



DEAR GEORGIA FOOD SAFETY PARTNERS:

This message is to provide an update on the novel coronavirus currently circulating around our state as it relates to food safety. At this time, food has not been identified as a likely source of the novel **coronavirus** disease, called “COVID-19”. However, food safety practices you routinely perform at home and work can help reduce the spread of coronavirus among your workers and in our community. The purpose of this document is to ensure you have the resources to answer food safety questions.

The following includes guidance from our office in response to questions we have received. We are also working to post the information to the Georgia Department of Agriculture website for your ease of access and to help keep the information updated as more is known with this dynamic situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTION:

Although food may not be a way of transmission, following current food safety standards can help protect your employees and customers from COVID-19. Being extra cautious will help slow the spread of illness within your establishment; not only reducing workdays lost due to illness, but also aiding the protection of your customers.

What to look for, specific to COVID-19:

- Signs and symptoms of infection with COVID-19 include fever (100.4°F or greater with an oral thermometer), cough, and shortness of breath. Symptoms of COVID-19 may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure to the virus. Workers that are possibly sick with the symptoms matching COVID-19 should stay home. If possible, employees with family members/caregivers with symptoms matching COVID-19 should also stay home.

Review Employee Health Policies and Procedures:

- Be sure your employee health policies prohibit food workers from working in food establishments while sick.
- Retrain your employees to make sure everyone is aware of symptoms to monitor, and how to notify their supervisor if they are sick and unable to work.
- Food workers and managers suspected of illness should not return to work until they are symptom-free and current guidance is to stay home until at least 24 hours after symptoms have gone away. This may be altered upon medical diagnosis, local health authority or other factors.

Increase Hand Hygiene

- Ensure all employees wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Make sure each handwashing station is always stocked with soap, paper towels, and warm, running water. Public restrooms need to be monitored and stocked more frequently, as customers’ handwashing is likely increasing.
- Georgia requires retail food workers use tongs, gloves, or utensils to prevent barehand contact with ready-to-eat food.
- Recommend all employees cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. If a tissue is not available, employees can sneeze into their shirt sleeve, but should NOT sneeze or cough into their hands. Discard tissues and wash hands immediately with soap and water after each cough or sneeze.
- Remind employees to avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth to help slow the spread of germs. Current food safety rules require workers wash their hands whenever they touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.
- To help customers keep their germs to themselves, consider providing tissues, no-touch waste bins, and alcohol-based hand antiseptic rubs (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol as the active ingredient) in customer areas.

Clean and Sanitize

- Information about using disinfectants for COVID-19 is available from the [National Pesticide Information Center](#).
- It is expected that the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is, like other coronaviruses, also susceptible to EPA-registered sanitizers and disinfectants.

- The EPA has a [list of registered sanitizers](#) labeled for use against the novel coronavirus. *Note: EPA will update their list as additional disinfectants meeting their criteria are identified. If you have questions about a particular sanitizer, please carefully read the package label or reach out to the chemical manufacturer for more information.*
- Only use sanitizers registered with EPA as a sanitizer. Read the sanitizer label and follow usage directions. EPA recommends following the product label use directions for enveloped viruses, as indicated by the approved emerging viral pathogen claim on the master label. Be sure staff monitor the concentration of the sanitizer with test strips to make sure the active ingredient is available and at proper concentration.
- If the label directions for viruses/virucidal activity lists different contact times or dilutions, use the longest contact time or most concentrated solution. *Note: These disinfection concentrations may exceed the allowable levels allowed for use on food-contact surfaces such as dishes and utensils. Be sure to follow the label directions for food-contact surfaces when using the chemical near or on utensils and food contact surfaces.*
- **Read the label carefully and train employees thoroughly. Certain disinfection chemicals or increased concentrations may not be used on food contact surfaces, or may need to be rinsed prior to use with food.** All food contact surfaces such as utensils, cutting boards, and serving utensils must be washed, rinsed, and sanitized (either with chemicals or high water temperature) often throughout the day. When using chemical sanitizers with dishes or in food prep areas, be sure staff use the concentration and follow directions listed on the product's label for food-contact surfaces.
- Wash and rinse equipment of visible dirt or debris before sanitizing. Sanitizers work better on clean surfaces.
- To help reduce the potential for coronavirus, it is recommended to wash, rinse, and sanitize nonfood contact surfaces that employees touch throughout the day.
- To help protect your workers and customers, increase the frequency of cleaning and sanitizing of customer-access areas. Use a separate wiping cloth and sanitizing solution when sanitizing the front of house/customer-access areas.
- Consider removing decorative objects, papers, and other unneeded materials from counters to allow for thorough sanitization of unobstructed surfaces.
- Sanitize 'touchpoints' such as the outside of condiment containers and other items frequently handled such as doorknobs, backs of chairs, faucet handles, tabletops, and menus often throughout the day.
- At this time, there are no recommended restrictions from our office on customer self-service operations; such as beverage dispensers, bulk food containers, or salad bars. Wash, rinse, and sanitize tongs and other utensils in self-service areas often throughout the day. Consider providing alcohol-based hand antiseptic rubs (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol) for convenient use in these areas.

WHERE TO TURN FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [Coronavirus Disease 2019](#), – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- [AFDO Coronavirus Resource Page](#), - The Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO)
- [Coronavirus: What Can You Do?](#) – National Restaurant Association
- [Interim Guidance for Business and Employers to Plan and Respond to COVID-19](#) – CDC
- [Getting Your Workplace Ready for COVID-19](#) – World Health Organization (WHO)
- [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Situation Summary](#), Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH)

Thank you for your work in food safety and for sharing your food safety knowledge and practices with your staff and customers. Please let us know if you have additional questions or have requests for more information. We will keep updating information on our website as it is available.

Sincerely,

Your Georgia Department of Agriculture Food Safety Team