Food Safety
COVID-19 Emerging and Preparedness Practices

Hold Ctrl and Click on a FAQ listed in the Table of Contents below to jump to that section of the document and view the answer.

Table of Contents

Can I get sick with coronavirus COVID-19 from food? .............................................................. 2

Should we change our practices when handling food drive or donated food from retailers? ........................................................................................................................................ 3

What recommendations are there for continuing operating procedures in the event that a volunteer or warehouse worker tests positive for COVID-19? ......................................................... 3

Can COVID-19 spread from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects? ......................... 4

What disinfectants will be effective against coronavirus (COVID-19)? .................................. 4

What if a retailer reports an employee with a confirmed case of COVID-19? ......................... 5

Can I accept fresh produce donated from a retail store even if they have identified an employee that tested positive for COVID-19? ...................................................................................... 5

Can COVID-19 (Coronavirus) be passed on through prepared foods? ................................ 6

Should I take additional measures during the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate the risk of SARS-CoV-2 coming into my home on food and food packaging? ......................................................... 7

How do I maintain social distancing at my food bank or food pantry where staff and volunteers typically work within close distances? ........................................................................................................ 7
Can I get sick with coronavirus COVID-19 from food?

Updated 03.30.2020

A: We are not aware of any reports at this time of human illnesses that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. However, it is always important to follow good hygiene practices (i.e., wash hands and surfaces often, separate raw meat from other foods, cook to the right temperature, and refrigerate foods promptly) when handling or preparing foods.

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.

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. This includes between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. However, it is always important to follow good hygiene practices (i.e., wash hands and surfaces often, separate raw meat from other foods, cook to the right temperature, and refrigerate foods promptly) when handling or preparing foods.

References

   According to the World Health Organization, it is safe to receive packages from areas with known COVID – 19 illnesses.
5. Diversey
   As of now, there’s no evidence of COVID-19 transmission through food. Coronaviruses need a host (animal or human) to grow in and are not believed to grow in food.
Should we change our practices when handling food drive or donated food from retailers?

Updated 03.15.2020

We do not believe receiving practices for food drive or retail store donation need to change. There is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. Coronavirus historically have poor survivability on surfaces and the FDA and USDA indicate that there is no evidence of the virus being spread from handling food packages. Coronavirus is most likely to be spread via respiratory droplets. The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from close personal contact via respiratory droplets. Anyone handling, preparing and serving food should always follow safe food handling procedures and practice good personal hygiene.

References


What recommendations are there for continuing operating procedures in the event that a volunteer or warehouse worker tests positive for COVID-19?

Updated 03.30.2020

If you have an employee or volunteer that test positive for COVID-19 you will need to immediately contact your local health department for guidance. The local health department will need to know who has had close contact with the COVID-19 positive person while they were at the food bank. It is important to note that COVID-19 is a respiratory virus and the main mode of transmission is through respiratory droplets (close personal contact) and not from touching inanimate objects such as food products. It is not necessary to recall or destroy food products that the worker may have handled.

All components of the food industry are considered critical infrastructure and it is therefore vital that they continue to operate. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued Guidance on [Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA33296.pdf) that includes information on how a COVID-19 outbreak could affect workplaces and [steps all employers can take to reduce workers’ risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)](https://www.osha.gov/Publications/c19/GL2020021242966.pdf).

Food facilities need to follow protocols, including cleaning protocols, set by local and state health departments, which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-
19 in each area. These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission – not based on food safety.

If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality about individual employees’ identities. Sick employees should follow the CDC’s What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Employers should consult with their local health department for additional guidance. CDC’s guidance for disinfecting your facility after having an employee test positive can be found here.

References


Can COVID-19 spread from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects?

Updated 03.15.2020

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not believed to be the main way the virus spreads.

Reference:


What disinfectants will be effective against coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Updated 03.15.2020

It is safe to assume to date that COVID-19 has similar virulence on surfaces as other human coronaviruses. This is a link to disinfectants that are effective on human coronavirus.

References
What if a retailer reports an employee with a confirmed case of COVID-19?*

*Updated 03.15.2020

Should a store employee test positive for COVID-19, work with the retail store and local health department to determine the best course of action for future pick-ups. There is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread from close personal contact via respiratory droplets and is not contracted from consuming food or from handling packaged foods. Retailers are not recalling foods if they have a COVID-19 positive employee. The only exception is if the local or state health department requires action.

References

Can I accept fresh produce donated from a retail store even if they have identified an employee that tested positive for COVID-19?

*Updated 03.15.2020

The short answer is yes. If produce was handled by someone with COVID-19 it does not need to be recalled or destroyed. Produce handling has not be identified as primary mode of transmission. Coronaviruses historically have poor survivability on surfaces and the FDA and USDA indicate that there is no evidence of the virus being spread from handling foods or food packages.

The Produce Marketing Association (PMA), United Fresh Association and FMI have released the following joint statement on the safety of produce during the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

“There are no clinically confirmed cases of COVID-19 linked to the consumption of fresh produce or food sold through traditional retail outlets. As consumers select their produce, adhering to food safety guidance is critical. We encourage consumers to wash their hands, and wash their produce just prior to preparing [following FDA recommendations](https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions#food).”

According to Amanda Deering, an Extension specialist in Purdue’s Department of Food Science, current research indicates that the virus is not foodborne or transmitted by food.
“From all indications, the virus that causes COVID-19 appears to be transmitted just like other viruses,” Deering said. “This is very positive in that the same practices that we normally use to reduce contamination risk, such as washing your hands and washing fruit and vegetables before eating, should be applicable to reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19.”

Scott Monroe, Purdue Extension food safety educator, points out that many produce growers already incorporate good agricultural practice that reduce the risk of contamination by a human pathogen.

“How viruses may be transmitted from surfaces, most growers take steps to prevent contamination. At this point in time, fear of COVID-19 should not be a reason to stop purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables,” he said.

References


Can COVID-19 (Coronavirus) be passed on through prepared foods?

Updated 03.15.2020

People are not infected with the virus through food. So, it is unlikely the virus is passed on through food and there is no evidence yet of this happening with COVID-19 (coronavirus) to date.

Coronaviruses need a host (animal or human) to grow in and cannot grow in prepared food. Thorough cooking is expected to kill the virus because we know that a heat treatment of at least 30min at 60ºC is effective with SARS. Also, the COVID-19 virus is not able to survive in the stomach due to the high stomach acidity.

References

Should I take additional measures during the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate the risk of SARS-CoV-2 coming into my home on food and food packaging?

Updated: 3/30/2020

Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. CDC notes that in general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient, refrigerated, or frozen temperatures. It is much more likely that a person will be exposed by person-to-person transmission involving close contact with someone who is ill or shedding the virus.

Consumers can follow CDC guidelines on how to protect yourself, especially the advice on frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; and frequent cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces.

If you are concerned about contamination of food and food packaging you have purchased from the grocery store, wash your hands after handling food and food packages when you return from the grocery store and after removing packaging from food. In addition, it’s always critical to follow the 4 key steps of food safety—clean, separate, cook, and chill – to prevent foodborne illness. FDA also has advice about safely selecting and serving raw produce.

Reference


How do I maintain social distancing at my food bank or food pantry where staff and volunteers typically work within close distances?

Updated: 4/6/2020

To prevent spread of COVID-19, CDC is recommending individuals employ social distancing or maintaining approximately 6 feet from others, when possible. In food production/processing facilities and retail food establishments, an evaluation should be made to identify and implement operational changes that increase employee separation. However, social distancing to the full 6 feet will not be possible in some food facilities.

The risk of an employee transmitting COVID-19 to another is dependent on distance between employees, the duration of the exposure, and the effectiveness of employee hygiene practices and sanitation. When it’s impractical
for employees in these settings to maintain social distancing, effective hygiene practices should be maintained to reduce the chance of spreading the virus. Also, see Should Employees in retail food and food production settings wear face coverings to prevent exposure to COVID-19? (Posted April 4, 2020).

IMPORTANT: Maintaining social distancing in the absence of effective hygiene practices may not prevent the spread of this virus. Food facilities should be vigilant in their hygiene practices, including frequent and proper hand-washing and routine cleaning of all surfaces.

Because the intensity of the COVID-19 outbreak may differ according to geographic location, coordination with state and local officials is strongly encouraged for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside.

Sick employees should follow the CDC’s What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Reference

Should food bank employees and volunteers wear face coverings to prevent the exposure to COVID-19?

Updated: 4/6/2020

On April 3, the CDC released an updated recommendation regarding the use of cloth face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19. CDC recommends 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).

For workers in food production, processing, and retail type settings who do not typically wear masks as part of their jobs, consider the following if you choose to use a cloth face covering to slow the spread of COVID-19:

- Maintain face coverings in accordance with parameters in FDA’s Model Food Code sections 4-801.11 Clean Linens and 4.802.11 Specifications.
- Launder reusable face coverings before each daily use.
- CDC also has additional information on the use of face coverings, including washing instructions and information on how to make homemade face covers.

NOTE: The cloth face coverings recommended by CDC are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.

Reference