Coronavirus / COVID-19 and Food Safety Regulators

Introduction

We are closely monitoring developments related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in the U.S. and are working to provide our members and stakeholders with access to critical information and updates. Across the U.S. and around the globe, environmental health professionals are on the frontline of preventive public health services delivery, and we are committed to supporting the environmental health workforce to effectively and safely do their jobs. Below is a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) for food safety regulators.

FAQs for Food Safety Regulators

Can people 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 that everyone follow good hygiene practices and safe food handling practices to keep food safe.
- Coronaviruses are spread from person-to-person so it is very important that sick employees stay home.

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

- It is important to inform fellow coworkers or employees of their possible exposure to the coronavirus, while keeping information about the sick person confidential. Everyone should monitor themselves for symptoms of the disease at this time.
- Ill employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person, so it is important that sick employees and sick customers stay home.
- Ill persons can find more information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [What do to if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).](#)
- CDC has provided an [Interim US Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Persons with Potential Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID19).](#)

When can someone return to work after they were diagnosed with COVID-19?

- According to the CDC, persons may stop home isolation after being diagnosed with COVID-19 under the following conditions. Click [here](#) for more information.
    - If the individual will not be tested to confirm they are not contagious, the person must have no fever for at least 72 hours (without the aid of medications such as fever reducers), **and** their other symptoms have improved, **and** it has been at least 7 days since their symptoms improved.
    - If the individual will be tested to confirm they are not contagious, the person must have no fever for at least 72 hours (without the aid of medications such as fever reducers), **and** their other symptoms have improved, **and** they receive 2 negative tests in a row from their physician, 24 hours apart.

How can I protect myself from this virus while conducting inspections in the field?

- COVID-19 is a viral respiratory illness and is easily spread person-to-person. Therefore, good hygiene practices and social distancing are important.
- Wash your hands before, during, and after the inspection, especially if you have come in contact with surfaces or people on site. You may also consider using hand sanitizer after washing your hands.
- Keep as much social distance as possible. Avoid shaking hands as a greeting.
- Avoid touching your face, including your nose, eyes, and mouth.
- Monitor yourself for any symptoms of the disease such as cough, fever, or shortness of breath.

Which sanitizing agents are effective against COVID-19?

- The Environmental Protection Agency has a list of registered disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2, the cause of COVID-19. Click here for the list.
  - Within that list are two chemicals common to food processors, **quaternary ammonium (Quat)** and Sodium hypochlorite, more commonly known as **bleach.**
  - Use the list provided by the EPA to check the EPA registration number on the chemical label. If the registration number matches a product on the disinfectant list above, it can be used against COVID-19.
  - **IMPORTANT: Individuals applying chemicals must 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.**
  - A more frequent cleaning schedule is warranted at this time.

We are getting a lot of questions from food operations about COVID-19. Are there any resources currently available for them?

- NEHA's Coronavirus / COVID-19 and Food Safety FAQ for Food Handlers
- NEHA Coronavirus / COVID-19 Information
- CDC Webinar on Coronavirus for Food Regulators and Industry
- FDA FAQs for Food Products
- USDA FAQs on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)
- EPA Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2, the cause of COVID-19
- Visit FDA's Industry and Consumer Assistance from CFSAN to submit food safety questions to FDA

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.
  - 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.

For more information, visit neha.org/COVID-19