



COVID-19 GUIDANCE: Mask Utilization & Building Safety Measures for Food Industry

Includes: Retail food establishments, grocery stores, food manufacturers, processors, warehouses, distributors

Recent studies evaluated by The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) indicate that COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) can be transmitted to others through close contact with asymptomatic (infected people that do not present symptoms) and/or pre-symptomatic (infected people who later present symptoms) individuals. Additionally, the number of asymptomatic people in the population may be higher than initially estimated. Based on this evidence, the CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings in addition to social distancing measures, especially in areas of significant community spread, to mitigate against COVID-19.

In line with this guidance from the CDC, Governor Tom Wolf and Dr. Levine recommend that all Pennsylvanians [wear a mask in public](#). The Pennsylvania Department of Health has also issued an [order directing enhanced Building Safety Measures](#) to slow the spread of the virus.

In line with these recommendations, the Department of Agriculture advises all food production and retail food or grocery workers to wear cloth masks. This recommendation is in an effort to further protect the public and food industry employees during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. Ensuring Pennsylvanians continue to have access to a safe, reliable, food supply through these essential businesses remains critical to sustaining life.

Retail food establishments, grocery stores, food manufacturers, processors, warehouses, and distributors should implement the following guidance for mask-use and building safety:

Mask Utilization

It is important to emphasize that maintaining 6-foot social distance remains critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19. The use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus and prevent people, who may not know they have the virus, from transmitting it to others is recommended. Employers should provide face masks to employees and educate workforce on the importance of wearing masks for their protection and the protection of consumers.

Cloth face coverings should:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include multiple layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction
- be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

Inexpensive cloth face coverings from common materials can be made at home.

Instructions for making masks with sew and no-sew methods, proper removal, and cleaning of masks are provided on the Centers for Disease Control website:

- [Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#)

The cloth face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders.

Building Safety Measures

Cleaning, disinfecting, and other maintenance and security services performed by building service employees are critical to protecting public health and reducing spread of COVID-19.

Essential businesses operating buildings of at least 50,000 square feet used as grocery stores, retail food establishments, food manufacturers, food processors, warehouses and distributors, shall implement the following cleaning protocols:

(1) In addition to maintaining pre-existing cleaning protocols established in the facility, as specified (in paragraph 2) below, clean and disinfect high-touch areas routinely [in accordance with CDC guidelines](#).

Cleaning and disinfection after persons suspected/confirmed to have COVID-19 have been in a facility that does not house people overnight:

Timing and location of cleaning and disinfection of surfaces:

- Close off areas visited by the ill persons. Open outside doors and windows and use ventilating fans to increase air circulation in the area. Wait 24 hours, or as long as practical, before beginning cleaning and disinfection.
- Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.

How to Clean and Disinfect:

Hard (Non-porous) Surfaces

- Clean dirty surfaces using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- Use an [EPA-approved](#) disinfectant against COVID-19
 - Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products for concentration, application method and contact time, etc.
 - Additionally, diluted household bleach solutions (at least 1000ppm sodium hypochlorite) can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application, ensuring a contact time of at least 1 minute, and allowing proper ventilation during and after application. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.
 - Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:
 - 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water or
 - 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water

Soft (Porous) Surfaces

- For soft (porous) surfaces such as carpeted floor, rugs, and drapes, remove visible contamination if present and clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces. If the items can be laundered after cleaning, follow laundry guidance below. Otherwise, use [EPA Approved Products](#) that are suitable for porous surfaces.

Electronics

- For electronics such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines, remove visible contamination if present.
 - Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.
 - Consider use of wipeable covers for electronics.
 - If no manufacturer guidance is available, consider the use of alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol to disinfect touch screens. Dry surfaces thoroughly to avoid pooling of liquids.

Lab coats, smocks, clothing, and other items that go in the laundry

- In order to minimize the possibility of dispersing virus through the air, *do not shake dirty laundry*.
- Wash items as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an ill person can be washed with other people's items.
- Clean and disinfect hampers or other carts for transporting laundry according to guidance above for hard or soft surfaces.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Hand Hygiene

- The risk of exposure to cleaning staff is inherently low. Cleaning staff should wear disposable gloves and gowns for all tasks in the cleaning process, including handling trash.
 - Gloves and gowns should be:
 - Compatible with the disinfectant products being used.
 - Removed carefully to avoid contamination of the wearer and the surrounding area
 - Gloves should be removed after cleaning a room or area occupied by ill persons
 - CLEAN HANDS OFTEN by washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water. Clean hands:
 - After removing gloves
 - After handling dirty laundry
 - After blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - After using the restroom
 - Before eating or preparing food
 - After contact with animals or pets
 - Before and after providing routine care for another person who needs assistance such as a child
- Additional PPE might be required based on the cleaning/disinfectant products being used and whether there is a risk of splash.
- If gowns are not available, coveralls, aprons or work uniforms can be worn during cleaning and disinfecting. Reusable (washable) clothing should be laundered afterwards.

- Cleaning staff should immediately report breaches in PPE such as a tear in gloves or any other potential exposures to their supervisor.
- Follow normal preventive actions while at work and home, including cleaning hands and avoiding touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

(2) Maintain pre-existing cleaning protocols established in the facility for all other areas of the building:

- Restaurants, grocery, and retail food establishments use the [Food Code](#) published by the FDA.
- FDA-regulated food manufacturers follow existing food safety plans in place. Food safety plans include a hazards analysis and risk-based preventive controls and include procedures for maintaining clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces. See: [FSMA Final Rule for Preventive Controls for Human Food](#).
- All FSIS-regulated establishments are required to adhere to Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (Sanitation SOP), which are written procedures that an establishment develops and implements to prevent direct contamination or adulteration of product.

(3) Ensure that the facility has enough employees to perform the above protocols effectively and in a manner that ensures the safety of occupants and employees:

- Consider instructing employees to self-monitor and report any signs of COVID-19 symptoms (shortness of breath, fever, aches) in themselves or family members
- Consider implementation of employee temperature screening prior to start of each shift. Send any employee showing signs of elevated temperature or fever home.
- Consider eliminating attendance penalties and/or incentivizing attendance of healthy employees

(4) Ensure that the facility has enough security employees to control access, maintain order, and enforce social distancing of at least 6 feet, provided the security employees are otherwise responsible for such enforcement.

- Encourage employees to practice Social Distancing at home, self-monitor and report any signs of COVID-19 symptoms (shortness of breath, fever, aches) in themselves or family members
- Consider eliminating attendance penalties and/or incentivizing attendance of healthy employees
- Consider implementing employee temperature screening prior to start of each shift.
- Send any employee showing signs of elevated temperature or fever home.
- Consider 'quarantining' employees who have had close contact with another that has symptoms or has tested COVID-19 positive, especially when adequate social distancing of 6 feet was not practical in the workplace.

Reminders for Retail Food Establishments and Grocery Stores

- Per the Governor's order, all restaurants and bars must close their dine-in facilities and open only to drive-through or other pick-up/delivery options to help stop the spread of COVID-19.
- Encourage use of online ordering with outside pick-up or delivery options in lieu of indoor shopping.
- Grocery stores should remain open and operational but may consider altering hours to allow for increased cleaning and restocking.
- Consider limiting the number of customers at any given time as necessary to reduce crowding and lines in order to meet social distancing guidance.

The FDA offers relevant guidance pertaining to implementation of [Social Distancing in Food Production / Processing and Retail Food Establishments](#).

Additional Considerations for Food Production, Processing, and Distributors

- Encourage employees to perform any work that can be completed remotely through telework to work from home
- Utilize skeleton crewing, stagger production and shifts, or schedule a typically 5-day work week over 7 days to reduce personnel density on site
- Enhance social distancing through:
 - Small units of dedicated crews that work together consistently (as opposed to rotating employees through many areas / 'teams' throughout the week)
 - In open areas with production lines in proximity, consider shutting down alternating lines
 - Consider physical separations between production lines—temp walls, plastic sheeting barriers as used when isolating construction projects

Food facilities should be vigilant in their hygiene practices, including frequent and proper hand-washing and routine cleaning of all surfaces.