

**NWX-FDA OC (US)**

**Moderator: Cathy McDermott**  
**April 10, 2020**  
**12:00 pm CT**

Coordinator: Welcome everyone and thank you for standing by. At this time I'd like to inform all participants that your lines will be in a listen-only mode until the question and answer session of today's conference call.

If you would like to ask a question today please press star 1 on your phone. You'll be prompted to record your name. Please remember to unmute your phone and record your name and affiliation.

Today's conference call is being recorded. If you have any objections you may disconnect at this time. I will now turn the meeting over to our first speaker, Ms. Cathy McDermott. Thank you. You may begin.

Cathy McDermott: Thank you. Good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining today's call. My name is Cathy McDermott and I will be serving as your moderator. The purpose of today's 30 minute call is to discuss recently released information on best practices for retail food stores, restaurants and pickup and delivery services during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect workers and customers.

Release of these documents were sent with the call invitation. This is not a media briefing. All media inquiries should continue to be directed to the FDA Office of Media Affairs.

I am joined today by Mr. Frank Yiannas, Deputy Commissioner for Food Policy and Response. He will serve as our main speaker. In addition to Mr. Yiannas we have several technical experts on the call who will be available to respond to questions during the Q&A portion of the call.

They are Miss Laurie Farmer, Director, Office of State Cooperative Programs, Office of Human and Animal Food Operations, Office of Regulatory Affairs, Miss Glenda Lewis, Director, Retail Food Protection Staff, Office of Food Safety, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

And our colleagues from the CDC are Commander Chad Dowell, US Public Health Service, Deputy Associate Director for Emergency Preparedness and Response, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Miss Hadley Hickner, COVID-19 Response Policy Partnership Staff Force and Miss (Sherry Bengari), CDC Liaison COVID-19 Response Power – Policy Partnership Task Force.

Following formal remarks we will open the call up and take a few questions during a Q&A session. So at this time I would like to turn the call over to our speaker, Mr. Yiannas.

Frank Yiannas: Well, good afternoon and thank you for joining us today. I appreciate this opportunity to speak directly to you about important information that we posted yesterday on best practices for retail food stores, restaurants including food pickup and delivery services.

The information that we are going to cover is intended to reemphasize the importance of keeping both workers and consumers safe. FDA is committed to protecting the health of the American people when facing any challenges that might arise during this crisis.

I would like to begin by saluting workers at all points of the food supply chain continuum who have not been able to stay home or shelter in place. They have been going to work every day to provide a lifeline for the American consumer anxious about having enough food to feed their families and pets, these men and women working on farms and in food facilities and selling food in grocery stores as well as restaurants that are not providing takeout meals delivering foods to producers and consumers alike.

These men and women are also on the front lines of the pandemic. I know we hear on (unintelligible) the term front line and it's often associated with healthcare workers, which certainly are deserving of our praise.

But there's more than one front line in this crisis and we are committed to doing what we can to protect those who are still out there working every day for the greater public good.

The best practices and documents we posted this week address key considerations for how foods offered at retail should be safely handled and delivered to the public, as well as some best practices for employee health, cleaning and disinfection and personal protective equipment.

The fact sheet and the companion infographic reinforce some practices we've all recommended for keeping food safe and people healthy, but I believe those bear repeating and that's why we're all on this call today.

Others are specific to the unprecedented times that we find ourselves in now. On this call I plan to reemphasize a few key examples. We've broken them down in the infographic into four key themes: one, be healthy and be clean; two, clean and disinfect; three, social distancing; and four, pickup and delivery.

If you have the infographic in front of you I encourage you to follow along. Let's begin with be healthy and be clean. While this should always be the case at this very important time let's continue to encourage sick employees to stay home and follow guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on what to do if they're sick with COVID-19.

Of course, they should consult with local health departments for additional guidance. If an employee is sick at work send him or her home immediately and clean and disinfect surfaces in that workspace.

Others with close contact within 6 feet of the employee are considered exposed so follow CDC and OSHA protocols. FDA has posted a link to these protocols as well as reference to a Food and Beverage Industry Alliance procedure aligned to CDC and OSHA guidance on our Web site.

Instruct employees who are well that know they've been exposed to someone positive for COVID-19 to notify their supervisor and follow the CDC recommended precautions, and identify where and how workers might be exposed to COVID-19 at work and show your employees how they could reduce the spread including monitoring their own health, wearing masks or face coverings and practicing social distancing techniques.

Regarding personal hygiene by employees emphasize effective hand hygiene including washing hands for at least 20 seconds especially after going to the

bathroom, before eating, after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing and always wash hands with soap and water.

If soap and water are not available then use an alcohol-based sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol and avoid working with unwrapped or exposed food. Instruct workers and employees to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.

And at this time best practices for handling food safely are still words to live by. Never touch ready-to-eat foods with your bare hands. Use a single service glove, deli tissue or suitable utensil.

Wrap food containers to prevent cross-contamination and always follow the four keys to safer food: clean, separate, cook and chill. Next, let me move on to the next theme, cleaning and disinfection.

Retailers should train employees on the procedures among others. This is a – this includes proper use of cleaning and disinfection products as well as any PPE that might be required, disinfecting high touch surface areas, how to frequently clean and disinfect floors, counters and other facility access areas and offer sanitizing in wipes to customers to clean grocery cart and basket handles or have retail employees execute these measures if wipes aren't available.

Our third theme is best practices to promote social distancing. They include helping to educate employees and customers on the importance of social distancing with signs or prerecorded audio messages.

Floor marking and cues can also be used as best practices and as I've visited several retail establishments I've been impressed with the markings I've seen spacing customers 6 feet apart.

Discontinue operations such as salad bars, self-service buffets or beverage service stations that require customers to use common utensils or dispensers. Retailers can be asked to consider using every other register or lane to encourage additional spacing.

We've also seen some retailers suggesting one-way traffic in particular grocery aisles and shortening time in store pickup queues by encouraging customers to order ahead.

And briefly for our final theme pickup and delivery there's a significant shift happening in consumer behavior with more and more consumers ordering foods online whether they have been delivered to their home or they pick them up at their store.

This trend had started before the COVID crisis. We had previously reported that it's an – predicted that \$1 out of every \$5 spent on food would be spent online by the year 2023.

It's clear that COVID-19 is accelerating this conversion. If you're offering delivery options ensure retailers are practicing the food basics. I call them TTC. They stand for time, temperature and cross-contamination.

Ensure that you're using time and/or temperature control for food safety purposes, and ensure that food deliveries and pickups are packaged in a way that prevent cross-contamination.

Ensure that these employees are also practicing effective hand hygienes whether it includes contacting or after the contacted high touch surfaces like doorknobs and doorbells.

And encourage customers to use no-touch delivery in which they are told the package is arriving by text or by phone, and you can set up pickup or designated areas whether inside or outside the store.

There's a lot more information in the materials we posted yesterday and I've only clearly highlighted a few. These are challenging times and we want to make sure we provide you with as much information to help retail food establishments that you operate in states across the country, and make sure that your employees and customers get through this crisis in good health.

Now we've taken action to protect workers before this recent best practice guidance. I'd like to take a few minutes to review what we've previously done. We've taken certain actions designed to reduce risk for FDA investigators and state inspectors for the immediate future.

These mainly involve how we'll be conducting inspections of farms and food facilities across the US as well as those that export food to our country. Specifically we've postponed what we call routine surveillance inspections of farms and food facilities both in the US and abroad.

We will, however, continue to conduct for-cause inspection when there's a potential threat to public health, and if there is a threat to public health we won't hesitate to act.

We are equally concerned with the health of workers in the food industry. We've updated our communications material this week and to be in line with CDC's recommendations that cross-face coverings be worn in public settings in which social distancing is difficult to maintain.

And some protections for workers live in the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act requirements that food facilities have food safety plans to control risks associated with workers who are ill regardless of type of virus or bacteria, and there are also requirements for facilities to maintain and clean their facilities and clean contact surfaces.

I think everyone on this call knows that restaurants and retail food establishments are regulated at the state and local level. State, local, territorial and tribal regulators are using the food code published by FDA to develop (unintelligible) their own food safety rules. You should be aware of them.

As you know to prevent the spread of COVID-19 CDC is recommending individuals employ social distancing or maintain a distance of approximately 6 feet from others when possible.

However, social distancing to the full 6 feet will not be possible in some operations. Again we understand that it might not be possible in some operations. This makes effective hygiene practices all that more important whether it's regulatory recommended including wearing face coverings, staying home if you're ill, frequent and proper hand washing and routine cleaning of all surfaces.

FDA is acting on several fronts to increase the availability of hand sanitizers. I know we've heard from many of you on the need for more hand sanitizers. Many companies I am pleased to report and have witnessed firsthand are stepping up across America to help with manufacturing critical and lifesaving medical supplies to strengthen the US response, and FDA is providing maximum regulatory flexibility where we can.

To increase supplies of hand sanitizers FDA Center for Drug Evaluation and Research has posted three guidances to facilitate the temporary manufacture and compounding of alcohol-based hand sanitizers by pharmacies and other companies.

We're being told this is already making a difference. The agency realize that manufacturers and compounders will need some time to ramp up production as they obtain the ingredients necessary, and during this time FDA will work to assist them as they develop hand sanitizers to be made available to the American public and your operations.

Let me talk a little bit about how you can reach us because this is a question we often get. Just about every government agency has an emergency operations center working at this time.

FDA's Web site points you to where information on COVID-19 is posted and how to direct questions as do Web sites for our partners on this call, CDC, and those not on this call, USDA, EPA and others.

We posted and have been updating a new set of frequently asked questions at [fda.gov/fcic](https://www.fda.gov/fcic). I urge you to check out those questions and answers and refer to them frequently. We'll be adding more on a regular basis.

There are also answers to more general questions that consumers might have found at [www.fda.gov/coronavirus](https://www.fda.gov/coronavirus). We want to hear your suggestions and answer any questions that might arise for you during these challenging times.

Please check our FAQs first to see if your question has been answered. If not, the best way to ensure your food safety questions are getting through to FDA

are to submit them to FDA's Food and Cosmetic Information Center via [www.fda.gov/fcic](http://www.fda.gov/fcic).

According to the questions we've been receiving approximately 30% of them are coming in from retail food operators and so we know you have questions and we want to answer them.

We've done our best to try to answer those that have come in quickly and completely. And if you have supply chain issues although supply chain issues appear to be leveling off, we recommend or encourage you to submit them to FEMA's National Business Emergency Operations Center at the email address [nbeoc@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:nbeoc@fema.dhs.gov).

Let me mention partnerships because they've been so critical. Addressing this crisis is clearly a team effort and it involves a whole of government approach. Federal partners are working together each and every day.

It also involves public and private collaboration. We're working with the White House, the CDC, USDA, the food industry as well as state and international regulatory partners to monitor and mitigate any impact on food safety and food access for the American people.

I personally am also part of a White House-level Coordinating Committee on supply chain, which has a broad representation from all components of the federal government that are in constant and close coordination on supply chain issues.

CDC is working closely with FDA and we have some of our CDC colleagues who's on today to develop and both review additional materials for food and grocery pickup, delivery drivers as well as grocery and food retail workers.

In addition to the materials we just released this week CDC will be issuing guidance to further help these workers protect themselves from exposure to COVID-19 while at work and to help decrease the spread and lower the impact of COVID-19 in their workplace.

We're also working with partners to address reported challenges associated with quarantines and travel restrictions that might be impeding food workers' ability to continue to work and move product.

We're hearing less and less of these concerns but nevertheless we stand by and are prepared to help. This includes working with state and federal officials and industry to help ensure food workers can get to and from their jobs in communities where curfews and shelter in place directives are being enforced.

Now let me end with two points that I usually start off with as I talk to people about the COVID crisis. One, let me assure you that the US food supply remains safe for both people and animals.

There is no and I repeat no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with the transmission of COVID-19. The virus that causes COVID-19 is one that causes respiratory illnesses and is not known to be transmitted by exposure to food.

I think we all know it's much more likely that an infected person will spread the virus through person-to-person transmission rather than contaminated food or food packaging material.

And two, there is no widespread or nationwide shortages of food despite localized reports of such shortages. I know I've had the same experiences that some of you have had or you may have seen in some of your retail stores of some shelves being empty.

But based on ongoing communication that we're having with industry leaders, some of the world's leading manufacturers and retail establishments we understand this is largely an issue of unprecedented demand, not a lack of capacity to produce, process and deliver.

And manufacturers and retailers, many that are on this phone call, are working 24 hours and around the clock to replenish shelves and they will do so. And if you pause to think about it our food system is pretty amazing.

I've always been impressed with the way it's responding to this crisis and it just strengthens my idea that we have one of the best food systems in the world. A typical grocery store could have tens of thousands of SKUs of different food items, and if you go into a grocery store today while you might find some SKUs missing the reality – the majority are still there.

We've heard that there have been run-ups and outages on paper product and cleaning supplies and there's been a rush for what they call center of the store-type items, shelf staple foods.

But as I mentioned manufacturing and retailers are working promptly to replenish and get well and they will. In closing, I want to thank you for all that you're doing to keep the citizens of the states in which you operate safe and healthy as we weather this challenge together.

Everyone, each and every person working in food, is a critical part of our nation's infrastructure and we are grateful for what they and you on this call are doing to feed consumers nationwide and across the world. Thank you.

Cathy McDermott: Thank you Mr. Yiannas for your remarks and at this time I'd like to open up the line for questions operator.

Coordinator: Thank you. Again at this time if you have questions or comments please press star 1 on your phone. Please make sure your phone is unmuted and please record your name and affiliation.

We'll have our first question from (Ellen Boyer). I'm sorry. I think you said (Wakefront) Food Court was your affiliation. Oh.

Cathy McDermott: Operator do we have any questions?

((Crosstalk))

Coordinator: Looks like we lost her line. Can you hear me? Are you able to hear me?

Frank Yiannas: Yes we can now.

Coordinator: Okay. All right. Sorry. We – I had a question in queue and it looks like they must've changed their mind and dropped off but one just – another one just popped up so just one moment while I get their name. Thank you. Eric Richard your line is open. Please state your affiliation.

Eric Richard: Hi. It's the International Dairy, Deli and Bakery Association.

Cathy McDermott: We can hear you.

Coordinator: Thank you. You may ask your...

Eric Richard: Oh.

Coordinator: ...question.

Eric Richard: Okay thank you. The question I have is does the FDA offer any materials, documents, et cetera on how employees are to properly wear masks and any other details around that such as how frequently to replace them?

We're finding a lot of information geared towards general public use of masks but not much around employee usage of it. Thank you.

Frank Yiannas: And this is Frank Yiannas. Chad, going to ask you to take that question. I know I have seen guidance from CDC.

Chad Dowell: Yes so I'll say CDC does provide some general guidance for community members, and we are working on further guidance for use of cloth face coverings in the workplace.

So that has not been released yet but we are quickly working to get that up so that should help employers implement or work around the voluntary use of cloth face coverings.

And Frank I'll also mention that FDA does have a really good FAQ on this so I don't know if you want to explain that.

Frank Yiannas: Glenda do you want to talk about the FAQs?

Glenda Lewis: For – we have several frequently asked questions on the FDA Web site and that’s where we refer to 30% of those questions. We would - in terms of the masks we would refer back to CDC first and in the facility itself the persons can – we would refer mostly to the CDC guidance in terms of how you would wear the mask. Is that your question or...

Frank Yiannas: Yes let me just build on that a little before we move to the next question. You know, I think the guidance that CDC has provided on facemasks are pretty clear.

I’ve seen some pretty good infographics. I think the message on how to wear them safely and appropriately applies whether you’re in the general public or working.

Specifically on face coverings one of the Q&As FDA does have on the Web site is direction on how to maintain those, and we would expect them to be laundered before each use or each shift and that they be maintained in a sanitary condition, typical of how you would handle other uniform-type products per FDA food code.

And so we do have a good Q&A and I encourage you to look at that. Thanks for your question.

Chad Dowell: Yes and Frank one thing I will add to that. You know, I think it’s important to recognize that if employees are required to wear a respirator, you know, before the COVID outbreak they would need to continue to wear the respirator and not switch over to a cloth face covering.

Coordinator: All right. Thank you.

Cathy McDermott: Do we have more questions?

Coordinator: I'm showing no additional questions. Once again as a reminder if there are questions or comments please press star 1 on your phone. Again please remember to unmute your phone and record your name and affiliation.

We'll wait another moment for any responses. I am showing no additional responses at this time.

Frank Yiannas: Okay with that let me just make some closing comments. One is I want to thank you once again very sincerely from the bottom of my heart for taking time out of your busy day, and more importantly for the work each and every one of you are doing.

We said that responding to this crisis requires a whole of government approach but it requires public and private collaboration. I think many of you know that I was in your shoes in the private sector not too long ago, about 15 months ago, and I have stated that there is a lot that the private sector can and should do to protect the American consumer and we know you're doing this at this time.

I've also stated since I've been on this side of the fence that there's a lot the public institutions can and will do such as FDA and CDC and hopefully you see and are hearing our commitment.

But I've stated - and what I've seen this crisis bear to the farmers that there's so much more that we can do working together so thank you again for what you're doing.

It's making a difference and it's protecting the American consumer and ensuring that they have access to safe and available food, so thank you and keep up the good work.

Coordinator: And excuse me, we did have two questions that came into queue. I don't know if you take those.

Cathy McDermott: There are no questions – more questions operator?

Coordinator: I have two questions that came in. Did you want to take those? I'm sorry.

Frank Yiannas: Sure.

Coordinator: Okay. Dr. Baroudi from the Cheesecake Factory your line is open.

Al Baroudi: Thank you. Good morning and thank you Frank and Glenda – pretty – very well – good information. My question is about the screening for temperature for the staff coming in to the restaurant.

How do you see this coming? Is it going to be recommended or it's going to be required and how do you do that? Thank you.

Frank Yiannas: Yes. CDC issued guidance for workers in critical infrastructure for those that were either exposed to someone, confirmed or suspected of being around someone that might have COVID and I'll let CDC talk about the guidance to critical infrastructure they issued Friday evening. Chad or (Sharon)?

Al Baroudi: Okay thank you.

Chad Dowell: Sure Frank. Thanks for that. We did issue new guidance on – that does provide recommendations that can allow critical infrastructure workers to return to work after an exposure.

And within that we do have recommendations on pre-screening and regular monitoring as well as wearing a facemask, social distancing and routine cleaning and disinfection to help minimize transmission.

I will point out that I, you know, that it's important that if facilities are able to use the traditional stay out of work for 14 days recommendation that they follow that, but this guidance really is intended for those critical infrastructure positions where they don't have anyone left and that they, you know, this is a way to ease the 14 days to allow people back into work.

But I think our, you know, the preference if possible is to continue to follow the 14 days and then with, you know, talking with the local health department and your occupational safety and health to look at transitioning over to the new critical infrastructure guidance that eases that requirement.

And with both of the recommendations, you know, we still say if an – worker is sick they should remain out of a workplace.

Al Baroudi: Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you. And we have a question from Jill Hollingsworth of Chemstar. Your line is open.

Cathy McDermott: Was there one last question?

Coordinator: Yes. Jill Hollingsworth from Chemstar your line is open.

Jill Hollingsworth: Thank you and thank you to Frank and Glenda and the others for this information and also for the briefing on them. My question has to do with some confusion that has existed between sanitizing and disinfecting.

In the FDA food code and the Q&A they – and they recommend and continue to point out the importance of cleaning and sanitizing as a routine best practice. And disinfecting I believe is focused more on situations where you might have a higher risk like high touch points, or perhaps even in a part of a store in an area where a person actually exhibited symptoms.

Is that still where we are that cleaning and sanitizing is the recommendation as a general recommendation, and that disinfecting especially with the EPA products on the N List are for those more special or unique situations where there is a higher risk?

Frank Yiannas: Yes thank you Jill. This is Frank. You are absolutely correct. The – I think the majority of people on this call knows there is a difference between disinfection and sanitation.

We would expect in food and beverage environments and certainly in food contact areas and surfaces that you follow your traditional food sanitation techniques, and that includes products approved for that intended use - food contact, some of them often used in retail establishments without a final rinse.

Disinfection is - referred to those high touch or high contact areas that you've mentioned that are not food contact surfaces. They could - includes things like grocery cart handles or door handles and you should be looking at EPA's new and expanded list of products approved for disinfection purposes and be using them per manufacturer's instructions.

So I appreciate you calling out the difference and when you're instructing your employees to make sure you are clear in the difference between disinfection and sanitation, which products are used and any personal protective equipment that might be required.

Jill Hollingsworth: Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you. And now I'm showing no further...

Cathy McDermott: Thank you.

Coordinator: ...questions.

Cathy McDermott: So with that I'd like to – I'm sorry. With that I'd like to thank everyone for participating on today's call. We really appreciate it. Again if you have any further questions the Web site again is [www.fda.gov/fcic](http://www.fda.gov/fcic). Thank you for participating and everyone have a great weekend.

Coordinator: We thank you all for your participation in today's conference. That will conclude the call. You may now disconnect. Thank you.

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