



Health  
Department

# COVID-19 AND FOOD SAFETY FAQ

## IS CORONAVIRUS A CONCERN AT GROCERY STORES?

CDC, FDA and USDA are not aware of any reports at this time that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. Current evidence shows the biggest risk of transmission of COVID-19 is being around individuals who are symptomatic (and to a lesser extent, infected but not showing symptoms.) Food businesses should be following employee health policies and local health department recommendations to keep these individuals home.

### CAN I GET SICK WITH COVID-19 FROM TOUCHING FOOD OR PACKAGING IF THE VIRUS WAS PRESENT ON IT?

- There is no indication that food packaging material has served in significant connection to virus transmission.
- If concerned, handling of food packaging can be followed with handwashing and/or using hand sanitizer.

### HOW SHOULD PRODUCE BE HANDLED?

- Consider using hand sanitizer before and after selecting produce items.
- Avoid touching multiple produce items when making selections.
- As per good food handling practices in general, wash hands before food preparation or eating, avoid touching the face and consider supplementing handwashing with the use of hand sanitizer.

### WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE TO MINIMIZE RISK WHEN SHOPPING AT THE GROCERY STORE?

- Use hand sanitizer when entering stores, and wash hands and/or use sanitizer as soon as possible after leaving.
- Wear a cloth face covering while shopping.
- Try to maintain social distancing as much as possible while shopping.
- Avoid touching surfaces or items unnecessarily and avoid touching your mouth, nose or face.
- **Do not go shopping when showing symptoms or think you have been exposed to the virus.**

### WHAT IS MY GROCERY STORE DOING TO MINIMIZE MY RISK?

- Many stores are following CDC guidelines on cleaning and disinfection. Some are limiting hours to allow for additional cleaning and disinfection.
- Stores may also be providing hand sanitizer to customers and be asking sick employees or customers to leave.
- Grocery employees are essential employees and encouraged to wear cloth face coverings
- Stores may also limit the number of people allowed to shop at one time, and enforce physical distancing while in line inside and outside the store.

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## IS CORONAVIRUS A CONCERN AT GROCERY STORES?

CDC and USDA are 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.

### IS FOOD IMPORTED FROM COUNTRIES AND STATES AFFECTED BY COVID-19 AT RISK OF SPREADING COVID-19?

- Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with imported goods and there are no reported cases of COVID-19 in the United States associated with imported goods.

### IF AN EMPLOYEE AT A FOOD ESTABLISHMENT BECAME INFECTED WITH CORONAVIRUS, WOULD THE FOOD PRODUCED AT THAT FACILITY BE SAFE TO EAT?

- Food establishment personnel who are ill with COVID-19 or any other illness should be excluded from work activities that could create unsanitary conditions (i.e. coughing or sneezing on product).
- COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets that can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby.

### CAN I GET SICK WITH COVID-19 FROM TOUCHING FOOD, THE FOOD PACKAGING, OR FOOD CONTACT SURFACES, IF THE CORONAVIRUS WAS PRESENT ON IT?

- Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19.
- Coronaviruses need a living host (animal or human) to grow in and cannot grow in food.
- Like other viruses, it is possible that the virus that causes COVID-19 can survive on surfaces or objects.

### HOW SHOULD FOOD BE HANDLED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

- As always, follow good hygiene and food safety practices when preparing food:
  - Purchase food from reputable sources
  - Cook food thoroughly and maintain safe holding temperatures
  - Use good personal hygiene
  - Clean and sanitize surfaces and equipment

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# COVID-19 AND FOOD SAFETY FAQ

## SHOPPING AND HANDLING GROCERIES

Current evidence shows the biggest risk of transmission of COVID-19 is being around individuals who have symptoms (and to a lesser extent, infected but not showing symptoms.) Grocery stores should be following employee health policies and health department recommendations to keep these individuals home.

### SHOPPING

#### WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE TO MINIMIZE RISK WHEN SHOPPING AT THE GROCERY STORE?

- Use hand sanitizer when entering stores, and wash hands and/or use sanitizer after leaving.
- Wear a cloth face covering while shopping.
- Bring disinfecting wipes and use on cart and basket handles and card readers.
- Maintain social distancing as much as possible while shopping and give others at least 6ft of space.
- Avoid touching surfaces or items unnecessarily and avoid touching your mouth, nose or face.
- **Do not go shopping when showing symptoms or think you have been exposed to the virus.**

#### WHAT IS MY GROCERY STORE DOING TO MINIMIZE MY RISK?

- Many stores are following CDC guidelines on cleaning and disinfection. Some are limiting hours to allow for additional cleaning and disinfection.
- Stores may also be providing hand sanitizer and/or disinfecting wipes for carts or baskets, and may ask sick employees or customers to leave.
- Grocery employees are essential employees and encouraged to wear cloth face coverings.
- Stores may also limit the number of people allowed to shop at one time, and enforce physical distancing while in line inside and outside the store.

#### IS DELIVERY A SAFER OPTION THAN GOING TO A STORE?

- Delivery or pre-order is a great risk management decision, especially for vulnerable individuals.
- Delivery helps limit the number of people in the store and helps with social distancing, as well as the number of people touching surfaces.
- Pre-order or delivery also prevents the shopper from inadvertently exposing others if they are infected but not showing symptoms

#### HOW SHOULD PRODUCE BE HANDLED?

- Consider using hand sanitizer before and after selecting produce items.
- Avoid touching multiple produce items when making selections.

### HANDLING GROCERIES

#### HOW SHOULD I HANDLE GROCERIES WHEN I GET HOME? CAN I BRING THEM INSIDE RIGHT AWAY?

- There is no indication that food or food packaging material has served in significant connection to virus transmission.
- Handling of food packaging should be followed with handwashing and/or using hand sanitizer.
- **It is NOT recommended to store groceries outside of the home, in cars or garages.**

#### HOW SHOULD I HANDLE GROCERIES FOR SOMEONE WHO IS IN VULNERABLE POPULATION?

- If shopping for someone else, best practice is to drop off groceries while maintaining social distance.
- If entering a home to care for someone, wash hands immediately upon arrival, while unpacking and before providing direct care.

#### SHOULD PRODUCE BE WASHED BEFORE EATING? SHOULD SOAP OR A DISINFECTANT BE USED?

- Washing produce before eating is always a good idea. Rinse with cool running water or soak in cool water right before eating.
- **It is NOT recommended to wash produce with dish soap or any detergent.**
- **It is NOT recommended to treat produce with chemical disinfectants or wipes at home.**

#### SHOULD I ONLY BUY FOOD THAT CAN BE HEATED?

- There is no evidence that food is a transmission route for the virus.
- There is not current data about the temperature to inactivate the virus, so heating recommendations are not science-based.

## TIPS

1. Use hand sanitizer and cart wipes.
2. Shop alone and go with a plan.
3. Maintain social distance.
4. Only touch what you will buy.

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# COVID-19 AND FOOD SAFETY FAQ

## IS CORONAVIRUS A CONCERN WITH TAKEOUT?

CDC, FDA and USDA are not aware of any reports at this time that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. Current evidence shows the biggest risk of transmission of COVID-19 is being around individuals who are symptomatic (and to a lesser extent, infected but not showing symptoms.) Food businesses should be following employee health policies and health department recommendations to keep these individuals home.

### WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF TAKEOUT OR DRIVE-THRU FOOD?

- There is no current indication that takeout or drive-thru meals will increase illness.
- This option is a good risk management choice, especially for high risk and elderly groups because it helps maintain social distancing and reduces the number of touch points.

### WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF FOOD DELIVERED TO HOME?

- Similar to takeout, food delivery helps maintain social distancing and reduces the number of touch points between preparation and serving of food.
- Many delivery programs have also instituted no touch/no interaction options, which further reduces risk.

### CAN I GET COVID-19 FROM TOUCHING FOOD OR PACKAGING EXPOSED TO CORONAVIRUS?

- The risk of transfer of viruses is very low, based on current research.
- To further minimize risk, handling food packaging should be followed by handwashing and/or using hand sanitizer.

### WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR BODY IF YOU DO INGEST CORONAVIRUS THROUGH FOOD?

- Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. It may be possible for a person to get COVID-19 by touching a contaminated surface or object and then touching their mouth, eyes, or nose, but this is not thought to be the major way the virus is transmitted.
- Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of the virus directly by eating food that might inadvertently contain virus.
- In commercial food production, processing, and preparation, there are many best practices that are routinely followed as per federal, state, and local regulations. These are all designed to prevent foods from becoming contaminated with microbes from the environment, including viruses.
- The best thing a consumer can do is to continue using good food safety practices before preparing or eating food, like always washing your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds after using the restroom, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

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