

# COVID-19 Guidance for Food Establishments



The novel coronavirus disease, also known as COVID-19, is causing respiratory illness throughout North Carolina, and cases of community spread are likely. Questions arise on the likelihood of food service establishments to serve as a source of potential community outbreak. Currently, food has not been identified as a primary mode of transmission for COVID-19, but food service establishments can still take steps to protect their employees and customers. The following recommendations should be used in food service establishments:

General control measures can be implemented by food service employees to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19:

1. Practice good hand hygiene and coughing/sneezing etiquette:
  - Hands should be cleaned often using proper technique. Handwashing should include using soap and warm water, scrubbing all portions of hands and fingers for 20 seconds, rinsing with warm running water, and drying with a single-use towel.
  - Avoid touching your face as much as possible, specifically avoiding contact with eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
  - When sneezing, ensure a tissue is used, and that coughing is done into a tissue or one's elbow. Properly wash hands immediately after disposing of tissue or coughing.
2. Follow employee health policy and stay home when symptomatic
  - Employee health policy that excludes symptoms and illnesses found in Chapter 2 of the NC Food Code must continue to be followed. If a food service worker (food handler, server, cashier, etc.) is exhibiting symptoms of a fever (100.4°F or greater on an oral thermometer), excessive coughing and sneezing, or other respiratory symptoms, they should also be excluded from work.
  - Individuals should remain home until asymptomatic for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants).
  - Individuals providing care for a sick family member should practice additional precautions, including wearing gloves when available, and washing hands thoroughly after providing care, cleaning, and before leaving the house. The use of respiratory masks for the general public is not recommended.

The following control measures can be implemented by food service establishments to reduce the risk of customers within your establishment spreading COVID-19:

1. Perform routine environmental cleaning
  - Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces, including menus and digital ordering systems, condiment containers, salt and pepper shakers, countertops, doors and door handles, etc., with the cleaners that are EPA-approved for emerging viral pathogens. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label. Chlorine disinfectant can be made by using 1/3 cup of household bleach and 1 gallon of water (1,000 ppm chlorine).
  - Surfaces that are visibly dirty should be cleaned with detergent and rinsed before being disinfected.
  - Use disposable gloves when cleaning high touch surfaces. Ensure gloves are changed frequently when changing cleaning locations to avoid additional spread of contamination and wash hands immediately after removing gloves.

2. Provide additional precautions for customers within the establishment

- Ensure adequate supply and convenient placement of alcohol-based hand sanitizers for use by customers inside food establishment.
- Provide extra supplies of napkins or tissues for customers to use when coughing or sneezing.
- If customer self-service is done within the establishment, consider additional employee oversight so contaminated surfaces can be cleaned, and any contaminated food or utensils can be removed.
- Based on volume and peak usage of self-service areas, replace utensils in these areas more frequently. Ensure food in self-service areas is properly protected using covers and sneeze shields.

Stay informed and updated on this rapidly changing situation using reliable information sources. The CDC and NC DHHS websites listed below will have updated guidance and information as it becomes available. If you have specific questions regarding the outbreak, contact your local health department environmental health specialist or communicable disease nurse.

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-response-north-carolina>