

WHAT IS COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. Patients with COVID-19 have experienced mild to severe respiratory illness, including fever, cough and shortness of breath. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel (new) coronavirus. It is not the same as other types of coronaviruses that commonly circulate among people and cause mild illness, like the common cold. Those who are older than 60, have underlying health conditions such as heart or lung disease, and diabetes, are particularly at risk.

HOW DOES COVID-19 SPREAD?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

TRANSMISSION THROUGH PACKAGING

The USDA is not aware of any reports at this time of human illnesses that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. However, it is always important to follow good hygiene practices (i.e., wash hands and surfaces often, separate raw meat from other foods, cook to the right temperature, and refrigerate foods promptly) when handling or preparing foods.

FRESH PRODUCE

According to the United Fresh Produce Association there are no clinically-confirmed cases of COVID-19 linked to the consumption of fresh produce or food sold through traditional retail outlets. As consumers select their produce, adhering to food safety guidance is critical. We encourage consumers to wash their hands, and wash and prepare their produce following FDA recommendations.

FOOD PERSONNEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Personal hygiene by food handlers and sanitation of food handling and serving services are both critically important for all food-related establishments.

- Sick personnel should never be allowed in food handling areas. Public health officials say that asymptomatic infections, are highly probable. This means asymptomatic persons can be actively shedding the virus through coughs, sneezes and mucous, which can then contaminate foods and food handling surfaces.
- Personnel exhibiting respiratory infection symptoms of any degree should be required to stay away from food products and work surfaces. Best practice is to send them home or tell them to stay home from work.

Currently, there are no approved vaccines or anti-viral drugs for COVID-19. Personnel who have recently traveled in affected areas or were around people suffering from respiratory infections should immediately contact a health professional for instructions.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE FOOD PROGRAM AVAILABILITY

The USDA is monitoring the COVID-19 situation closely in collaboration with federal and state partners. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service programs are ready to assist in the government-wide effort to ensure all Americans have access to food in times of need. In the event of an emergency or disaster situation, Food and Nutrition Service programs are just one part of a much larger government-wide coordinated response. All programs, including SNAP, WIC and the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, have flexibilities and contingencies built-in to allow to respond to on-the-ground realities and take action as directed by Congress.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information and resources for COVID-19 are available at the links below.

- CDC COVID-19 webpage: <https://coronavirus.gov>
- USDA COVID-19 webpage: <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>
- ISDH COVID-19 webpage: in.gov/coronavirus
- United Fresh Produce Association webpage: <https://www.unitedfresh.org/coronavirus-fresh-produce-industry-resources>
- The Food Industry Association Preparedness Checklist: <https://www.fmi.org/food-safety/coronavirus>
- U.S. EPA Registered Antimicrobial Products for Use Against Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, the Cause of COVID-19: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/sars-cov-2-list_03-03-2020.pdf