



THE FOOD
INDUSTRY
ASSOCIATION

Guidance for the Food Industry: Coronavirus Outbreak

III. Suggested Business Practices

April 10, 2020

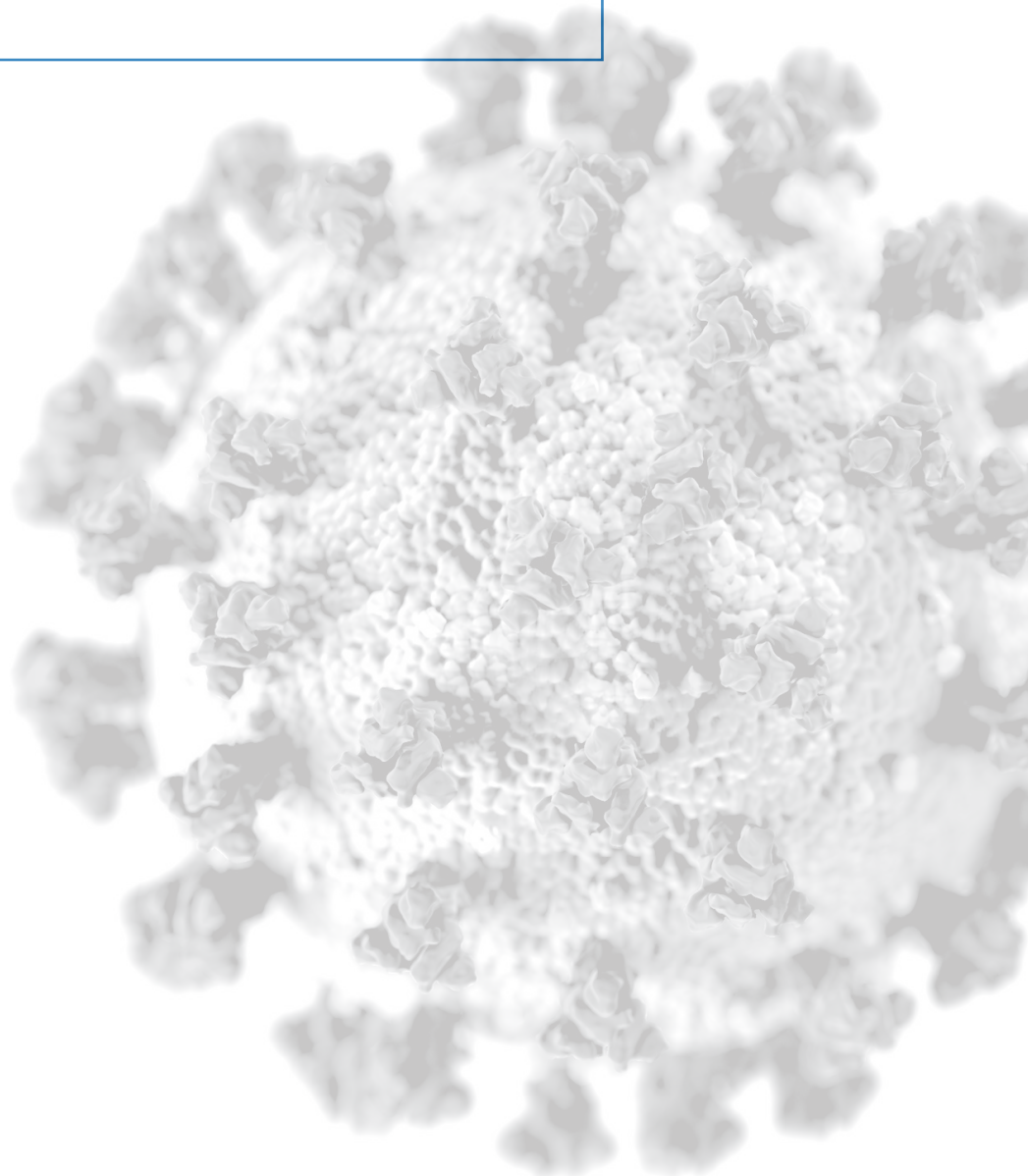


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As the food industry association, FMI works with and on behalf of the entire industry to advance a safer, healthier and more efficient consumer food supply chain. FMI brings together a wide range of members across the value chain — from retailers that 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 global COVID-19 pandemic is now months old, and President Trump's national emergency declaration in the United States is approaching the one-month mark. Most states now have [stay-at-home orders](#) or similar measures in place to deter people from making unnecessary trips outside of their homes in an increased effort to stop the spread of the virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently updated its face mask [guidance](#) and now "recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies)." FDA provides regularly updated [guidance](#) related to food safety and public health in food production and retail environments.

Just recently, there are some glimmers of hope that certain states may have already hit the peak, but the situation continues to be very fluid as the virus spreads across the U.S. and additional cities emerge as potential new hot spots. The food industry continues to implement new practices to protect its workers and its customers as the outbreak's disruption on society progresses by the hour. FMI compiled the following business practices to help the food industry respond both appropriately and effectively to the ongoing public health crisis. This document is the third in a series of business practice documents that FMI is producing for the food industry. Previous documents included [I. Best Practices and Planning for the Immediate Situation](#) and [II. Short-Term Best Practices](#).

Recent FMI Efforts

FMI continues to work with its coalition partners through the Food and Beverage Issues Alliance (FBIA) to develop [updated protocols and other guidance documents](#) to help the industry through the outbreak, including the proper usage of face masks, achieving proper social distancing and recommended protocols for when associates test positive for COVID-19.

FMI recently created a new worker and customer safety [toolkit](#) to substantiate safety and sanitation practices in grocery stores to fight misinformation and misperceptions regarding coronavirus. Video clips feature key message points from experts; two new infographics that communicate worker safety and ways food retailers are keeping their customers safe; information from the Partnership for Food Safety Education; a link to a thorough FAQ; and a script to customize for FMI members' closed circuit TV programs so they can create their own video.

Best Practices for Associates

Employee Health

- The entire food industry is considered [critical infrastructure](#) and it is vital for the public health that it continues to operate.
- FMI, with the Food and Beverage Issues Alliance, developed [protocols](#) for (1) when an employee of a firm is a confirmed or presumptive case of COVID-19 and (2) when a facility employee/facility visitor/customer has been in close contact with an individual with COVID-19. This protocol is specific to food manufacturing facilities, distribution centers, and wholesale and retail outlets.
- If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality about individual employees' identities.
- Companies should follow protocols, including cleaning protocols, set by local and state health departments.
- Companies should consult the CDC's [Interim Guidance for Business and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019](#).
- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) also issued Guidance on [Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#) that includes information on how a COVID-19 outbreak could affect workplaces and steps all employers can take to reduce workers' risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19).
- The Food and Beverage Issues Alliance has developed [protocols](#) for screening food industry employees for COVID-19 symptoms or exposure, including taking temperatures.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Face Masks

- CDC now [recommends](#) "wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) especially in areas of significant community-based transmission."
- Individuals choosing to wear a mask as a barrier to protect against droplets, including large respiratory particles, should always wear a clean mask. Masks should be worn as they are intended and individuals should continue practicing good personal hygiene and wash their hands before putting on a mask, after taking off a mask, and after touching/adjusting the mask. Whether or not an individual chooses to wear a mask, everyone must continue to follow all safe practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Additional information is available from the [World Health Organization on when and how to use a mask](#).
- The Food and Beverage Issues Alliance has developed [guidelines](#) for the proper usage of face masks to protect against COVID-19.

Social Distancing

- FBIA has developed [protocols](#) on the emergency prevention measures to achieve physical (social) distancing in food manufacturing facilities as related to COVID-19.
- FMI has created sample [in-store signage](#) for companies to use to encourage customers to maintain a distance from one another.

Asset Protection Practices

- FMI has [asset protection resources](#) available to assist staff members from food defense, to crisis communications, to cybersecurity. In many cases, existing asset protection policies can be applied to the situations arising from the ongoing pandemic.
- Bad actors will become more brazen during a time of uncertainty, from shoplifting to larger basket pushouts to food defense incidents. For smaller shoplifting infractions, consider policies for apprehension in relation to the level of exposure risk for the staff. Consider using video capabilities instead of apprehension and work with local authorities to investigate once the crisis is over.
- Partner with local authorities to determine if they can increase presence throughout the day with additional parking lot drive-throughs.
- Offer the parking lot to local guard personnel to set up as a staging area.
- Consider which activities are non-essential by asset protection associates and suspend or centralize them to reduce in-store exposure.
- As more staff moves to telework and meetings move online, ensure everyone has heightened awareness of phishing and other cyber-attacks.

Bringing Associates Back to Work

Companies should begin planning for employees to return to work in order to facilitate a seamless recovery from emergency to normal operations when it is appropriate. To prepare for this, companies should take into consideration the following:

- Clean and disinfect the work environment before employees return to work and continue to perform routine environmental cleaning and disinfection. See [CDC's Guidelines for Cleaning and Disinfecting Facilities](#).
- Anticipate 'waves' of issues related to COVID-19 to continue and develop a response plan to address potential problems.
- Continue to identify opportunities to maintain a healthy work environment and reduce transmission among employees, including reminding employees to stay home when sick.
- Continue to implement flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices.

- Evaluate employee travel policies and determine what travel is and is not permitted.
- Communicate openly with employees prior to resuming normal operations.
 - Prepare to notify employees of any policies or rules that were temporarily lifted, added or changed to accommodate COVID-19.
 - Develop office procedures for employees to begin returning to work.
 - Remind employees of what the normal operating policies are and let them know when these rules will resume.
- Consult the CDC's [Interim Guidance for Business and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019](#).

Workforce

In the face of massive workforce challenges throughout the country, our industry has a unique and immediate opportunity across the food industry spectrum. As we evaluate the marketplace, we know that roughly 2 million workers are displaced and that retailers are looking for upward of 1 million new hires. With the commitment of human capital, technology, and speed from myriad corporate partnerships, FMI is co-sponsoring the **Talent Exchange powered by Eightfold**. This online platform will facilitate and accelerate connection between and among companies hiring, companies furloughing and available employees, matching needs across roles and geographies.

Employees can opt in for placement assistance with a short set of qualifying questions and interactive tools to match talent supply and demand across companies. Employers can contact employees directly as well as make offers at scale. All participating employers have visibility as employees are placed. For a brief overview of the Talent Exchange, watch this short [Eightfold Talent Exchange Video](#), and review [the site](#). Schedule through talentexchange@eightfold.ai.

Supply Chain / E-commerce

- Work with upstream suppliers on commodities that are heavily impacted by supply and demand fluctuations (such as milk) to adjust production and create more finished material (such as butter, cheese, chocolate, powder, yogurt, etc.) with a longer shelf life to avoid food loss.
- Expect continued reliance on and heavy use of e-commerce options as people stay at home. Devote IT resources to communicate realistic windows for product availability and delivery windows.
- Be reminded that digital platforms are of continued importance, in addition to contactless delivery and pickup options.
- To the extent possible, streamline quick communications through DSD networks and point to point tools.
- Utilize FMI's [Coronavirus Business Solutions and Resources](#) as many service providers have offered complimentary tools to assist with upstream supplier freight visibility, communications around employees who may have contracted COVID-19, labor and workforce solutions, supplemental food delivery options and more.

Food Donation / Rescue

- Utilize existing channels for food donation and supplement with additional food rescue solutions as necessary to support the widening number of people relying on food assistance.
- Partner with restaurants and other community organizations to help solve the rising demand for food donations.
- Consider food donation packages in a form that can go directly to homes to limit contact.
- Consider additional contributions of cardboard boxes or bags if available.
- Utilize the [Food Waste Reduction Alliance](#) for additional resources.

Looking Ahead and Future Shopping Behavior

In the months ahead, as we hopefully see fewer and fewer positive cases in states and communities across the country, the food industry will need to assess the types of business practices to maintain in their stores and the overall impact of future shopping behavior. If the virus becomes a seasonal occurrence, how will businesses adapt to the change in consumer behavior? As states lift emergency declarations, will companies keep social distancing in place? Will the economy take weeks, months or longer to bounce back from the outbreak's resulting recession? The answers to many of these questions will largely depend on the progression of the ongoing outbreak and its overall impact across the country, both of which still remain uncertain.

As shown in the last economic downturn, consumers in every demographic category, even those whose financial status was not significantly affected by the downturn, made changes in their spending and displayed behaviors demonstrating a new economic sensitivity and awareness. While the current economic environment is unlike one that anyone has ever experienced in recent U.S. history, there are some clear signs of its impact on how Americans are changing their shopping behaviors.

Americans have had to make changes in where, how and who shops for groceries as a result of COVID-19. According to recent [FMI research](#), online shopping has seen significant growth with many shoppers increasing or shopping online for the first time and almost one-half of Americans shopping online for grocery-type items in the past month. This is more than twice the proportion of monthly online shoppers from our *U.S. Grocery Shoppers Trends* research one year ago. The length and severity of the current economic downturn remains to be seen, but FMI will continue to track shopping behavior and trends to help the industry navigate the ongoing crisis.

Additional Resources

In addition to these suggested business practices, 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 Issues Crisis Tracker:** Tracking state-by-state responses and waivers for industry topics, including WIC waivers, state emergency declarations, and 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.
- **CDC's Coronavirus Site**
- **FDA's Food Safety and Coronavirus Resources**
- **Governors' Office Contacts:** <https://www.nga.org/governors/addresses/>
- **State and local public health contacts:** The state and local public health departments are the points of contact for many areas during the ongoing coronavirus outbreak.