



Guidance for the Food Industry: Coronavirus Outbreak

*I. Best Practices and Planning for
the Immediate Situation*

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As the food industry association, FMI works with and on behalf of the entire industry to advance a safer, healthier and more efficient consumer food supply chain. FMI brings together a wide range of members across the value chain — from retailers that sell to consumers, to producers that supply food and other products, as well as the wide variety of companies providing critical services — to amplify the collective work of the industry. www.FMI.org

The coronavirus outbreak has already had a significant impact on the global economy, and countries throughout the world are in different stages of their mitigation efforts to slow down the spread of the virus. In the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other health officials are recommending that individuals stock up on food and other necessary supplies, which has increased demand for grocers and product suppliers and highlighted the efficacy of our supply chain.

The purpose of this document is to provide best practices and operational guidance for the food industry on the scenarios and issues that are occurring today, just days after the president declared a national emergency. These short-term tips are designed to help address situations and concerns with your associates, your customers and the supply chain.

Recommendations for Your Associates

- Recognize their heroic efforts to keep food available. Consider providing food, transportation or childcare if needed.
- Ask customers who bring in reusable bags if they would bag their own items.
- Ask for customers to hold their recycling in states where bottles/cans are returned to the stores to avoid associates handling and to allow them to continue their efforts in support of maintaining food supply.
- Consider developing an updated sick leave policy.
- Consider alternate workforce, partnering with other sectors, employing teenagers out of school.
- Ensure employees are:
 - Washing hands properly.
 - Practicing good personal hygiene.
 - Avoiding bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods.
 - Controlling all food safety hazards. Following cleaning and sanitation procedures.
- Visible and enhanced cleaning and sanitation, hand sanitizer and wipes at front end. Encourage frequent handwashing and provide hand sanitizer for use by employees who are in contact with customers.
- General precautions should be taken to prevent the spread of infection among employees. Employees should be reminded to properly wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, practice proper respiratory hygiene, follow proper food safety practices, and avoid contact with anyone experiencing respiratory illness symptoms such as coughing and sneezing.

- Ensure associates stay home if sick, symptomatic, or if they have come in close contact with individuals who are sick. Employees should immediately notify their supervisor and the local health department if they develop symptoms of COVID-19.
- Employees should be trained on:
 - How to properly clean and disinfect surfaces, including how to use PPE and cleaning chemicals properly and the hazards associated with the cleaning chemicals according to [OSHA's Hazard Communication standard \(29 CFR 1910.1200\)](#).
 - Recognizing the symptoms of COVID-19.
 - What to do if they develop symptoms associated with COVID-19.
- In-store stocking implications:
 - Limit the size of orders while warehouse is under duress, issue piece count maximums for daily orders.
 - Provide a list of critical items that warehouse will allocate and stores are not allowed to order- this will enable central procurement to smooth orders.
 - 80/20 rule: 20% of the items contribute to 80% of the sales. Consider the ability of substitution from a consumer standpoint. Perhaps only stock specific SKU's in key categories until things smooth out. In the short term, ability to abandon planogram in those key categories and expand facings on a select group of items (for example Paper towels and toilet paper SKUs) fewer SKUs and more facings on the shelf. For fresh categories: more hamburger meat, less filet mignon.
 - In fresh areas, including food service, move toward more packaged goods as possible vs. bulk.
 - Have a critical item list for products that are not limited by warehouse (list of things store should concentrate on, and the warehouse has inventory).
 - DSD employees must verify they have been screened for fever.
 - DSD suppliers on the sales floor should be wearing gloves.
 - DSD suppliers are given strict rules on what they are to do in terms of item substitutions and not following planograms. These strict rules are communicated by central procurement and list provided to the store-level backroom receivers.
 - Backroom receivers are to wear gloves
- Pricing cycles: Consider the amount of labor going into pricing cycles and determine if you need to widen the intervals (weekly to every other week or move to monthly).
- Parking lot: Clear procedures on how to handle shopping carts and outside merchandising on curbs.

Recommendations for Helping your Customers

- Communicate to customers what you are doing and why you are doing it, using any and all communication channels, signage, electronic tools and social media.
- Inform your customers that closures are being done to restock, clean and provide associates with a break.
- Encourage CDC best practices on social distancing when in the store.
- Explain how to utilize click and collect and delivery models including for WIC and SNAP shoppers.
- Make adjustments or other efforts to address seniors and other high-risk shoppers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>.
- Increase cleaning and sanitizing of all high touch points. Do this frequently; and make it visible to customers.
 - Ensure to disinfect all high touch points including door handles, payment systems and touch screens, shared pens, ALL utensils including those for employees only and those available to customers, and any other touch points in your stores. If surfaces are visibility dirty, ensure to clean surface to remove any soil prior to disinfecting.
- Increase the availability of products to avoid contamination such as antimicrobial wipes, sanitizer stations and access to handwashing sinks.
- Ensure there is a way to sanitize shopping cart and basket handles – either by making wipes easily accessible to customers or by having employees manage the process and sanitize between each customer use.
 - Do not utilize reusable cloths/rags.
- Place hand sanitizer stations and wipes throughout store.
- Customer facing businesses should also evaluate novel ways to limit or minimize person-to-person contact.
- Include signage at key categories explaining to customers the limits being placed on critical items (paper towels, sanitizers, toilet paper, water).
- Provide ways of communicating your guidelines to the public to earn trust. Signs that read: “Our employees are screened for fever or any symptoms of illness before working today” or other signs that instill confidence in the consumer.
- Include signage that indicate both your store hours and that your stringent sanitizing is being done during closing hours (this will allow consumers to understand you are closed to clean and stock, as opposed to not having enough food to sell).
- In areas of high-volume traffic, utilize spacing tools for checks and lines. Put tape on the floor to keep customers adequately spaced. This is a very local decision by the market by store.

- Update your messaging on your websites to provide customers an understanding of limits, guidance toward digital ordering, and store hours. Don't forget they may have your app and will be looking for good communications.

Supply Chain Best Practices

- With many unknowns with SARS-CoV-19 and how it spreads, it is believed that the new coronavirus behaves similarly to other coronaviruses (i.e., SARS and MERS) and thus has poor survivability on surfaces and packages. Therefore, products and packages that are shipped pose a very low risk of spreading the virus.
- Receiving and delivery practices should be evaluated to minimize human to human contact. An example of this could be to limit the sharing of pens or equipment between associates.
- Although suppliers may currently pose a low risk, we strongly encourage you to work with all suppliers, ensure that they have strong food safety programs in place and are meeting all food safety and employee health specifications that have been established.
- Work closely with suppliers to identify local manufacturers and producers of key essential products.
- Coordinate with your buying departments or retail customers to learn about their plans to "bulk up" on core items so that facilities can be secured for emergency storage.
- In the first wave, increase volumes key in-demand items (e.g. pasta, sauces, tinned and canned foods, instant noodles, frozen ready meals, cleaning detergents, alcohol, hand sanitizer and gel, paper products).
- Develop relaxed product substitution rules such that products continue to flow to the shelves. These will need to be well communicated and well understood.
- Allocate key product lines, to manage demand, and control stocks as necessary.
- If an alternate supplier is needed to source ingredients ensure that adequate food safety programs are in place and appropriate verification activities have been conducted before using the supplier on a temporary basis.
- Offer to collect from suppliers where stock is available, agree on basic commercial terms to cover costs.
- Accept loads when available from suppliers, prioritize inbound bookings. Relax on-time performance metrics.
- Operate a flexible inbound window system with capacity managed rather than specific load bookings.
- Use supplier trucks leaving empty to do store deliveries, 'front haul.'

- Driver absenteeism or reluctance to access containment zones may limit trucks for the supply of product. Split picking and deliver on core products multiple times a week with extended range only once a week to maximize deliveries per run and minimize picking activity.
- Offer access to restroom facilities for truck drivers.
- Communicate concerns about labor, supply chain stoppages, fuel or other issues with your industry partners, associations and government to address in as collective a partnership as possible.
- Activate emergency check-in and receiving procedures to minimize contact between drivers and warehouse personnel, including any lumper service labor. For example, allow drivers to stay in their vehicle to avoid contact.
- Increase security for warehouses and vehicles.
- Utilize alternative routing plans that reduce the number of deliveries.
- Develop plans to minimize the potential for a fuel shortage that could occur during an initial panic period. Communicate fuel needs to local emergency management.
- Hours of Service: FMCSA issued an emergency declaration to waive hours of service regulations to assist with flow of goods during the outbreak.
- Check delivery time and noise restrictions with state and local governments; we are currently working to try to get some of these restrictions relaxed.
- Develop backup plans to serve routes should some drivers decline to travel into areas they perceive as high risk.
- Develop cooperative arrangements with other distributors to keep the food supply chain functioning.
- Partner with other sectors experiencing a decline in demand (foodservice, mass retail, etc.). Consider using any excess distribution capacity to help in other emergency areas (for example, medical supplies).

Food Safety Practices

The food industry's top priority is to provide safe products for consumers. The entire food industry is dedicated to making sure that food and food establishments remain safe and do not contribute to the current outbreak.

The most effective tools for food safety are the basics – handwashing, employee hygiene, following SOPs and GMPs, avoiding contamination and following well established food safety management practices and programs. In addition to basic food safety practices, we recommend the following to further reduce the risk of COVID-19 being spread.

- Food establishments should ensure that they have strong food safety programs in place and ensure employees are washing hands properly, practicing good personal hygiene, avoiding bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, staying home when sick, and are following routine cleaning and sanitation procedures.
- Continue to verify that the food safety programs you have in place are effective and are working as intended.
- Supplier approval programs should be evaluated to make sure policies are in place to prevent, and if necessary, to quickly contain and mitigate spread of infectious diseases. This includes policies and communication of event reporting.

Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations for Areas Exposed to Employees or Customers with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease (Source: [CDC](#))

- Close off areas used by the ill persons and wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets.
- Clean and disinfect all areas visited or used by the ill persons, with an increased focus on frequently touched surfaces.
- Wear disposable gloves and gowns for all tasks in the cleaning and disinfecting process, including handling trash.
 - Gloves and gowns should be removed to avoid contamination and should be discarded upon removal, after each use.
 - Gloves and gowns should be compatible with the disinfectant products being used.
 - Additional PPE might be required based on the cleaning/disinfectant products being used and whether there is a risk of splash.
- Wash hands immediately after removing gloves.
- Any potential contamination of individuals or environment during the cleaning and disinfecting process should be reported to a supervisor.
- Consult the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfection products used.
- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered disinfectants should be effective. [EPA list of Effective Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#)

Additional Resources

Over the past several weeks, FMI has been engaged in an ongoing dialogue with our member companies, lawmakers, the Administration and our contacts in the states to address concerns or other issues that arise to ensure that your companies can continue to provide food and other necessary products to the many affected communities across the country. In addition to the best practice tips outlined above, we have additional resources that companies are using to stay informed.

- **FMI Coronavirus Resources:** www.fmi.org/coronavirus
- **Daily Calls:** FMI's government affairs team is holding daily calls at 4:30 p.m. EDT to provide the latest updates on the government response to the outbreak and to provide a forum for members to ask questions.

- **FMI Crisis Management Email:** For general questions on the ongoing outbreak, contact crisismanagement@fmi.org to get in touch with an interdisciplinary group of experts at FMI.
- **FMI State Coronavirus Resources Page:** Including resources for:
 - State Emergency Declarations Relative to Mass Gatherings
 - States Declarations Addressing Truck Weight Limits and Hours of Service
- **Food Safety Resources:** FMI has a team of food safety experts that are providing members with answers to a broad range of questions related to COVID-19 and the safety of our food supply. Please contact FMI with any questions.
- **Workforce Resources:**
 - [Littler Coronavirus Resources for Employees](#)
 - [Fisher Phillips Comprehensive FAQs For Employers on COVID-19](#)
 - [CDC Resources for Businesses and Employers](#)
- **CDC Coronavirus Site:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.