



COVID-19 Food Safety

Revised March 24, 2020

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is committed to ensuring the safety and availability of Maryland’s food supply during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency. This interim guidance highlights actions taken at the federal and State levels to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 as it relates to food service facilities and the food supply. **Per Governor Hogan’s executive order - effective March 16, 2020 - all restaurants and bars are now closed until further notice, unless they have carry-out, delivery, or drive-thru services.**

MDH understands that many Marylanders will be either cooking at home more, ordering food online through meal delivery services, or picking up carry-out meals from their favorite local food businesses. When preparing, ordering, or receiving food, always remember to follow the [4 Steps to Food Safety](#) - clean, separate, cook, and chill – to prevent foodborne illness.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reports that, “Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19.” Please visit the FDA [website](#) for the FAQ document “Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).”

Currently there are no reported food shortages and no disruptions in food supply have been noted. There are reports of limited supplies of other household items, however those are being restocked.

MDH is aware that Maryland residents have questions about food, food safety, and the COVID-19 illness as related to food. Please find below a list of questions that we have been receiving and some answers to those questions. Businesses should also see the FAQs available on the Business Express website, <https://businessexpress.maryland.gov/coronavirus>, for more information.

Additionally, if you have a specific food safety question that is not answered below, or you cannot find the answer on any of the following links, please call 410-767-8401 and the Office of Food Protection staff will work to provide you an answer.

INTERIM COVID-19 Food Safety FAQs

Employee Illness

What should I do if a restaurant that I have used has a worker who has contracted coronavirus?

Restaurants have been directed to keep ill employees from working, so the chances of having a sick worker in restaurants is very low. Foodborne exposure to COVID-19 is not currently thought to be a route of transmission, but patrons should still wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water before and after meals. Restaurants have also been directed to make sure people are spaced apart when picking up food.

What steps should a food establishment take if one or more of their employees is diagnosed with COVID-19?

Food establishments and other businesses should review the [CDC's interim guidance for businesses and employers](#) and the information on [Maryland's Business Express](#) website for planning and responding to coronavirus disease.

All food establishments should have clear policies on illness and COVID-19. No employee or manager should work if ill. Employees and managers should check themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, flu-like symptoms). All employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

What kind of cleaning should businesses do?

The CDC is encouraging routine environmental cleaning for businesses. [Click here for more guidance and information](#). Additional sanitation steps are not recommended in the event of an employee that appears ill. The CDC provides general cleaning and disinfection guidelines [here](#). The FDA has emphasized the need to maintain clean and sanitized facilities, including food contact surfaces, and food facilities may want to consider a more frequent cleaning schedule.

[Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#) are expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.). **Check the product label guidelines for if and where these disinfectant products are safe and recommended for use in food manufacturing areas or food establishments.**

When preparing food in your home or business, are there additional practices needed to ensure the spread of the virus is minimized?

Use this opportunity to practice food safety by frequent cleaning of food contact and non-food contact surfaces and proper handwashing.

INTERIM COVID-19 Food Safety FAQs

- Continue to regularly clean and sanitize any objects or surfaces that are frequently touched by workers or household members.
- Follow safe food handling practices, keep food items cold or hot as required, and include frequent hand washing with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds.
- Keep food preparation stations at least 6 feet apart.

Food Supply and Food Safety

What is the guidance on home prepared foods or foods prepared by volunteers being delivered to vulnerable populations?

All individuals and volunteers preparing foods should follow [safe food](#) handling guidelines and should not handle food if they show signs of illness.

Foods that are to be delivered hot or cold should be placed in a cooler or insulated bag to maintain proper temperatures. Prior to placing food in the cooler or insulated bag ensure hot foods are at or above 135°F and cold foods are at or below 41°F.

Additionally, serve foods immediately, refrigerate left-over foods within 2 hours, cool foods within 4 hours, and if reheating, reheat any foods to 165°F.

If foods are being delivered, keep foods at appropriate temperatures and plan the route out to minimize the length of time food is in the cooler or insulated bag.

If I am picking food up at a facility that offers carryout, will I be able to go into the facility to pick-up the food or will curbside pick-up only be required?

Businesses may continue to allow customers to go in and pick up food as long as social distancing procedures are followed. Facilities should limit the number of customers entering at one time and provide hand sanitizer for customer use.

What is the recommendation for salad bars and buffets?

Restaurants and bars that do not have carryout, drive-thru or delivery services are closed per Governor Hogan's executive order. The mandatory closure will be enforced by local police, State police, and possibly the National Guard. <https://governor.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Executive-Order-Amending-Large-Gatherings.pdf>.

MDH's Office of Food Protection encourages critical infrastructure stores (grocery, supermarkets, etc.) that remain open to voluntarily close salad bars, self-service food bars and buffets. Facilities with self-service areas (such as coffee stations) should incorporate enhanced cleaning protocols, limit the number of customers with access, and provide customers with napkins or other barriers when touching carafes, condiments, milk cartons, etc. to align with the intent of the executive order.

INTERIM COVID-19 Food Safety FAQs

Resources:

- Visit the FDA's website for more information and FAQs for food products:
 - [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Frequently Asked Questions](#)
 - [Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
 - [Retail Food Protection: Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook](#)
- Additional information for retail food establishments, including a fact sheet in English and Spanish, can be found on the National Restaurant Association's website:
 - [Coronavirus Information and Resources](#)
- Guidance from CDC for businesses:
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html>
- Guidance from WHO for businesses:
 - <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf>
- Additional information for businesses on planning for and responding to coronavirus disease is available on Maryland's Business Express website:
 - <https://businessexpress.maryland.gov/coronavirus>