



2019 Novel Coronavirus: Frequently Asked Questions For Food Establishments

February, 2020

The Benton-Franklin Health District works with community partners to ensure the safety of food and prevent illness at food businesses. This FAQ is meant to address questions that food establishments and their employees may have about the COVID-19 (2019 Novel Coronavirus). This FAQ is based on current understanding of the virus and may change.

What is a coronavirus?

The term "coronavirus" describes a large number of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory illness. Some coronaviruses have caused more severe illness, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). COVID-19 (2019 Novel Coronavirus) is spreading person-to-person. In most cases outside of China, COVID-19 has been associated with travelers to China.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Fever, cough, difficulty breathing, and sore throat also have been reported in some patients with COVID-19. Risk factors for severe illness are not yet clear, although older patients and those with chronic medical conditions may be at higher risk for severe illness.

Can COVID-19 be spread through food handling?

Experts are still learning how COVID-19 is spread but, like most viruses, food could be a source of transmission. Most coronaviruses spread through:

- Droplets in the air when coughing or sneezing
- Close contact with an infected person
- Contacting a surface with the virus on it, then touching your nose, mouth, or eyes. This could include eating a food that has been handled by an infected food worker.

Am I at risk for COVID-19 from a package or product shipped from China?

In general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient temperatures.



Is there a vaccine for COVID-19?

At this time, there is no vaccine for COVID-19. Food workers can help prevent the spread of illness by washing hands often with soap and running water, staying home if they are sick, and avoiding close contact with others who are sick. Clean and sanitize high volume areas often, such as door handles, menus, and salad bars.



Food workers can help prevent the spread of illness by washing hands often with soap and running water, staying home if they are sick, and avoiding close contact with others who are sick.

What should food workers do if they get sick?

As with any illness, food workers must report immediately to their person-in-charge if they are sick. With respiratory illness, food workers must be restricted to duties that do not involve handling food or food contact surfaces, and may return to full food handling duties once they are free of symptoms. Food workers in an establishment serving a highly susceptible population must be restricted (go home) until they are symptom free.

What if I have recently traveled to China?

If you have recently traveled from China or another impacted area (see <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/novel-coronavirus-china>) or been in close contact with someone with confirmed COVID-19 and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, call your health care provider BEFORE going to get care. Tell them about your symptoms and travel. They can provide you instructions for seeking care so that you do not expose others.

The information in this flyer is based on current understanding of the virus, and guidance may change.

For updates on the COVID-19 outbreak, check the Washington State Department of Health webpage, at www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus.