the virus that causes COVID-19 can survive on surfaces or objects for short periods of time. The critical concept to understand is that it is a respiratory disease so you'd have to provide a method for the virus to get into the lungs. This is the reason hand-washing is a key component to preventing illness as well as not touching your face/mouth/nose area with your hands. It however is important that you reinforce hand-washing procedures for employees that handle returned bottles and crates; these employees should wash their hands regularly and particularly after they have completed their work. Also, refer to this question on how long the virus can live on surfaces.

- [CDC – Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\), How It Spreads](#)
- [US FDA – Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [CDC – Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\), How to Protect Yourself](#)

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## Produce-related

### **Q: Will my produce operation still be inspected for the FSMA Produce Safety Rule?**

**Posted 4/14/20** – The FDA has [temporarily postponed](#) all domestic routine surveillance facility inspections. In some states, inspections are conducted at the state level. Please check with your state department of agriculture to see if they are continuing to conduct food safety, dairy, and plant inspections.

### **Q: How do we sanitize enclosed cab tractors?**

**Posted 4/14/20** – The focus of cleaning and sanitizing the cab of a tractor, or any vehicle in operation, should be on the frequently touched surfaces. Surfaces in this category include; steering wheels, seat belts, door handles, arm rests, radio buttons, cup holders, and other surfaces touched by drivers or passengers.

It is not necessary to clean and sanitize every nook and cranny but focusing on the commonly touched areas can decrease the risk of transmission.

There are additional actions that can be taken to reduce risks related to farm vehicles:

- Limit the number of operators in farm vehicles.
- Train farm machinery operators to clean and sanitize frequently touched surfaces before and after driving farm vehicles.
- Remind operators to wash their hands after using farm machinery as well as before and after they eat.

Inform all farm employees that SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is most commonly spread through respiratory droplets, so maintaining social distancing of at least 6 feet is the most effective way to reduce risks. Frequent hand-washing, avoiding touching your face, and cleaning and sanitizing frequently touched surfaces are additional actions that will reduce contamination risks.

- [NYC Health – COVID-19: General Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting for Non-Health Care Settings](#)

### **Q: How should I reinforce my worker training curriculum?**

**Posted 4/14/20** – First, it is good that you already have a worker training program in place. This is a great opportunity to retrain workers on food safety practices that reduce microbial risks while handling fresh produce. Address policies such as when and why it is important to wash your hands, the importance of not coming to work when sick and, coming to work with clean clothes. It is important to add practices specific to reducing the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, including social distancing (i.e., staying at least 6 feet away from others) and increasing cleaning and sanitization of commonly used equipment and areas (e.g., lunch rooms, bathrooms).

- [National GAP Program Worker Health/Hygiene Video](#)
- [CDC – Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation](#)

### **Q: Should all employees that work with produce be wearing gloves?**

**Posted 4/14/20** – No. It is likely gloves will be hard to find due to the COVID-19 outbreak, so farms should reserve glove use for times when it is necessary. This includes during cleaning and sanitizing when gloves are used as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Many farms have implemented glove policies during harvest due to buyer demand, but this is not a critical practice if gloves are not available. It is important that employees wash their hands prior to beginning harvest and anytime they become dirty, but hand washing is sufficient. Providing hand sanitizer is recommended as an additional step. Some farms may decide to designate glove use for specific on-farm activities, such as employees who collect money at a farm stand. If gloves are used, it is important to make sure they are worn properly. Hands should be washed prior to putting gloves on, after use they should be removed properly so that the outside of the gloves are not contacted by the hands, and the worker should wash their hands before continuing with other activities at the stand, like handling produce.

**Q: I heard the virus can be carried in beards or hair. Should workers with beards shave before working with produce?**

**Posted 4/14/20** – In the food industry, it is not a new concept that a beard or hair can harbor contamination or be a contaminant in food. The proper use of hair and beard nets prevents contamination from hair in produce. This could be an opportunity to address avoiding handling fresh produce after touching your hair or face. Also, it is important to remind employees that they must properly wash their hands after sneezing or blowing their nose since the SARS-CoV-2 virus is spread through respiratory droplets. Workers may also wear a cloth face covering in the absence of beard hair.

- [CDC – Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [CDC – Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community-Based Transmission](#)
- [CDC – Personal Protective Equipment: Questions and Answers](#)

**Q: Should I change all my food packaging from plastic to cardboard?**

**Posted 4/14/20** – No. Food packaging has not been associated with the transmission of COVID-19. Persistence studies show that the virus can remain viable on different surfaces but there is no evidence of infection from viruses on surfaces. Workers should continue to practice good hygienic behaviors and pack into new, single use containers to lower the risk of contaminating both produce and packaging, but there is no need to change food packaging containers.

- [FDA, Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

**Q: Should I increase how often my facility is cleaned and sanitized?**

**Posted 4/14/20** – Yes. You should maintain your cleaning and sanitizing schedule and consider increasing your sanitation practices in high traffic areas and for surfaces that are commonly contacted by people in your operation. This includes door knobs and communal areas such as break rooms. It is important to ensure hand washing facilities are well-stocked so employees can practice proper hand-washing. It is also good to provide hand sanitizer for employees throughout the farm. Remember to implement policies that allow employees to maintain at least a 6 ft distance from others while they are working. This may mean modifying time schedules for your sanitation crew to allow them to work without coming within 6 feet of others on the sanitation crew.

- [What to do if you have a COVID-19 case or other cases of illness on the job](#)
- [Cleaning vs Sanitizing](#)

**Q: Can the PSA Sanitizer Tool be used to find a product effective against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19?**

**Posted 4/14/20** – No. The intent of the [PSA Sanitizer Excel Tool](#) is to help farmers and educators search for a sanitizer that might meet their needs (i.e., produce washing, food contact surface sanitation). The functions in the tool allow sorting to answer some basic questions but the user must decide for themselves whether the products are appropriate and effective based in part on the EPA label (linked in the tool) and the manufacturer's technical specification sheets. The [EPA N list](#) was created specifically to help the public find products that can be used to disinfect or sanitize surfaces that are contaminated with the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. The EPA has stated that each of those products is appropriate for that purpose. Straightforward information on the development of the EPA N list, and how it can be used to cross-reference products, can be found in the [N list FAQs document](#). When in doubt, in reference to COVID-19, please use the EPA N list.

## Cloth Face Coverings

### Q: I heard the CDC is now recommending people wear cloth face coverings, why?

**Posted 4/7/20** – First, it is critical to remember that this recommendation (cloth face coverings) is only effective if correctly implemented in addition to practicing social distancing of 6 feet or more from others, regularly washing your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, and not touching your face. The virus is thought to spread mainly from close person-to-person contact and by respiratory droplets. These COVID-19 containing droplets may be spread by asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic COVID-19 positive individuals when they sneeze, speak, or cough. Current studies suggest that between 20-40% of individuals that have COVID-19 are asymptomatic, and thus may be spreading the virus unknowingly. For these reasons, CDC has issued a new policy on cloth face coverings with the intent of preventing either asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic individuals from spreading the disease.

*Note: CDC is NOT recommending the general public wear surgical masks (also known as facemasks) or N-95 respirators, these are still in shortage and should be reserved for health care workers.*

- [CDC – Cloth Face Coverings](#)
- [Estimating the Asymptomatic Proportion of Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Cases on Board the Diamond Princess Cruise Ship, Yokohama, Japan, 2020](#)

### Q: How effective are 'home-made' cloth face coverings?

**Posted 4/7/20** – Studies have shown that efficacy of cloth face coverings can vary by design, the material used, and even the brand of the material used. Following the CDC recommendations for construction are best practice. Remember that cloth face coverings may reduce the spread of virus from the wearer to others, but are not intended to protect the wearer and are not effective without practicing social distancing of at least 6 feet, frequent hand-washing with soap for 20 seconds, and not touching your face.

- [CDC – Guidance on How to Make an Effective Cloth Face Covering](#)
- [Simple Respiratory Protection – Evaluation of the Filtration Performance of Cloth Masks and Common Fabric Materials Against 20–1000 nm Size Particles](#)
- [How to make a pleated version of a cloth face covering with ties](#)
- [How to make a fitted version of cloth face covering ear loops](#)

### Q: When should I wear my cloth face covering?

**Posted 4/7/20** – You should wear your cloth face covering whenever you leave your home, ie: grocery shopping, to the pharmacy, or whenever someone visits your home where you have interactions with them. Having visitors to your home is highly discouraged, but if someone (repairman, health care provider, etc) must come to your home, you should wear your cloth face covering and remember to always keep 6 feet of distance between you and others.

- [CDC – Cloth Face Covering Q&A](#)

### Q: How often should I clean my cloth face covering?

**Posted 4/7/20** – You should wash your cloth face covering regularly based on frequency of use, or as soon as it is damp. Ideally cleaning is performed in a washing machine or by carefully washing with soap and water. Allow it to completely dry before reuse, drying it on the highest heat possible in the dryer. Remember to not touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing or handling the cloth face covering and wash hands immediately after removing, handling, and cleaning.

- [CDC – Guidance on How to Make an Effective Cloth Face Covering](#)

### **Q: What other precautions should I be aware of when wearing my cloth face covering?**

**Posted 4/7/20** – A cloth face covering is not intended to protect you, the wearer, but may offer some protection to others in the case that you are a pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic spreader. The cloth face covering needs to be implemented in addition to social distancing of 6 feet or more, hand-washing and avoiding touching your face or cloth face covering. If you are symptomatic, you need to self-isolate and reach out to your primary care provider. A cloth face covering will not allow you to venture out without putting others at risk. To protect yourself, you should be following social distancing practices, regularly washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and not touching your face.

### **Q: I can't find any cloth face coverings to buy in stores in my area, how do I make them?**

**Posted 4/7/20** – The CDC and the US Surgeon General, have published how-to-guides on making Cloth Face Coverings depending on the equipment and cloth you have available.

- [CDC – Guidance on How to Make an Effective Cloth Face Covering](#)
- [US Surgeon General's Video on How to Make a Simple Cloth Face Covering](#)

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## Food Delivery

### **Q: Is it safe to order takeout food in NYC? Are there any special precautions to follow because of COVID-19?**

**Posted 3/23/20** – It is safe to order and consume takeout food in NYC or in any areas in NY State. All food preparation establishments are required to adhere to safe food practices as dictated by the Department of Health and FDA. Based on the [CDC information](#), 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 associated with any type of food. If you are concerned about the possible surface contamination of the takeout bag, container or package, in the unlikely event that a person carrying the coronavirus has touched those surfaces, then you can minimize the risk by:

- Maintaining social distance (at least 6 feet) when you pick up the food. Avoid touching your face.
- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water as soon as you arrive at your home.
- Remove the food from the takeout bag/package/container and dispose of or recycle them appropriately. Wash your hands again.
- Wash your hands frequently before handling food, while preparing food, and before consuming food.

And as a [general food safety rule](#), refrigerate leftover food quickly, within 2 hours, and consume within 3-4 days.

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## Food Supply

### **Q: I want to help support local farmers, where can I purchase NY products?**

**Posted 4/8/20** – The NYS Taste NY program is a collaborative effort to promote and retail locally grown and produced NYS food and farm products supported by the NYS Office of the Governor, the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and, of course, local farm and food producers.

A recently unveiled online e-commerce site is now available at [Shop Taste NY](#), where consumers can find shelf-stable Taste NY items for sale that are normally available only at select Taste NY locations.

### **Q: Is there any legitimate threat of a food shortage?**

**Posted 3/30/20** – No. There are no nationwide shortages of food, although in some cases the inventory of certain foods at your grocery store might be temporarily low due to mass buying and a normal lag before stores can restock. Food production and manufacturing are widely dispersed throughout the U.S. and there are currently no wide-spread disruptions reported in the supply chain. Food production is classified as an essential function that will not be restricted due to COVID-19.

### **Q: Why is social distancing and self-quarantine important to keep the food supply chain running properly? What is the food supply chain actually made up of? (farmers, drivers, stores, etc.)**

**Posted 3/26/20** – The [coronavirus that causes COVID-19](#) is transmitted mainly by person-to-person through respiratory droplets. When people are in close contact, defined as less than 6 feet, there is a possibility that respiratory droplets from an infected person can land in the mouths, noses or eyes of nearby people, eventually reaching the lungs where the virus reproduces and produces the lung disease. The best way to prevent the illness is to avoid being exposed to the coronavirus, hence one important measure (in addition to frequent hand-washing) is to keep social distancing of at least 6 feet. Any infected person must avoid contact with other people by self-quarantining for the period of time specified by their healthcare provider. In order to keep the food supply chain running properly, we need healthy workers to perform their jobs, and that can only be achieved by following current safe food handling procedures that include social distancing and self-quarantine.

The food supply includes farmers, packers, producers, suppliers, storage facilities, manufacturers, processors, warehouses, transportation systems, food/grocery retail stores, food preparation for immediate consumption establishments (restaurants, cafeterias, pizza shops, etc.) and other food distribution systems (such as online purchasing).

### **Q: Do I need to stockpile as many groceries and supplies as I can? Is there a shortage of food and supplies I should be concerned about?**

**Posted 3/24/20** – No. Only buy what your family needs for 1-2 weeks, practicing social distancing to minimize contact with people. It is important to remember that many families may be unable to buy a supply of food and water for weeks in advance due to economic limitations. Consumer demand has recently been exceptionally high – especially for grocery, household cleaning, and some healthcare products because of COVID-19 anxiety. Food supply and freight flows are not disrupted, but stores need time to restock.

- [FEMA – Coronavirus Rumor Control](#)

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## **Variants of the Virus**

### **Q: The SARS-CoV-2 variant from the UK (B.1.1.7) has been detected in the US; what can I do to protect myself and my family?**

**Updated 3/22/21** – Virus mutation is a natural process that occurs when viruses are transmitted from one host cell to another, from one human host to another; the case is the same with SARS-CoV-2. Most mutations (new variants) occur without any change to the virus, some reduce the effectiveness of the virus to infect the host and there are a few that increase this effectiveness. There are currently at least three variants with this slightly higher effectiveness; one was first identified in South Africa (variant B.1.351), one in Brazil (variant P.1) and the third one in the UK (variant B.1.1.7). All three variants are specifically more effective at getting from one person to another (higher transmissibility). [All prevention measures and medical countermeasures](#), including vaccines that were developed, are still effective against all three variants; the same is true for current methods we are using to test for SARS-CoV-2 virus.

All three variants have been identified in [states across the US](#), some of them are becoming the dominant variants in countries inside and outside of the US and they have the potential to increase the number of cases and prolong the pandemic. This is a good time to make sure our behavior is in line with all the [basic mitigation strategies](#): (i) keeping a physical distance of 6 feet at all times, properly wearing face coverings whenever outside of your home, frequently washing your hands, avoiding touching your face, and avoiding large crowds and indoor public spaces. These basic mitigation strategies will remain the best way of preventing the spread until a sufficient portion of the population gets vaccinated to achieve herd immunity.

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## Response to Media

**Q: I am constantly being bombarded by different ads that claim they have a cure for COVID-19; is there a cure?**

**Posted 4/8/20** – There are currently no reports of an effective cure for COVID-19 that would be available to the general public. Several research groups and pharmaceutical companies around the world are working on developing a vaccine that would prevent infection with COVID-19. Information on when an effective vaccine might become available is not known yet.

The best way to [protect yourself](#) from COVID-19 infection is to practice social distancing (at least 6 feet), wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water, and avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. CDC is also recommending the use of simple [cloth face coverings](#) as a voluntary public health measure in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies). If you get sick, follow the [guidelines from CDC](#) to protect others and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Currently, any product (human drugs, animal drugs, medical devices, biological products, foods, dietary supplements or cosmetics) being advertised and sold as being able to cure COVID-19 would be considered an unlawful sale of medical product. All unlawful sale of medical product should be reported to FDA using [MedWatch Online Voluntary Reporting Form](#).

**Q: I saw a video on YouTube from MD Jeffrey VanWingen recommending disinfecting every food package that comes from stores/deliveries, and washing fruits and vegetables with soap to avoid contracting COVID-19. Why is this group not recommending the practices this doctor illustrates?**

**Posted 3/27/20** – USDA is specifically advising against the use of soap and other detergents and sanitizers to wash produce since detergents and sanitizers will absorb into produce which may lead to health issues upon ingestion.

- [US FDA – Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

**Currently, there is no evidence of food, including produce and food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19.** Not a single positive case of COVID-19 has been linked to food. The coronavirus responsible for COVID-19 is a respiratory virus, most likely to be transmitted person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Current guidance from USDA recommends rinsing produce (fruits and vegetables) under cold running water to remove any lingering dirt. If there is a firm surface, such as on apples or carrots, the surface can be scrubbed with a brush under running water without using soap.

- [FDA has a step-by-step guide to cleaning fresh fruits and vegetables with plain running water.](#)

## Q: I saw that an article in VICE says “Can I Get Coronavirus from Food? Scientists Say Yes and to Step Away from the Deli Meats.” Is that true?

Posted 3/21/20 – Answered by Martin Wiedmann, who takes full personal responsibility for this answer. This article presents unsubstantiated and un-supported personal opinions and theoretical possibilities. It is important to reiterate that FDA and food safety agencies across the US agree that there is not evidence for foodborne transmission of COVID-19. Just because something is possible, that does not mean it will or has happened or happens frequently enough to present a concern.

- [FDA – Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [CDC – How It Spreads](#)

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## Other Questions

### Q: I’m screening my employees for COVID-19; is this information considered a medical record? How long do I have to retain the documents if they are considered medical records?

Posted 6/4/20 – Visit this page from Matrix Sciences to find a good overview of what is considered a medical record and what the requirements are for retention of medical records.

### Q: How do I address my employee’s childcare situations?

Updated 4/20/20 – As of 3/20/2020 licensed child care businesses in New York State are considered essential services and allowed to operate. [Guidance can be found here](#). The Office of Children and Family Services [provides guidance to New York State licensed child care centers during the COVID-19 crisis here](#). While child care centers are being given guidance to help address additional child care needs for children of essential employees, particularly in the health care fields, at the same time, child care facilities are also being asked to find ways to increase social distancing measures and improve sanitation. The Office of Children and Family Services maintains a [listing of licensed day care providers](#) to search for child care options although not all of the providers may be open during this current time. The ABCD program, which serves as a primary resource for the children of farm employee and food system employees, is [currently closed and will re-evaluate its status regularly](#) so please call local Centers for availability.

### Q: How can I access the federal Paycheck Protection Program for my agricultural or food related business?

Posted 4/3/20 – The Department of Treasury and Small Business Administration (SBA) released an interim final rule on the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Agricultural producers and food processors are eligible to participate in the program and should reach out to their bankers and/or agricultural lenders to apply immediately. While SBA still needs to confirm some administrative details, loans will be provided on a first-come, first-served basis and producers and processors can get started on the application now.

- [For a top-line overview of the PPP program click here.](#)
- [Information for prospective borrowers can be found here.](#)
- [The application for borrowers can be found here.](#)
- [Your local SBA Field Office can be found here.](#)

**Q: Does my food or beverage processing and manufacturing business, grocery store, produce auction, or farmer's market qualify as an essential business under the State of New York's [Executive Order](#) mandate to de-densify workplaces?**

**Updated 3/30/20** – Yes. [Businesses engaged in supporting food production in New York State](#), from farms, food manufacturing of all scales, to places of business where food sales are conducted like grocery stores, convenience stores, produce auctions, livestock markets and auctions, farm stands and farmer's markets are considered to be essential to the food supply. [These businesses are NOT subject to mandatory de-densification](#) of employee work spaces nor are these businesses subject to restrictions on the amount of people who can gather in one space. Businesses supporting food and feed production such as food animal veterinary based clinics, food safety testing labs, and agricultural supply businesses/services and ingredient manufacturers for food businesses are similarly included within the definition of essential services. This answer has been approved by the [NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets](#).

Additionally, the FDA and Department of Homeland Security considers food and agriculture essential. This exclusion does not mean that businesses should not make every effort to ensure appropriate sanitation and good social distancing in the place of work and place where consumers are coming to purchase food. Please refer to the resources on this page and within the FAQ for good sanitation practices and signage resources. Businesses can seek an opinion from Empire State Development Corporation as to whether their business is an essential business. Food manufacturers who are experiencing logistical challenges with transportation and the supply chain can reach out to FEMA's [National Business Emergency Operations Center](#) at [NBEOC@Fema.dhs.gov](mailto:NBEOC@Fema.dhs.gov).

**Q: Can I expect to see financial relief provided to small and large scale food processing businesses and farms?**

**Posted 3/20/20** – State and national governments are enacting numerous COVID-19 economic relief programs, and information in this area is changing rapidly. The federal government recently added New York State to its listing of declared national disaster areas, making businesses eligible for [low interest to no interest loans here](#). While most of the immediate focus on disaster assistance has been to immediately unemployed personnel and various extensions of tax due dates and certain loan or debt payment extensions, the general consensus among elected leaders seems to be that some form of business assistance programs should be developed particularly for hard-hit sectors of the economy. Cornell CALS recommends following the latest news from your elected officials or the trade organizations pertinent to your sector for the most up to date information on business relief packages. In general, financial relief packages for businesses and residents tends to be provided by the federal government. Here are some helpful resources for you:

- [Congress.gov](#)
- [Consumer Brands Association](#)
- [New York Farm Bureau](#)
- [American Farm Bureau Federation](#)
- [International Dairy Foods Association](#)
- [Wine America](#)

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