

---

## **COVID-19 Prevention Guidance for Food Establishments**

March 16, 2020 9:00am

Dear Michigan Food Establishments,

This message is to provide an update on the novel coronavirus currently circulating as it relates to food safety. While food has not been identified as a likely source of the novel coronavirus disease, called “COVID-19,” we wanted to reach out to you because food safety practices you routinely perform at home and work can help reduce the spread of coronavirus among your workers and in our community. We also want to make sure you have a resource to have your food safety questions answered.

The following includes guidance from our office in response to questions we’ve received from you. We plan to continue to add information and we will share with you when it is available—as well as it when it changes. We are also working to post the information to the Health Department of Northwest Michigan (<http://nwhealth.org>) website for your ease of access and to help keep the information updated as more is known with this dynamic situation.

### **Prevention Recommendations**

Again, food has not been identified as a likely source of COVID-19 infection at this time. However, following current food safety standards will help protect your workers and customers from COVID-19. In addition, expanding your current food safety practices will help slow the spread of respiratory viruses in the community and help reduce working days lost due to illness.

### **Review Employee Health Policies and Procedures:**

Be sure your employee health policies prohibit food workers from working in food establishments while sick.

- Talk with your workers about employee health requirements and expectations. Now is a good time to retrain your employees as needed to make sure everyone is aware of symptoms to monitor and how to notify you if they are sick and unable to work.
- 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. 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.
- Food workers and managers suspected of illness should not return to work until they are symptom-free. Current guidance is to stay home until at least 24 hours after symptoms have gone away; however, this may be altered by medical diagnosis, local health authority, changing conditions, or other factors.
- Per CDC guidelines, employers are encouraged not to require employees to provide a doctor’s note to return to work, because doing so will burden the medical system.

### **Increase Hand Hygiene**

- Ensure all employees wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20seconds. Make sure each handwashing station is always stocked with soap, paper towels, and warm, running water. Please note: you may notice your sinks in public restrooms need to be stocked more frequently as customers are also likely also increasing handwashing.

- Even with proper handwashing, Michigan requires that food workers use a barrier such as tongs, gloves, or other utensil to prevent direct hand contact with ready-to-eat food. The virus is likely to be inactivated by proper cooking temperatures; it is important to use gloves or other barriers to prevent touching foods that will not be fully cooked.
- 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. The current food safety rule requires 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

- 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: There may be additional disinfectants that meet the criteria and EPA will update the list as needed. If you have questions about your particular sanitizer, please carefully read the package label or reach out to your chemical provider for more information.*
- When disinfecting for coronavirus, EPA recommends following the product label use directions for enveloped viruses, as indicated by the approved emerging viral pathogen claim on the master label. If the directions for use for viruses/virucidal activity list 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.*
  - Additional information about using disinfectants for COVID-19 is available from the [National Pesticide Information Center](#).
- **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 and cutting boards must be washed, rinsed, and sanitized (either with chemical sanitizer or high-temperature dish machine) often throughout the day. When using chemical sanitizers with dishes or in food prep areas, be sure staff use the concentration and directions listed on the product's label for FOOD CONTACT SURFACES.
- Only use sanitizers registered with EPA as a sanitizer. Read the sanitizer label and follow usage directions. Be sure staff monitor the concentration of the sanitizer with test strips to make sure the active ingredient is available and at proper concentration.
- Wash and rinse equipment of visible dirt or debris before sanitizing. Sanitizers work better on cleansurfaces.
- All nonfood contact surfaces, such as equipment, counters, and doors should be cleaned of spills as needed. To help reduce the potential for coronavirus, it is recommended to also 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 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 at least daily.
- At this time, there are no recommended restrictions from our office on customer self-service such as beverage dispensers, bulk food containers, or salad bars. To help customers reduce illness wash, rinse, and sanitize tongs and other utensils in self-service areas often throughout the day and consider providing alcohol-based hand antiseptic rubs (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol) at the entrance to the facility.

**Where to turn for more information:**

- [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Coronavirus Disease 2019](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Coronavirus and Pandemic Preparedness for the Food Industry](#), FMI Food Industry Association
- [Coronavirus: What Can You Do?](#) National Restaurant Association
- [Interim Guidance for Business and Employers to Plan and Respond to COVID-19](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Getting Your Workplace Ready for COVID-19](#) World Health Organization
- [Guidance for Travelers](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**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 updated information coming your way as it is available. Please be safe out there.

Sincerely,

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan Environmental Health Division