

# COVID-19 Guidance for Food Workers & Food Establishments

## Industry-Specific Guidance

On May 4, Governor Inslee announced “[Safe Start Washington](#),” a phased approach to recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic. Until there is an effective vaccine or effective treatment, it is important to maintain community interventions throughout all phases of recovery to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Use the guidance below to help comply with the [governor’s requirements](#) and to help ensure employee and customer safety while operating during this pandemic. Each document provides information about service and customer safety modifications, sanitation, employee training and safety requirements, and recommendations for each phase of the governor’s Safe Start plan. The guidance will be updated as new information becomes available.

- [COVID-19 Guidelines for Grocery Stores](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidelines for Restaurants](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidelines for Farmers Markets](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidelines for Food Pantries](#)

## General Guidance

Food has not been identified as a way of spreading COVID-19 infection. However, expanding routine food safety procedures will help slow the spread of respiratory viruses in the community, and help reduce working days lost due to illness. The following guidance will be helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Review Employee Health Policies & Procedures

Employee health policies should prohibit food workers from working in food establishments while sick.

- Review your sick leave policies and expand upon paid leave options for your workers, if possible. Offering paid sick leave will help ill employees take needed leave, while helping keep the rest of your employees and customers healthy.
- Talk with your workers about employee health requirements and expectations. Retrain your employees as needed.
- Workers sick with the symptoms matching COVID-19 should stay home. Employees with family members or caregivers with symptoms matching COVID-19 should also stay home.
- Per CDC guidelines, employers are encouraged not to require employees to provide a doctor’s note to return to work, because doing so may burden the medical system.

- The [Employee Health & Decision Strategies](#) document will help food workers and food establishments follow health requirements for COVID-19. This guidance provides general information about COVID-19, including how it spreads, how to screen workers for symptoms, and requirements for isolation and quarantine.
- Learn more by reviewing [DOH's Resources for Workplaces and Employers](#) web page.

### Increase Hand Hygiene

- Ensure all employees wash their hands often. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Make sure each handwashing sink is always stocked with soap, paper towels, and warm, running water.
- Washington requires food workers use a barrier such as tongs, gloves, or other utensils to prevent hand contact with ready to eat food. The [Reducing Consumables in Food Establishments](#) document provides tips to reduce waste and prevent bare hand contact. Suggestions to reduce glove use include changing food handling procedures or using utensils.
- Recommend all employees cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. If a tissue is not available, employees can sneeze into their shirt sleeve, but NOT into their hands. Discard tissues into a lined garbage bin and wash hands immediately with soap and water after each cough or sneeze.
- Remind employees to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth to help slow the spread of germs. The food safety rule requires workers to wash their hands whenever they touch their eyes, nose or mouth.
- Provide tissues, no-touch waste bins, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer in customer areas to reduce germ spread. Hand sanitizers should have at least 60% ethyl alcohol.

### Ensure Proper Cleaning, Sanitizing & Disinfecting

- Cleaning is a necessary first step for sanitizing and disinfecting chemicals to work. Use soap and water to clean food and non-food contact surfaces.
- Wash, rinse, and sanitize food contact surfaces following routine procedures.
  - Use an EPA registered product such as chlorine, quaternary ammonia or iodine at a concentrations suitable for sanitizing food contact surfaces.
  - Wash, rinse, and sanitize all food contact surfaces throughout the day. This includes items such as utensils, cutting boards, and serving ware. Properly wash and sanitize dishes with chemicals or by a high-heat dishwasher after each customer's use.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces frequently. Examples include customer restrooms, doors, handles for freezers and refrigerators, check-out counters, and payment touchpads.
  - Use an [EPA registered product](#) at a concentration that has been shown to be effective against COVID-19.
  - Follow the directions on the label. If there are multiple contact times listed for viruses, use the longest contact time or the most concentrated solution.
  - Disinfection concentrations may exceed the allowable levels 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.
- To help protect your workers and customers, increase the cleaning and disinfection frequency of customer-access areas. Use a separate wiping cloth and solution when disinfecting the front of house and customer-access areas.
- Consider removing decorative objects, papers, and other unneeded materials from counters. Unobstructed counter surfaces make it easier to clean and disinfect.

## Supply Chain Issues & Conservation Strategies

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the availability and cost of a wide variety of products commonly used in food establishments. The [Supply Chain Issues & Conservation Strategies](#) document provides tips to conserve supplies that may be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Guidance for Restaurants Selling Grocery-Type Items

The [Guidance for Restaurants Selling Grocery-Type Items](#) document provides information about how permitted restaurants can change their style of service. The guidance includes how to repackaging food or add grocery-type food items for retail sale during the pandemic.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Does COVID-19 spread through food?

There is no current evidence COVID-19 is transmitted through food or water. History with previous outbreaks of coronavirus such as SARS and MERS suggest that people aren't likely to become infected with coronavirus through food. However, limited research on the new coronavirus indicates that it can be shed in stool. It is not known at this time whether the virus can make people sick after it has passed through the digestive tract.

While we don't believe the novel virus can spread through food, we do know other germs can. We highly encourage people to practice the following routine food safety procedures to reduce risk:

- Only handle food when healthy. People that are coughing, feverish, short of breath, vomiting or have diarrhea or other symptoms of illness should stay home.
- Wash hands to reduce the risk of illness. Always wash hands thoroughly before and during food preparation.
- Rinse fruits and vegetables before cutting or eating. Rinse raw agricultural products, such as heads of lettuce, under clean running water prior to cutting or serving. Ready-to-eat bagged lettuce does not need additional washing.
- Thoroughly cook whatever you can. Cooking destroys many germs, including coronavirus.
- Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces. Wash, rinse, and sanitize cutting boards, tables, utensils, and other food contact surfaces often.

### Is it safe to sell unpackaged produce?

Yes, it is safe to sell unpackaged produce. COVID-19 is not known to be transmissible through food, including fruits and vegetables. We encourage pre-bagging and portioning produce to

expedite purchasing and shopping time by customers. Always wash hands thoroughly before and during food handling.

### Are businesses required to maintain a customer log to help with contact tracing?

Yes. As part of the Safe Start Plan, businesses must keep a daily log of all guests that voluntarily provide contact information, including customer names, phone, email, and time they entered the facility. Keep the log for 30 days to help with contact tracing. Logs are only required for customers that volunteer their information as clarified in a [memo](#) issued by Governor Inslee on May 14, 2020.

### What is the role of money in the spread of COVID-19?

According to CDC, money is not a primary mode of transmission of coronavirus. However, it may be possible to transfer the virus by touching a contaminated surface and then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes. Customers and employees are encouraged to properly wash their hands often throughout the day, including after handling money and before they eat or touch their eyes, nose, and mouth.

### Can you get COVID-19 from handling reusable shopping bags?

It is unlikely to get infected with COVID-19 by touching reusable shopping bags. According to the CDC, touching surfaces that may have the virus on it is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. To help address any concerns, follow these recommendations:

- Encourage self-bagging when customers use reusable shopping bags brought from home.
- Provide single use bags for clerks to use while bagging customer groceries.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol) for cashiers.
- Ensure all employees wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Remind employees to avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth to help slow the spread of germs.

### What type of face mask should food workers wear?

Employers are required to provide workers with the appropriate type of face covering, mask, or respirator depending on the [level of risk for their specific type of work](#). For example:

- Reusable cloth face coverings are required when risk for transmission is low. Examples include waiters at restaurants, and cafes only offering curbside pick-up services.
- Disposable masks are required when risk for transmission is medium. Examples include grocery-store produce stockers who work around customers, or kitchen workers in restaurants.

Employees may also bring their own face covering. To clarify the requirements, the Department of Labor & Industries has developed "[Which Mask for Which Task](#)" and the "[eTool Selection Guide](#)" to help employers determine proper selection and use of face coverings and respirators. The department also released an [FAQ Page](#) to respond to common questions about masks, including options for reasonable accommodation for workers with a medical exemption.

### As a business, what should I do when a worker tests positive for COVID-19?

You are required to contact your local health department within 24 hours if you suspect COVID-19 is spreading in your workplace. You are also required to contact your local health department if you are aware of 2 or more employees who have confirmed or suspected COVID-19 within a 14-day period. Use the [DOH Employee Health & Decision Strategies guidance](#) and the [DOH Checklist for Businesses with Suspected or Confirmed Cases of COVID-19](#) to determine next steps. You should work with local health to:

- Confirm the number of probable and confirmed cases.
- Determine close contacts.
- Ensure control measures are in place.
- Verify that your business is following the Safe Start plan to prevent further workplace transmission.

You may be asked to provide a list of all potentially exposed employees and customers. In addition, you may need to close your business temporarily if you have inadequate control measures or workplace transmission is high.

### When should I discard food that may have been exposed to COVID-19?

There is currently no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted to humans through food or food packaging materials. The FDA does not anticipate food will need to be held, recalled, or withdrawn from the market if it is exposed to coronavirus through a COVID-19 positive food facility worker. Discard food contaminated by coughs or sneezes. For more information see [FDA's Food Safety and Coronavirus Disease website](#).

## More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

A person's race/ethnicity or nationality does not, itself, put them at greater risk of COVID-19. However, data are revealing that communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19- this is due to the effects of racism, and in particular, structural racism, that leaves some groups with fewer opportunities to protect themselves and their communities. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

**Have more questions about COVID-19?** Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127**, Monday – Friday, 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., Weekends: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact a health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email [civil.rights@doh.wa.gov](mailto:civil.rights@doh.wa.gov).