COVID-19 PREVENTION PROTOCOL FOR FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS

Updated 04/07/2020

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates there is currently no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food. However, it may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, like a packaging container, that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. Therefore, it is important to take extra precautions at this time.

In addition, following current food safety standards, EH&S recommends following the Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection Protocols for the Prevention of COVID-19 to help protect food service workers and the UW community from COVID-19.

**EH&S and public health guidance will be updated as the situation evolves.** The EH&S COVID-19 Health and Safety Resources webpage and UW Novel coronavirus & COVID-19: facts and resources webpage have the most current information, including many helpful frequently asked questions, such as what to do if you feel sick and how to prevent the spread of the virus.

**UNIVERSITY OPERATIONS POLICY COMPLIANCE**

- All food establishments must comply with Governor Jay Inslee’s “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order. Currently, onsite dining is prohibited.
- All employees who can telework or work from home without impacting critical operations must be allowed to do so.
- All employees, vendors and contractors who have symptoms of COVID-19 infection and/or other respiratory symptoms must stay home, even if symptoms are mild. Follow the steps in the FAQ “What do I do if I feel sick?” at www.uw.edu/coronavirus.
- All employees, vendors and contractors who have been in close contact with someone who has confirmed or suspected COVID-19 should follow the steps listed in the FAQ “I have been in close contact with someone who has a confirmed case of COVID-19. What should I do?” at www.uw.edu/coronavirus.

**REVIEW EMPLOYEE HEALTH POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

- Ensure employee health policies prohibit food workers from working in food establishments while sick.
- Remind employees of symptoms that restrict them from working in food establishments, and the procedure to notify management if they are sick.
Food workers and managers with symptoms of illness should not return to work until they are symptom-free. Current CDC guidance for discontinuing home isolation after COVID-19 infection:

- At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and
- Improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and
- At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

Per DOH guidelines, employers are discouraged from requiring employees to provide a doctor’s note to return to work, because doing so will burden the medical system.

Where possible, food production areas should promote employee separation by at least 6 feet.

INCREASE HYGIENE

- Ensure all employees wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Make sure each handwashing station, including public restrooms, remains stocked with soap, paper towels, and warm, running water.
- Even with proper handwashing, Washington state requires that food workers use a barrier such as tongs, gloves, or other utensils to prevent direct hand contact with food. The virus will likely 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.
- All employees and customers should cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. If a tissue is not available, employees can sneeze into their elbow, 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. The current food safety rule requires workers wash their hands whenever they touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Provide tissues, no-touch waste bins, and alcohol-based hand sanitizers (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol) in customer areas.
- Per CDC recommendation, consider wearing cloth face coverings when visiting or working in retail food establishments or grocery stores. This is an especially helpful voluntary public health measure in food production areas where 6-foot physical distancing is difficult to follow. Ensure reusable cloth face coverings are laundered daily.
CLEAN & DISINFECT

- While COVID-19 primarily spreads person-to-person, it may also be capable of spreading through contact with a contaminated surface.

- The EPA has a list of registered products for use against the novel coronavirus. Properly concentrated bleach solutions and quaternary ammonium solutions commonly used in food establishments are included in this list. 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 disinfectant, please carefully read the package label or reach out to your chemical provider for more information.

- Follow UW Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection Protocols for the Prevention of COVID-19. The disinfection concentrations in these protocols 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 a chemical near or on utensils and food contact surfaces.

- Read labels 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, cutting boards, and servingware must be washed, rinsed, and sanitized (using a 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 EPA-registered disinfectants. 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 disinfecting.

- Clean and disinfect non-food contact surfaces that employees and customers frequently touch throughout the day (e.g., payment registers, handles of doors and refrigerators, backs of chairs, faucets, menus, tabletops, condiment containers, etc.).

- To help protect your workers and customers, increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection in customer-access areas. Use a separate wiping cloth and sanitizing solution when sanitizing the front of house/customer-access areas.

- Remove decorative objects, papers, and other unneeded materials from counters to allow for thorough sanitization of unobstructed surfaces.
OTHER MODIFICATIONS TO FOOD SERVICE PRACTICES

• Consider suspending “bring your own mug” programs at cafés and coffee shops to limit sharing of touched surfaces between staff and customers.

• Consider individually wrapping customer grab-and-go items (cutlery, sandwiches, donuts, bagels) to eliminate the risk of hand contact when items are on display.

• At this time, there are no required restrictions from EH&S 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 provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% ethyl alcohol) at the entrance to the facility.

• Portable point-of-sale (POS) systems should be handled by employees only. Do not pass handheld POS systems between diners in the food establishment without practicing proper cleaning, disinfection, and hand washing procedures between each use.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

• UW coronavirus information, UW
• COVID-19 FAQs, US Food & Drug Administration
• COVID-19 Health and Safety Resources, UW EH&S
• Food Worker and Establishment Guidance on COVID-19, Washington State Department of Health
• Coronavirus and Pandemic Preparedness for the Food Industry, FMI Food Industry Association
• Coronavirus: What Can You Do? National Restaurant Association

Please contact the EH&S Public Health Program with questions or requests for more information at phdept@uw.edu.