



COVID-19 FOOD INDUSTRY GUIDANCE: **Public Health Safety Measures for Life Sustaining Food Businesses Permitted to Maintain Operations**

Includes: Food manufacturers, processors, warehouses, and distributors

The 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a contagious disease that is rapidly spreading from person to person in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. COVID-19 can be transmitted from people who are infected with the virus even if they are asymptomatic or their symptoms are mild, such as a cough. Additionally, exposure is possible by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching one's mouth, nose, or eyes.

Special consideration is required to protect not only customers; but also, the workers needed to run and operate life-sustaining businesses. Therefore, Governor Tom Wolf and Department of Health Secretary, Dr. Levine, have issued an [order](#), effective April 19, 2020, directing protections for critical workers who are employed at businesses that are authorized to maintain in-person operations during the COVID-19 disaster emergency.

Management of food manufacturers, processors, warehouses, and distributors must implement the following cleaning, social distancing, and COVID-19 transmission mitigation protocols:

Building Safety Measures

Cleaning, disinfecting, and other maintenance and security services performed by building service employees are critical to protecting public health and reducing spread of COVID-19.

(1) In addition to maintaining pre-existing cleaning protocols established in the facility, as specified (in paragraph 2) below, clean and disinfect high-touch areas routinely [in accordance with CDC guidelines](#).

How to Clean and Disinfect:

Hard (Non-porous) Surfaces

- Clean dirty surfaces using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- Use an [EPA-approved](#) disinfectant against COVID-19
 - Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products for concentration, application method and contact time, etc.
 - Additionally, diluted household bleach solutions (at least 1000ppm sodium hypochlorite) can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application, ensuring a contact time of at least 1 minute, and allowing proper ventilation during and after application. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.
 - Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:
 - 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water or
 - 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water

Soft (Porous) Surfaces

- For soft (porous) surfaces such as carpeted floor, rugs, and drapes, remove visible contamination if present and clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces. If the items can be laundered after cleaning, follow laundry guidance below. Otherwise, use [EPA Approved Products](#) that are suitable for porous surfaces.

Electronics

- For electronics such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines, remove visible contamination if present.
 - Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.
 - Consider use of wipeable covers for electronics.
 - If no manufacturer guidance is available, consider the use of alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol to disinfect touch screens. Dry surfaces thoroughly to avoid pooling of liquids.

Lab coats, smocks, clothing, and other items that go in the laundry

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

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Hand Hygiene for Cleaning Staff Protection

- Provide cleaning staff with disposable gloves and gowns for all tasks in the cleaning process, including handling trash.
 - Gloves and gowns should be:
 - Compatible with the disinfectant products being used.
 - Removed carefully to avoid contamination of the wearer and the surrounding area
 - Gloves should be removed and properly disposed of after cleaning a room or area occupied by ill persons
- Advise staff to clean hands often by washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, wash with soap and water. Clean hands:
 - After removing gloves
 - After handling dirty laundry
 - After blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - After using the restroom
 - Before eating or preparing food
 - After contact with animals or pets
 - Before and after providing routine care for another person who needs assistance, such as a child
- Additional PPE might be required based on the cleaning/disinfectant products being used and whether there is a risk of splash.

- If gowns are not available, coveralls, aprons or work uniforms can be worn during cleaning and disinfecting. Reusable (washable) clothing should be laundered afterwards.
- Inform cleaning staff to immediately report breaches in PPE such as a tear in gloves or any other potential exposures to their supervisor.
- Follow normal preventive actions while at work and home, including cleaning hands and avoiding touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

(2) Maintain pre-existing cleaning protocols established in the facility for all other areas of the building:

- FDA-regulated food manufacturers should follow existing food safety plans in place. Food safety plans include a hazards analysis and risk-based preventive controls and include procedures for maintaining clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces. See: [FSMA Final Rule for Preventive Controls for Human Food](#).
- All FSIS-regulated establishments are required to adhere to Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (Sanitation SOP), which are written procedures that an establishment develops and implements to prevent direct contamination or adulteration of product.

(3) Establish cleaning and disinfection protocols for execution *upon discovery that the business has been exposed to a person who is a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19:*

a) Timing and location of cleaning and disinfection of surfaces:

- Close off areas visited by the person who is a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19. Open outside doors and windows, if possible and not a violation of food safety regulations, or take steps to promote air flow and use ventilating fans to increase air circulation in the area. Wait 24 hours, or as long as practical, before beginning cleaning and disinfection.
- Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.

b) Identify employees that were in close contact (within about 6 feet for about 10 minutes) with a person with a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19 during the 48 hours period before symptom onset to the time at which the patient isolated;

- If the employee(s) remains asymptomatic, the person should follow the CDC, April 8, 2020 [Interim Guidance for Implementing Safety Practice for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19](#). The CDC Interim Guidance states in part “Critical Infrastructure workers who have had an exposure but remain asymptomatic should adhere to the following practices prior to and during their work shift:

Pre-Screen: Employers should measure the employee’s temperature and assess symptoms prior to them starting work. Ideally, temperature checks should happen before the individual enters the facility. Send employees home that have an elevated temperature or fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. Ensure employees practice social distancing while waiting to have temperatures screened.

Regular Monitoring: As long as the employee doesn't have a temperature or symptoms, they should self-monitor under the supervision of their employer's occupational health program.

Wear a Mask: The employee should wear a face mask at all times while in the workplace for 14 days after last exposure. Employers can issue facemasks or can approve employees' supplied cloth face coverings in the event of shortages.

Social Distance: The employee should maintain 6 feet and practice social distancing as work duties permit in the workplace.

Disinfect and Clean work spaces: Clean and disinfect all areas such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment routinely."

- If the employee becomes sick during the workday, the person should be sent home immediately:
 - The employee's workspace surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected.
 - Determine who had contact with the ill employee during the time the employee had symptoms and during the 48 hours prior to symptoms—employees at the workplace with close contact (within 6 feet) of the employee during this time would be considered exposed;
 - Notify employees who were in close contact with suspected or confirmed infected person while maintaining confidentiality of ill employee
- Ensure that the facility has enough employees to perform the above protocols effectively and in a timely manner.
- c) Implement temperature screening of each employee prior to start of each shift or workday. Send any employee showing signs of elevated temperature or fever of 100.4 F home. Practice Social Distancing while in-lines for temperature screening.
- d) Employees must report any signs of COVID-19 symptoms (shortness of breath, fever, aches) to their supervisors and stay home or be sent home.
- e) Sick employees should follow CDC recommendations: [What to Do if You Are Sick](#). Employees should not return to work until CDC criteria to discontinue home isolation are met in consultation with healthcare providers, state and local health departments. Consider liberal attendance policies and paid time off and/or incentivizing attendance of healthy employees

(4) Stagger work start and stop times for employees when practicable to prevent gatherings of large groups entering or leaving the premises at the same time;

(5) Provide ample space for employees to have breaks and meals while maintaining a social distance of 6 feet. Arranging seating to prevent employees from facing each other in eating and break settings;

(6) Stagger employee break times to reduce the number of employees on break at any given time so that appropriate social distancing of at least 6 feet may be followed;

(7) Limit persons in employee common areas (such as locker or break rooms, dining facilities, training or conference rooms) at any one time to the number of employees that can maintain a social distance of 6 feet;

(8) Conduct meetings and trainings virtually (i.e., by phone or through the internet). If a meeting must be held in person, limit the meeting to the fewest number of employees possible, not to exceed 10 employees at one time, and maintain a social distance of 6 feet;

(9) Provide employees access to regular handwashing with soap, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes and ensure that common areas (including but not limited to break rooms, locker rooms, dining facilities, rest rooms, conference or training rooms) are cleaned on a regular basis, including between any shifts;

(10) Provide masks for employees and make it a mandatory requirement to wear masks while on the work site, except to the extent an employee is using break time to eat or drink,

Mask Utilization

Cloth face coverings must be worn by all employees during work hours and:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include multiple layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction
- be disposable, or if to be reused, be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

Inexpensive cloth face coverings from common materials can be made at home.

Instructions for making masks with sew and no-sew methods, proper removal, and cleaning of masks are provided on the Centers for Disease Control website:

- [Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#)

The cloth face coverings recommended 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.

(11) Ensure that the facility has enough employees to perform all measures listed effectively and in a manner that ensures the safety of the public and employees;

(12) Ensure that the facility has enough personnel to control access, maintain order, and enforce social distancing of at least 6 feet;

(13) Prohibit non-essential visitors from entering the premises of the business; and

(14) Ensure that all employees are made aware of these required procedures by communicating them, either orally or in writing, in their native or preferred language, as well as in English or by a methodology that allows them to understand.

The FDA offers relevant guidance pertaining to implementation of [Social Distancing in Food Production / Processing and Retail Food Establishments](#).

Additional Considerations for Food Production, Processing, and Distributors

- Encourage employees to perform any work that can be completed remotely through telework to work from home
- Utilize skeleton crewing, stagger production and shifts, or schedule a typically 5-day work week over 7 days to reduce personnel density on site
- Enhance social distancing through:

- Small units of dedicated crews that work together consistently (as opposed to rotating employees through many areas / 'teams' throughout the week)
- In open areas with production lines in proximity, consider shutting down alternating lines
- Consider physical separations between production lines—temporary walls, plastic sheeting barriers as used when isolating construction projects

Food facilities should be vigilant in their hygiene practices, including frequent and proper hand-washing and routine cleaning of all surfaces.