

Coronavirus / COVID-19 and Food Safety

Introduction

Richland County Health Department is closely monitoring developments related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in the U.S. and are working to provide our establishments important information. Below you will find a list of frequently asked questions for food establishments.

FAQs for Food Establishments

Can we still be open during the COVID-19 outbreak?

- The most recent order from the Governor, dated March 26, 2020, indicated that food production is an essential service that should remain open.
- All establishments must switch to take-out only or delivery only, provided that they can do so safely.
- No more than 5 people, who are 6 feet apart or more, should be in the establishment lobby or waiting area at any time to pick up food.

Can my employees or customers get sick with coronavirus (COVID-19) from food?

- Currently there is no evidence that suggests food is associated with transmission of COVID-19.
- Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal viruses such as norovirus and hepatitis A, which often spread through contaminated food, COVID-19 is a virus that causes respiratory illness. Foodborne transmission is not expected at this time.
- As usual, it is important to follow good hygiene practices and safe food handling practices to keep food safe.
- COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person, so it is important that sick employees and sick customers stay home.

Should employees who are sick stay home?

- Employees who are sick with respiratory illness and/or symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home.
- Ill employees must notify their supervisor if they are sick.
- These recommendations are not different than what should be standard practice in your establishment

What should I do if one of my employees was diagnosed with coronavirus?

- If a person tests positive for COVID-19 infection, Richland County Health Department will call close contacts with information.

- If an employee is tested for COVID-19, they will be asked to stay home until the test results come back. If negative, they must stay home until they are well. If positive, they will be asked to stay home for up to two weeks. They CANNOT work in your establishment during this time.
- COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person, so it is very important that sick employees and customers stay home.

How can I clean and sanitize my restaurant to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

- Within that list are two chemicals common to food processors, **quaternary ammonium (Quat)** and Sodium hypochlorite, more commonly known as **bleach**.
- **IMPORTANT: Follow all manufacturer's instructions, paying close attention to the contact time, or the time the surface should remain wet and if the product is safe for use on food contact surfaces.**
- Food establishments should engage in more frequent cleaning schedules at this time.

Should we be doing any special cleaning to stop the spread of COVID-19?

- Like other viruses, it is possible that the virus that causes COVID-19 can survive on surfaces.
- Because this is a novel virus, there is limited data on the specific time periods the virus may stay viable, however recent research shows the virus may be present on surfaces from a few hours to several days.
- It is important to frequently clean and sanitize high-touch surfaces in the work place including but not limited to the following: doorknobs, cooler and freezer handles, point of sale systems, cash registers, salt and pepper shakers, tabletops, countertops, coffee carafes, equipment buttons and handles.

Can we still have a staff meeting?

- You can have a staff meeting or other meeting necessary to your operation, but do so using the social distancing precautions.
 - All employees should be 6 feet or more apart. This may mean you hold the meeting in your dining room instead of meeting room.
 - All surfaces used should be cleaned and sanitized when you are done.
 - If you serve food, do so in a manner that limits cross contamination-no buffet, shared utensils, family-style.

We offer door-to-door delivery service. Should we be taking any extra precautions?

- Social distancing across the country may increase the number of persons ordering food via delivery services.
- Managers and supervisors must ensure sick employees are sent home. Delivery drivers must not deliver foods if they have symptoms of illness.
- If an employee arrives at work exhibiting symptoms of illness, they should be sent home immediately.
- Like other viruses, it is possible that the virus that causes COVID-19 can survive on surfaces.
- It is important that all food handlers and delivery drivers follow proper hand washing procedures and good hygienic practices to keep themselves and their customers safe.
- Protect delivery foods using appropriate containers from door-to-door or door-to-curb.
- Use plastic or paper bags to protect food containers during transit.
- Sealing a bag with a knot or using a sticker/staple to seal a paper bag is recommended for an additional layer of protection.

Will cooking a food kill the virus?

- Normal cooking times and temperatures, depending on the food product, should effectively kill viruses like coronavirus.

Can coronavirus be spread through money?

- The CDC indicates that money is not likely a primary mode of transmission, however as with many viruses, it is possible to transfer the virus from a surface to a person by touching a contaminated surface and then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes.
- It is important to wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds with soap and avoid touching your face including your eyes, nose, and mouth.

How can I help stop the spread of coronavirus in my community?

- COVID-19 is a new viral respiratory illness for which there is no vaccine available. Sustained community spread is ongoing due to the ease at which it spreads person-to-person. In order to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in your community, it is critical to do the following:
 - It is important that sick people stay home and avoid contact with well people. It is important that those who are not sick minimize contact with others.
 - Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap frequently and avoid touching your face including the eyes, nose, and mouth.

- Always wash your hands after using the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and sanitize high-touch surfaces frequently.

I still have questions. Who do I call?

- You may reach the Sanitarian at the Health Department via phone at 406-433-2207, or via email at slcr@richland.org with questions specific to your establishment. If you have questions related to COVID-19, contact the Information Line at 406-433-6947. The line is continuously staffed, even on nights and weekends. Please leave a message and a staff member will return your call.

