



# FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN WORKER SAFETY

*During the COVID-19 pandemic*

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**The COVID-19 impact** quickly revealed the often unconsidered and unseen essential services that agriculture plays in our daily lives. Cultivating, processing, driving, stocking, inspecting and delivering food to our tables requires a critical workforce that we want to keep healthy and working. The food supply chain has been designated as a critical infrastructure industry that should maintain a normal work schedule while employers and workers follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidance to protect their health at work.

Specific safety guidance Questions and Answers include (source FDA <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>):

**How do I maintain social distancing in my food production/processing facility and food retail establishment where employees typically work within close distances?**

To prevent spread of COVID-19, CDC is recommending individuals employ social distancing or maintaining approximately 6 feet from others, when possible. In food production/processing facilities and retail food establishments, an evaluation should be made to identify and implement operational changes that increase

employee separation. However, social distancing to the full 6 feet will not be possible in some food facilities.

Workers in the food and agriculture sector fill critical and essential roles within communities. Promoting the ability of our workers within the food and agriculture industry to continue to work during periods of community restrictions, social distances, and closure orders, among others, is crucial to community continuity and community resilience. This was reinforced by DHS in its [Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce: Ensuring Community and National Resilience in COVID-19](#).

The risk of an employee transmitting COVID-19 to another is dependent on distance between employees, the duration of the exposure, and the effectiveness of employee hygiene practices and sanitation. When it's impractical for employees in these settings to maintain social distancing, effective hygiene practices should be maintained to reduce the chance of spreading the virus.

**IMPORTANT:** Maintaining social distancing in the absence of effective hygiene practices may not prevent the spread of this virus. Food facilities should be vigilant in their hygiene practices, including frequent and proper hand-washing and routine cleaning of all surfaces.

Because the intensity of the COVID-19 outbreak may differ according to geographic location, coordination with state and local officials is strongly encouraged for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside.

Sick employees should follow the CDC's [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).

**Will FDA/EPA approve off-label use of quaternary ammonium sanitizer at 200 ppm as a hand sanitizer for checkers and customers? It is currently on the EPA approved list for use in retail to sanitize food prep areas, dishes etc., and we would like to use it instead of gel hand sanitizer due to the lack of availability.**

We are aware of temporary out-of-stock conditions of alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Several manufacturers of these products have indicated that they are working to replenish supplies. In addition, the FDA has issued guidance for the temporary compounding of certain alcohol-based hand sanitizers by pharmacists in state-licensed pharmacies or federal facilities and registered outsourcing facilities.

See [Immediately in Effect Guidance for Industry: Policy for Temporary Compounding of Certain Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizer Products During the Public Health Emergency](#). FDA has also issued guidance for the temporary preparation of certain alcohol-based hand sanitizer products by firms during the public health emergency (COVID-19). See [Guidance for Industry: Temporary Policy for Preparation of Certain Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizer Products During the Public Health Emergency \(COVID-19\)](#).

Hand sanitizers are not intended to replace [handwashing in food production and retail](#) settings. Instead, hand sanitizers may be used in addition

to or in combination with proper handwashing. CDC recommends that everyone wash their hands with plain soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers may be used if plain soap and water are not available.

As an interim measure, we understand some food establishments have set up quaternary ammonium hand-dip stations and sprays at 200 ppm concentration. These products are intended for use on surfaces, and as such, may not be formulated for use on skin. FDA is aware of adverse event reports from consumers using such products as a replacement for hand sanitizers and advises against using these products as replacements for hand sanitizers.

**Should employees, such as cashiers, baggers, and cleaning personnel in food retail settings wear face masks to prevent exposure to COVID-19?**

CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms. This is to protect others from the risk of getting infected. The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone with COVID-19 in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).

[CDC recommends](#) everyday preventive actions for everyone, including service industry workers and customers:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
  
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
  - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

**A worker in my food production/processing facility/farm has tested positive for COVID-19. What do I need to do to continue operations while protecting my other employees?**

All components of the food industry are considered critical infrastructure and it is therefore vital that they continue to operate.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued Guidance on [Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#) that includes information on how a COVID-19 outbreak could affect workplaces and [steps all employers can take to reduce workers' risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 \(COVID-19\)](#).

Food production/processing facilities/farms need to follow protocols, including cleaning protocols, set by local and state health departments, which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in a given area. These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission – not based on food safety.

If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality about individual employees' identities. Sick employees should follow the CDC's [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).

CDC's Interim US Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Managements of Persons with Potential Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Exposures: Geographic Risk and Contacts of Laboratory-confirmed Cases, provides a framework for assessing and managing risks of potential exposures to SARS-CoV-2.

**FDA, CDC, and USDA have all stated that there are no reports at this time of human illnesses that suggests COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. The Florida food supply remains strong, and keeping our workers safe and healthy will keep it that way.**

