

COVID-19 in Food Service Employees – What to Do



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If a food service employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is presumed positive by a medical professional due to symptoms of fever, and/or cough, shortness of breath, the person in charge must ask the food service employee about symptom history to determine next steps to be taken by the food service establishment.

If food service employee was ASYMPTOMATIC while working, the following steps should be taken:

- Exclude employee from work until cleared per CDC recommendations:
 - NO fever for at least 72 hours since recovery (that is three full days of no fever without the use medicine that reduces fevers) AND
 - Other symptoms have improved (for example, when cough or shortness of breath have improved) AND
 - At least 7 days have passed since first symptoms.
- Disinfect high touch surfaces, focusing on area where employee worked and common touch surfaces including time clock, employee restrooms, locker areas, etc. in case of asymptomatic shedding.
- Food service workers who are providing care for someone who is sick with COVID-19 should be excluded from work until they are 14 days past date of last exposure.

If food service employee was SYMPTOMATIC with fever, cough, or shortness of breath while working, the following steps should be taken:

- Determine all other employees considered to be in close contact with symptomatic employee: (within 6 ft for periods of more than 10 minutes). Have employees in close contact self-monitor, consider excluding food service employees who are close contacts from work for 14 days from last exposure.
- Provide thorough cleaning and disinfection of areas potentially contaminated by symptomatic worker.
 - If possible, segregate and close potentially contaminated areas and provide cleaning and disinfection while facility continues to operate.
 - If segregation of potentially contaminated areas is not possible, consider closing for cleaning and disinfection, then reopening once CDC cleaning and disinfecting protocols have been completed.
 - Follow CDC guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting using an EPA registered disinfectant for use against coronavirus. (<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>)
- If employee has contact with the public that would constitute close contact, (within 6 ft for more than 10 minutes) notify customers of potential exposure.
- At this time, there is no recommendation to discard food or food packages. Currently there is no evidence of spread of COVID-19 by food or food packaging.

It can be difficult to make a decision about the appropriate actions to take when an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19. If a decision is made to close a business, it is important to have clear goals about what closing the business will accomplish and when reopening can occur. Effective communication with employees and patrons is key when potential exposure has occurred. The following are scenarios when closure would be recommended.

- Close for deep cleaning and disinfection when a symptomatic employee has tested positive and contaminated area cannot be isolated for cleaning. Recommend opening windows and doors for at least two hours prior to cleaning, then clean and disinfect using CDC guidelines. Closure is recommended for at least one day to complete this process.
- When number of symptomatic staff does not allow business to continue to operate, closure is needed until enough staff have been cleared by medical professional to return to work.
- During evaluation, it is determined staff who had close contact with symptomatic employee need self-quarantine and there are not enough employees out of self-quarantine to allow business to continue. When this happens, a facility can reopen once enough food service employees have returned from self-quarantine to resume operations.

Sources:

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

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

<https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>