



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Food Safety and Coronavirus/COVID-19

**Q: What happens if a grocery associate is identified to have COVID-19?**

**A:** If diagnosed, physicians work with state or local health departments, and health departments follow up with individuals. A store will also work with its local health inspector to determine the best course of action following an aggressive containment philosophy since there will be variability depending on person-to-person interaction, department and activities. Importantly, this associate will be asked to stay home and not return to work until they are asymptomatic.

**Q: Do grocery stores present a higher risk to consumers than other places?**

**A:** Most food retailers make their products available within their physical stores but food purchases can also be made online for pickup or home delivery for those who need or prefer ordering and receiving their groceries that way.

**Q: If a food manufacturer discovers that their employees have Coronavirus and their product could be tainted, what would happen?**

**A:** Food companies have programs in place to prevent sick workers from operating in a food manufacturing environment. If a worker is determined to have COVID-19, the facility will ensure that infected individuals are quarantined and directed to receive appropriate health care. In addition, companies will screen other employees and stay on alert to identify potential new infections in their operations.

**Q: Why should we believe that our food supply is safe during this pandemic when food recalls and outbreaks seem to happen all the time?**

**A:** There is no evidence for the spread of SARS-CoV-2 through consumption of food, no known cases of foodborne COVID-19, and no reason to believe that the Coronavirus has any gastro-intestinal transmission. Furthermore, coronaviruses are more than likely to be inactivated by stomach acids. According to multiple public health agencies around the world, including USDA, CDC, WHO, FDA and [EFSA](#) coronaviruses are primarily spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Furthermore, Coronaviruses have poor survivability on surfaces; therefore, packaging of food also pose a very low risk of spreading the virus.

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**Q: Can a person contract Coronavirus from food?**

**A:** Coronavirus is a respiratory virus spread through respiratory droplets. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does *not* consider COVID-19 to be a foodborne illness, but similar actions to prevent foodborne illness can be taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The most important actions to take include proper handwashing using soap and water and scrubbing for at least 20 seconds, frequent cleaning and sanitation of touch points and staying home when sick or caring for someone who is sick.

**Q: How can food suppliers guarantee American consumers that the food they are putting into the market is safe and free from the virus?**

**A:** According to multiple public health agencies around the world, including USDA, CDC, WHO, FDA and [EFSA](#) coronaviruses are primarily spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Coronaviruses do not grow in foods, and these viruses are known to have poor survivability on surfaces; therefore, packaging of food also pose a very low risk of spreading the virus. Federal food safety agencies remain alert to identify potential other food safety risks and inform consumers as appropriate, but it is always important for consumers to follow cooking instructions available on food packaging and labeling to ensure safe consumption of food.

**Q: Is it safer to buy food/groceries from a store or online?**

**A:** Most food retailers make their products available within their physical stores but many also offer the option to purchase food online for pickup or home delivery for those who need or prefer ordering and receiving their groceries that way.

**Q: What is our government doing to make sure that our food supply is safe, especially when we need it most?**

**A:** Delivering safe food to consumers is always a top priority of food companies and FDA and USDA. Here in the United States, FDA and USDA enforce the strictest food safety laws and regulations in the world.

**Q: What will happen if there aren't enough workers to manufacture, deliver and unpack groceries in stores in the coming months?**

**A:** Given that the US is now in a state of national emergency and social lockdowns are being put in place, there is every hope that the worst of the outbreak crisis will be over sooner than later. The goal is that the possibility of a risk of food supply shortage in the US will be averted. Food companies are working diligently to secure their supply chain and collaborating with their partners to be able to support public needs in the coming weeks and months of the crisis.

**Q: How will grocers keep shelves stocked with essentials?**

**A:** There are enough food products and consumables being produced to supply our country's needs. There may be moments when certain desired or essentials products are unavailable, but that will only be a temporary situation. It may take some additional time to get food products to the stores and on

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shelves. However, based on sound business practices and planning within the food and beverage industry, food will be available and store shelves will be restocked as quickly as possible.

**Q: What are grocery stores doing to protect customers from the Coronavirus?**

**A:** Grocery stores have the health of their customers in mind every day. CDC recommends that grocery stores continue to practice routine cleaning and sanitation, especially on those “high touch” areas of the store, such as buttons, carts and touch screens, etc. CDC confirmed that food retailers should continue to use cleaners and disinfectants according to label instructions for cleaning and sanitizing, and leverage EPA-registered cleaning and disinfecting products that are already on the market.

**Q: How will food manufacturers and grocery stores remain functioning while keeping their workers safe?**

**A:** Food retailers have implemented steps to ensure that even greater attention is placed on store personnel hygiene and are training employees to ensure sick employees are identified and swiftly removed from store locations to prevent infections within their stores.

**Q: What will happen to the food supply in the coming weeks and months?**

**A:** Depending on the local situation, shoppers are in either preventive-mode or response-mode. For instance, communities experiencing their first reported cases of Coronavirus may be securing sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizer, etc. Communities that have already seen several cases of the virus are in more of a response mode, perhaps self-quarantining and securing supplies that bring them comfort and preventive care. This means we are seeing spikes and plateaus in certain product purchases across the country. The food industry will continue to witness this as the Coronavirus plays out in the US.

**Q: What can be done to prevent the spread of Coronavirus?**

**A:** General precautions should be taken to prevent the spread of infection such as proper handwashing, covering mouth/nose with sneezing, and avoiding contact with anyone experiencing respiratory illness symptoms such as coughing and sneezing.

**Q: What actions should food establishments take?**

**A:** Food establishments should ensure that they have strong food safety programs in place and ensure employees are washing hands properly, practicing good personal hygiene, avoiding bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, staying home when sick, and are following routine cleaning and sanitation procedures.

Employee health policies should be re-examined and updated to ensure ill food workers are excluded from working in a food establishment. Allow for flexibility with work conditions in order to encourage employees with symptoms, as well as family members/caregivers with symptoms, to stay at home.

**Q: What will keep the food supply flowing and imported products safe in the United States?**

**A:** There is no evidence that food is a transmitter of the Coronavirus so there is no inherent or special risk to imported food. **Regulatory agencies will remain vigilant in monitoring this situation.**

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**Q: Is food from other countries that have reported serious Coronavirus outbreaks being blocked from entry to the US?**

**A:** There is no evidence that food is a transmitter of the Coronavirus so there is no inherent or special risk to imported food.

**Q: What will happen to food safety enforcement if FDA/USDA/CDC employees are sick from the Coronavirus and are unable to do their jobs?**

**A:** The *Food Safety Modernization Act* and USDA food safety guidelines and regulations provide companies the needed guidance to follow the best food safety manufacturing practices. Food and beverage companies are constantly implementing systems and steps to ensure the safety of the food supply during ordinary times as well as times of uncertainty.

**Q: How long can the Coronavirus remain viable in a food processing facility or grocery store?**

**A:** Some experiments have shown when aerosolized into fine, floating particles, the virus remained viable for three hours. On a copper surface, it was four hours, the study found. The median length of viability for the virus on stainless steel was 13 hours, and 16 hours on polypropylene, a common type of plastic. However, the CDC states that the durability of some coronavirus on a surface does not mean that it remains just as infectious as the hours go by. Most virus particles degrade in a matter of minutes or hours outside a living host, and the quantity of infectious particles goes down exponentially over time. (Ref: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.09.20033217v1>)

**Q: Is there a hotline, web site or central place to find out if food has been contaminated or impacted by the Coronavirus and should be avoided by consumers?**

**A:** COVID-19 is not a foodborne disease. With no evidence of food-related coronavirus transmission, no such resource has been developed and consumers should continue to have confidence in the food that they buy and consume.

**Q: How can we be certain that food consumption isn't tied to contracting Coronavirus?**

**A:** There is no evidence demonstrating that COVID-19 is transmitted through consumption of foods. Since this is a novel coronavirus, researchers across the world have already begun to conduct specific experiments to evaluate its survivability in food environments. There is some evidence that the virus can survive on a variety of surfaces for up to a week including on food packaging. However, food packaging is also not known to be associated with transmission of the virus.

**Q: What should consumers do with the food they already have at home to remain safe?**

**A:** Practice good kitchen habits including washing hands and surfaces often, separating raw meat from other foods, cooking foods to the right temperature, and refrigerating foods promptly when handling or preparing food (clean, separate, cook, and chill).

**Q: If countries that are lockdown are exporting food, how can we be certain that their products are safe?**

**A:** There is no evidence that food is a transmitter of the Coronavirus so there is no inherent or special risk to imported food.

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**Sources (previously noted):**

USDA Secretary/FDA Commissioner public statements; <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>;  
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