

Retail Food Service Operator Guidance, Questions and Answers

This guidance is based on current information known about the COVID-19 (Coronavirus). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), FDA (Food & Drug Administration) and the Howard County Health Department will provide updated guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available. Local guidance may also be updated depending on the level of community spread in a given area. Visit the Health Department website at www.hchealth.org for local updates and COVID Disease 2019 on the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov> and Food Safety and Coronavirus Disease 2019 on the FDA website at <https://www.fda.gov>

Effective March 16, 2020 Governor Larry Hogan ordered all restaurants and bars closed unless they have carry-out, delivery, or drive-thru services. This guidance is intended for retail food service operators such as restaurants, grocery stores, carry-out, delivery, drive-thrus and bars in Howard County that have adjusted their business operation to remain open and operate. Guidance may be updated depending on the level of community spread in a given area. The following requirements and recommendations are necessary to remain open amid the COVID-19 public emergency.

Close Dining Areas

- Close all dining areas to the public where food and/or beverages are served for on-premises consumption.
- Food and/or beverages are allowed to be sold if the food or beverages are promptly taken from the premises, i.e. on a carry out or drive through basis.
- If you do not comply with these requirements legal action will be taken as needed. Your facility may be closed as a result of failure to adhere to Governor's Executive order.
- If your food service establishment is not contracted with a delivery service including, but not limited to, Uber Eats, DoorDash, GrubHub, etc., these services may provide a viable option for meal pick-up and delivery. This would also help limit the number of patrons visiting your establishment.

Carry Out and Pick up Service

- Limit the number of patrons entering the establishment at one time to keep a safe social distance of 6-feet. The social gathering limit is 10-people. However, carry-out service area or the facility may not be able to accommodate 10-people and keep a social distance 6-feet. Therefore, limit the number of customers allowed in the facility at the same time.

- If more than one patron is picking up, use cones or have tape set on the floor or sidewalk outside your establishment at least 6-feet apart keeping a safe distance.
- Patrons could wait safely in their vehicles and food or beverage could be delivered safely.

Protecting Yourself, Your Staff and Your Loyal Patrons

- Switch to a credit card only payment so money does not have to be handled. The more things are touched the higher the risk to everyone. Routinely disinfect and sanitize all common and high touch areas such as credit card screens and buttons.
- Implement stringent handwash procedures and proper glove use.
- Implement cleaning and sanitizing procedures for all areas, including frequently touched surfaces.
- Exclude sick employee and ensure that employees know to report any illness symptoms to management.

Staying Safe While Operating and Maintaining Business Continuity

Workers in the food and agriculture sector fill critical and essential roles within communities. Promoting the ability of these workers to continue to work during periods of community restrictions, social distances, and closure orders, among others, is crucial to community continuity and community resilience.

Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission. Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. However, food service facilities must follow increased cleaning protocols and increased employee handwashing practices along with safe food operations, as set by Health Department.

According to FDA, 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. Food facilities must be vigilant in their hygiene practices, including frequent and proper hand-washing and routine cleaning of all surfaces. See the list of some frequently touched contact surfaces that require vigilant cleaning.

Q: How do I maintain social distancing in my food retail establishment where employees typically work within close distances?

Maura J. Rossman, M.D., Health Officer

To prevent the 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. As a result, restaurant operators and food service workers must follow increased cleaning protocols along CDC recommendations:

1. Increased employee handwashing practices and proper glove use. Handwashing is not a new procedure for retail food service facilities. All employees must frequently wash their hands with plain soap and warm water for a minimum of 20 seconds. Hand sanitizers are not intended to replace handwashing in retail food service facilities. Instead, hand sanitizers may be used in addition to or in combination with proper handwashing. All retail facilities remaining open must provide opportunities for frequent and continuous handwashing by all employees. This include cashiers.
2. Routine cleaning of food contact areas and frequently touched surfaces by workers and customers with approved cleaning agent and sanitizer:
 - Chlorine Bleach 50ppm or 5-tablespoons (1/3rd cup) off bleach per gallon of water or 4-teaspoon of bleach per quart of water.
 - QAC 800 ppm
 - General household cleaners with bleach may be used for bathroom areas.
3. Social distancing of 6-feet or as much as possible as food service areas allow (minimize number of persons operating in a specific area).
4. Exclude sick employees and ensure that all employees are aware to immediately (do not wait) report any illness symptoms. Discuss what COVID-19 symptoms are with your staff so they can immediately recognize the symptoms and report it immediately. This will help protect your staff from potential exposure to the virus by a sick employee.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers for Retail Operators

1: If a worker in my retail food facility has tested positive for COVID-19, should I close the facility? If so, for how long?

It is highly recommended that you close to clean and sanitize the food service facility because it is difficult to effectively clean and sanitized all required surfaces while still operating. It is recommended by CDC to close off areas used by ill person and wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and sanitizing to minimize exposure to any respiratory droplets by a sick individual. Though this is not

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specific to food service facility, it is recommended if possible, to wait a minimum of 24 hours before you begin cleaning and sanitizing the facility. Provide a list of all areas in the facility, items, high hand contact surfaces that will be cleaned throughout the facility. The Howard County Health Department may request a copy of this list prior to opening. Check the Health Department's website for a sample list of surfaces that require cleaning. Please note that the recommended decision to close may change or vary depending on the amount of community person-to-person spread of COVID-19 in a given area.

2: Do I need to ask other workers who may have been exposed to a worker who tested positive for COVID-19 to self-quarantine for 14 days?

Employers need to follow guidelines set the CDC and local authorities. 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 employee confidentiality. Discuss symptoms of COVID-19 with your other employees and inform them of the following.

1. Social distancing of 6-feet to the extent possible while still at work.
2. Wash your hands frequently and often with soap and warm water for 20 seconds.
3. Self-monitor, self-quarantine and immediately contact your doctor or health care provider if you are having symptoms. Let your doctor know you worked with a coworker that tested positive for COVID-19. Follow your doctor's instruction.
4. Immediately inform your supervisor of early signs of symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing). Do not report to work. If already at work, leave immediately.
5. Self-monitor and self-quarantine until test result is received.

Sick employees should follow the CDC's [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#). Employers should consult with the local health department for additional guidance. People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (i.e., experiencing fever, cough, and/or shortness of breath). [CDC recommends](#) everyday preventive actions for everyone, including the food service industry workers and the general public:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Maintain a social distance of 6-feet.
- Stay home when you are sick. Do not go to work if 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.

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3: If a worker in my retail food facility has tested positive for COVID-19 and I close to clean my food service facility, what should I post on my door or website to notify my customers?

You may post this sample sign once you have contacted the Health Department or the Health Department has contacted you regarding a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19. The Health Department Environmental Health Specialist (an inspector) will discuss cleaning and reopening procedures with you.

Sample Posting: *“We would like to inform our customers that we are temporarily closed for cleaning and sanitization due to a **suspected case** or **confirmed case** of COVID-19 of one of our staff members. Our closure is a precautionary measure to ensure that we are doing what it takes to keep our customers safe. We are working with the Health Department and our focus is to do what is necessary and to follow recommendations to safeguard our customers and everyone in our community. We plan to reopen as soon as our store has been fully cleaned and sanitized.”*

The message for food service operators that have remained open amid COVID-19, is that 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. While the primary responsibility is to take appropriate actions to protect other workers and people who might have come in contact with the ill employee, facilities should re-double their cleaning and sanitation efforts to control any risks that might be associated with workers who are ill regardless of the type of virus or bacteria. For example, facilities are required to maintain clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces.

The information provided above is a combination of recommendations and requirements from CDC, FDA and your local government. If you have questions you may contact review the recommended websites or contact your local Health Department.