



FBIA Communications Working Group/COVID-19 Response Task Force

Food Safety and Supply Chain Confidence Plan – AS OF 3/19/2020

Objectives:

- Ensure the American consumers are confident that the United States food supply is safe during this time of unprecedented uncertainty caused by the Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)
- Proactively provide information that protects/preserves/manages the reputation of the food and beverage industries
- Offer timely and accurate information that supports continued access to, purchasing of and consumption of foods and beverages in the United States
- Coordinate appropriate communication regarding the best available science of food transmission and persistence on food production and food service areas of COVID-19

Strategies:

- Convene a committee of food science, food microbiology, food safety and risk assessment experts to seek scientific and technical counsel regarding important food-related questions
- Create clear, consistent and accurate messaging related to the safety of the US food supply during the COVID-19 outbreak
- Provide information and messages that are factual and supported by the best available scientific information
- Produce materials, messages and templates to be widely distributed with responsible and thoughtful dissemination
- Support consumer and regulatory confidence in the US food supply, food businesses, food supply chain distributors, retailers, restaurants, growers and manufacturers
- Support and work with Federal food safety authorities to ensure they are able to focus on the public health risks posed by the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak

Tactics:

- Leverage relationships and information sharing among all food and beverage associations to create consistent and accurate messaging, such as fact sheets, social media copy, infographics, to inform key audiences and influencers
- Distribute information to federal agencies (FDA/USDA/CDC/DHS/SBA), governors, the White House and the larger public
- Continually modify/enhance the tools and messaging created to match the evolving media, regulatory and scientific environment around COVID-19
- Contact media outlets and social media influencers to assist in the dissemination of food safety messaging
- Respond to media stories/coverage with science-based messaging
- Utilize the Food and Beverage Industry Alliance (FBIA) to serve as industry resource and mechanism to vet questions and responses
- Leverage third-party experts to provide context and information about the relationship between COVID-19 and food products as well as manufacturing and retail facilities

Key Messages:

- The US food supply remains among the safest in the world
- Existing regulations, such as the *Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)* and *Federal Meat and Poultry Act* guide food companies and food and agriculture infrastructure, which are critical during regular “ordinary business” and during times of uncertainty
- As a preventative measure, many food companies are increasing the levels of sanitation and ordinary food safety testing beyond what is required by law or any regulatory guideline during this pandemic
- COVID-19 is NOT a foodborne illness
- The food industry’s top priority today and every day is food safety
- Food and beverage companies in the US follow very stringent food safety best practices in their facilities
- Food facilities have not been identified as a high-risk place for the spread of COVID-19
- CDC advice and guidance is prudent and advisable for all people – food company workers and consumers alike
- The CDC, FDA, USDA, State Governors and food industry leaders are working together to inform consumers about the most factual and science-based information available regarding COVID-19 and its impact on our food system
- Farmers, employees in food facilities, food service and grocery/retail stores should be recognized and celebrated for their hard work and ongoing efforts to provide an abundance of safe food
- Recent empty shelves are a result of “pantry stocking and preparedness” and it is advisable to prepare for a week (vs. a month) of food supplies, at this time
- Supply chain remains solid and transportation is moving food to consumers as quickly and safely as possible

Communications Tools:

- Fact Sheets
- FAQ’s
- Useful links to COVID-19 information
- Quotes from industry/scientific/government experts
- Social media messaging and influencer engagement (Twitter/Blogs/Facebook/Instagram – others)
- Traditional media op-eds/interviews (television/radio/newspaper)

THE FACTS: Coronavirus and US Food Safety

Background:

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease that is caused by the novel Coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. The disease has spread throughout the world and the World Health Organization (WHO) has officially determined this outbreak is a global pandemic. Common symptoms include high fever, sore throat, general malaise and weakness, cough, and shortness of breath. The incubation period is between 7-29 days. The most likely known route of transmission is from person to person. To date, the disease has disproportionately affected at-risk populations such as the elderly and immunocompromised individuals. While active efforts to develop a vaccine are in progress, it is important to recognize that there is no vaccine available today to protect the population.

FACTS: Following are Facts Related to Food Safety for Consumers During the Current Pandemic

Fact #1: The United States has one of the safest food supplies in the world.

Sources: [USDA Secretary/FDA Commissioner public statements](#)

Fact #2: There is no evidence that SARS-CoV-2 (the virus causing COVID-19) is transmitted through food or food packaging. Like other viruses, it is possible that the virus that causes COVID-19 can survive on surfaces or objects. For that reason, it is critical to follow the 4 key steps of food safety—clean, separate, cook, and chill.

Sources: <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>; <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

Fact #3: COVID-19 is understood to be a respiratory disease that is primarily contracted through inhalation.

Sources: Coronavirus is a respiratory virus spread through respiratory droplets. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does *not* consider COVID-19 to be a foodborne illness, but similar actions to prevent foodborne illness can be taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The most important actions to take include proper handwashing using soap and water and scrubbing for at least 20 seconds, frequent cleaning and sanitation of touch points and staying home when sick or caring for someone who is sick. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-cov/prepare/transmission.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Ftransmission.html

Fact #4: Even during this pandemic, US food systems continue to be held to the highest food safety and regulatory standards, which includes high levels of sanitation, food safety testing and monitoring in food processing and handling environments.

Source: <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

Fact #5: The food industry's top priority is to provide safe foods for consumers. The entire food industry is dedicated to making sure that food products and food establishments remain safe and do not exacerbate existing risks associated with the current Coronavirus outbreak

Source: <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>

Fact #6: According to multiple public health agencies around the world, including [CDC](#), [WHO](#), [FDA](#) and [EFSA](#) coronaviruses are primarily spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets NOT food.

Sources: CDC, WHO, FDA and EFSA; <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>;
<https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

Fact #7: Coronaviruses have poor survivability on surfaces; therefore, packages shipped over days and weeks at ambient, refrigerated, or frozen temperatures pose a very low risk of spreading the virus.

Sources: <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>
<https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/cleaning-disinfection.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fhome%2Fcleaning-disinfection.html

Fact #8: The FDA and USDA, which oversee food safety standards and compliance, have regulations and systems in place to ensure for the highest levels of food safety at all times.

Source: <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

Fact #9: Food companies and the FDA and USDA are working together during the Coronavirus outbreak to confirm that food safety systems are in place and that consumers can be confident that the food that they eat is safe.

Source: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-2/>; <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>

Fact #10: At this time there is no indication that the Coronavirus can be transmitted through the packaging of food products.

Source: <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>

Fact #11: During times of ordinary business, and times of uncertainty, the US food systems continue to be held to the highest regulatory standards. Food companies are required by law (the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2010) to have documented comprehensive Food Safety Programs and follow Standard Operating Procedures focused on food safety.

Source: <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus> ; <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

Frequently Asked Questions

Food Safety and Coronavirus/COVID-19

Q: What happens if a grocery associate is identified to have COVID-19?

A: If diagnosed, physicians work with state or local health departments, and health departments follow up with individuals. A store will also work with its local health inspector to determine the best course of action following an aggressive containment philosophy since there will be variability depending on person-to-person interaction, department and activities. Importantly, this associate will be asked to stay home and not return to work until they are asymptomatic.

Q: Do grocery stores present a higher risk to consumers than other places?

A: Most food retailers make their products available within their physical stores but food purchases can also be made online for pickup or home delivery for those who need or prefer ordering and receiving their groceries that way.

Q: If a food manufacturer discovers that their employees have Coronavirus and their product could be tainted, what would happen?

A: Food companies have programs in place to prevent sick workers from operating in a food manufacturing environment. If a worker is determined to have COVID-19, the facility will ensure that infected individuals are quarantined and directed to receive appropriate health care. In addition, companies will screen other employees and stay on alert to identify potential new infections in their operations.

Q: Why should we believe that our food supply is safe during this pandemic when food recalls and outbreaks seem to happen all the time?

A: There is no evidence for the spread of SARS-CoV-2 through consumption of food, no known cases of foodborne COVID-19, and no reason to believe that the Coronavirus has any gastro-intestinal transmission. Furthermore, coronaviruses are more than likely to be inactivated by stomach acids. According to multiple public health agencies around the world, including USDA, CDC, WHO, FDA and [EFSA](#) coronaviruses are primarily spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Furthermore, Coronaviruses have poor survivability on surfaces; therefore, packaging of food also pose a very low risk of spreading the virus.

Q: Can a person contract Coronavirus from food?

A: Coronavirus is a respiratory virus spread through respiratory droplets. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does *not* consider COVID-19 to be a foodborne illness, but similar actions to prevent foodborne illness can be taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The most important actions to take include proper handwashing using soap and water and scrubbing for at least 20 seconds, frequent cleaning and sanitation of touch points and staying home when sick or caring for someone who is sick.

Q: How can food suppliers guarantee American consumers that the food they are putting into the market is safe and free from the virus?

A: According to multiple public health agencies around the world, including USDA, CDC, WHO, FDA and [EFSA](#) coronaviruses are primarily spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Coronaviruses do not grow in foods, and these viruses are known to have poor survivability on surfaces; therefore, packaging of food also pose a very low risk of spreading the virus. Federal food safety agencies remain alert to identify potential other food safety risks and inform consumers as appropriate, but it is always important for consumers to follow cooking instructions available on food packaging and labeling to ensure safe consumption of food.

Q: Is it safer to buy food/groceries from a store or online?

A: Most food retailers make their products available within their physical stores but many also offer the option to purchase food online for pickup or home delivery for those who need or prefer ordering and receiving their groceries that way.

Q: What is our government doing to make sure that our food supply is safe, especially when we need it most?

A: Delivering safe food to consumers is always a top priority of food companies and FDA and USDA. Here in the United States, FDA and USDA enforce the strictest food safety laws and regulations in the world.

Q: What will happen if there aren't enough workers to manufacture, deliver and unpack groceries in stores in the coming months?

A: Given that the US is now in a state of national emergency and social lockdowns are being put in place, there is every hope that the worst of the outbreak crisis will be over sooner than later. The goal is that the possibility of a risk of food supply shortage in the US will be averted. Food companies are working diligently to secure their supply chain and collaborating with their partners to be able to support public needs in the coming weeks and months of the crisis.

Q: How will grocers keep shelves stocked with essentials?

A: There are enough food products and consumables being produced to supply our country's needs. There may be moments when certain desired or essentials products are unavailable, but that will only be a temporary situation. It may take some additional time to get food products to the stores and on shelves. However, based on sound business practices and planning within the food and beverage industry, food will be available and store shelves will be restocked as quickly as possible.

Q: What are grocery stores doing to protect customers from the Coronavirus?

A: Grocery stores have the health of their customers in mind every day. CDC recommends that grocery stores continue to practice routine cleaning and sanitation, especially on those "high touch" areas of the store, such as buttons, carts and touch screens, etc. CDC confirmed that food retailers should continue to use cleaners and disinfectants according to label instructions for cleaning and sanitizing, and leverage EPA-registered cleaning and disinfecting products that are already on the market.

Q: How will food manufacturers and grocery stores remain functioning while keeping their workers safe?

A: Food retailers have implemented steps to ensure that even greater attention is placed on store personnel hygiene and are training employees to ensure sick employees are identified and swiftly removed from store locations to prevent infections within their stores.

Q: What will happen to the food supply in the coming weeks and months?

A: Depending on the local situation, shoppers are in either preventive-mode or response-mode. For instance, communities experiencing their first reported cases of Coronavirus may be securing sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizer, etc. Communities that have already seen several cases of the virus are in more of a response mode, perhaps self-quarantining and securing supplies that bring them comfort and preventive care. This means we are seeing spikes and plateaus in certain product purchases across the country. The food industry will continue to witness this as the Coronavirus plays out in the US.

Q: What can be done to prevent the spread of Coronavirus?

A: General precautions should be taken to prevent the spread of infection such as proper handwashing, covering mouth/nose with sneezing, and avoiding contact with anyone experiencing respiratory illness symptoms such as coughing and sneezing.

Q: What actions should food establishments take?

A: Food establishments should ensure that they have strong food safety programs in place and ensure employees are washing hands properly, practicing good personal hygiene, avoiding bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, staying home when sick, and are following routine cleaning and sanitation procedures. Employee health policies should be re-examined and updated to ensure ill food workers are excluded from working in a food establishment. Allow for flexibility with work conditions in order to encourage employees with symptoms, as well as family members/caregivers with symptoms, to stay at home.

Q: What will keep the food supply flowing and imported products safe in the United States?

A: There is no evidence that food is a transmitter of the Coronavirus so there is no inherent or special risk to imported food. **Regulatory agencies will remain vigilant in monitoring this situation.**

Q: Is food from other countries that have reported serious Coronavirus outbreaks being blocked from entry to the US?

A: There is no evidence that food is a transmitter of the Coronavirus so there is no inherent or special risk to imported food.

Q: What will happen to food safety enforcement if FDA/USDA/CDC employees are sick from the Coronavirus and are unable to do their jobs?

A: The *Food Safety Modernization Act* and USDA food safety guidelines and regulations provide companies the needed guidance to follow the best food safety manufacturing practices. Food and beverage companies are constantly implementing systems and steps to ensure the safety of the food supply during ordinary times as well as times of uncertainty.

Q: How long can the Coronavirus remain viable in a food processing facility or grocery store?

A: Some experiments have shown when aerosolized into fine, floating particles, the virus remained viable for three hours. On a copper surface, it was four hours, the study found. The median length of viability for the virus on stainless steel was 13 hours, and 16 hours on polypropylene, a common type of plastic. However, the CDC states that the durability of some coronavirus on a surface does not mean that it remains just as infectious as the hours go by. Most virus particles degrade in a matter of minutes or hours outside a living host, and the quantity of infectious particles goes down exponentially over time. (Ref: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.09.20033217v1>)

Q: Is there a hotline, web site or central place to find out if food has been contaminated or impacted by the Coronavirus and should be avoided by consumers?

A: COVID-19 is not a foodborne disease. With no evidence of food-related coronavirus transmission, no such resource has been developed and consumers should continue to have confidence in the food that they buy and consume.

Q: How can we be certain that food consumption isn't tied to contracting Coronavirus?

A: There is no evidence demonstrating that COVID-19 is transmitted through consumption of foods. Since this is a novel coronavirus, researchers across the world have already begun to conduct specific experiments to evaluate its survivability in food environments. There is some evidence that the virus can survive on a variety of surfaces for up to a week including on food packaging. However, food packaging is also not known to be associated with transmission of the virus.

Q: What should consumers do with the food they already have at home to remain safe?

A: Practice good kitchen habits including washing hands and surfaces often, separating raw meat from other foods, cooking foods to the right temperature, and refrigerating foods promptly when handling or preparing food (clean, separate, cook, and chill).

Q: If countries that are lockdown are exporting food, how can we be certain that their products are safe?

A: There is no evidence that food is a transmitter of the Coronavirus so there is no inherent or special risk to imported food.

Sources (previously noted):

USDA Secretary/FDA Commissioner public statements; <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>;
<https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>; https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-cov/prepare/transmission.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Ftransmission.html; <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-2/>;
<https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>; https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/cleaning-disinfection.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fhome%2Fcleaning-disinfection.html; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-2/>;
<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.09.20033217v1>

Statements from Agency Representatives or Scientific Experts on COVID-19 and Food Safety Confidence

Experts from CDC, USDA and FDA Among Others

FDA:

- Dr. Stephen Hahn: *“insert statement about FDA confidence in food supply safety...”*
- Frank Yannis
- Dr. Susan Mayne
- Jenny Scott

Scientific Community:

- Dr. Martin Weidmann
- Dr. Linda Harris
- Dr. Mansour Samadpour
- Dr. David Acheson, former FDA Commissioner for Foods, U.S. FDA and Chief Medical Officer, USDA/FSIS
- Dr. Robert Gravani, Cornell University (Food Safety)
- Regina Benjamin, MD, former US Surgeon General, IFIC Trustee
- Dr. Tamika Sims, Ph.D., International Food Information Council (Food Safety, Virology, Food Science)
- Lee-Ann Jaykus, Ph.D., William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor, North Carolina State University (Food Virology, Food Microbiology, and Food Science expertise)
- Martin Wiedmann, Ph.D., Gellert Family Professor in Food Safety, Cornell University (Food Safety, Food Microbiology and Food Science expertise)
- Albert E. Bosch, Ph.D., Full Professor Microbiology, University of Barcelona. (Virology, Microbiology, Genetics expertise)

Social Media Tags and Targets

- Academic community
- Federal Agencies
- Federal Agency Leaders
- State Governors
- Congressional Representatives
- Public Health Officials
- Consumer advocacy groups
- All FBIA Members
- Member companies
- Health community
- Nutritionist/Dieticians
- Schools

LINK TO SOCIAL MEDIA TOOL BOX:

- <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/x7y0w85pg8nf9qm/AADiRehW3LB2n3gEWBkn18RHa?dl=0>

Useful References for Coronavirus Management and Food Safety

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-criteria.html>
<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-supply-chain-update>
[Mitigation Strategies for Communities](#)
[CDC Community Safety Infographic](#)
[Federal Emergency Preparedness Funding](#)
[Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations](#)
[Guidance for Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Homes and Residential Communities](#)
[Legal Resource Center – Hogan Lovells](#)
[FDA Coronavirus Resource and Q&A](#)
[CDC Coronavirus Resource and Q&A](#)
[WHO Coronavirus Resource and Q&A](#)
[EFSA](#)

Additional Resources:

<https://seafoodsafetycovid19.wordpress.com/>
<https://foodinsight.org/coronavirus-and-safe-food-handling-what-you-need-to-know/>
<https://consumerbrandsassociation.org/events/webinar-covid-19-overview-of-coronaviruses-and-the-current-situation/>
<https://consumerbrandsassociation.org/events/webinar-covid-19-facts-and-fiction-for-the-food-industry/>
<https://www.americanbakers.org/2020/03/aba-webinar-coronavirus-what-employers-need-to-know/>
<https://affifoodsafety.org/coronavirus/>
<https://www.fmi.org/food-safety/coronavirus>
<https://restaurant.org/covid19>
<https://www.astaspice.org/food-safety/asta-coronavirus-helpful-information-resources/>
<https://www.unitedfresh.org/coronavirus-fresh-produce-industry-resources/>
<https://www.gcca.org/resources/responding-coronavirus>
<https://www.namanow.org/voice/coronavirus-covid-19-resources/>
<https://www.nationalgrocers.org/news/national-grocers-association-coronavirus/>