

Food Safety Concerns during the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the **U.S. Food and Drug Administration**, the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** and the **U.S. Department of Agriculture**, there is currently no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 can be transmitted through food or food packaging. It is believed that the virus spreads from person-to-person through close contact or respiratory droplets, for instance when a person coughs or sneezes. While the virus does not enter the body through skin, it is believed the skin can hold and transfer the virus to an entry point into the body such as mouth, nose or eyes. It may be possible for viruses to survive on surfaces and objects, reinforcing the need to observe **proper hygiene and food safety practices**.



Proper food safety practices should always be implemented while preparing or eating foods. This includes frequently **washing hands** with soap and water and **washing surfaces** and utensils with hot soapy water after each use.

Credible sources recommend the following practices:

In Your Kitchen:

- Sharing food and beverages is discouraged, especially if someone in your household has gone out in the past 14 days. COVID19 is transferred through mouth/respiratory droplets from a person who carries the virus (and may not even know it) so sharing food or drinks even with someone you live with is considered high risk.
- Make a “Scrub In” rule – make a habit of everyone washing their hands when they enter the kitchen and no touching their face, mouth, eyes, nose or ears without washing again.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces like refrigerator handles and countertops often with disinfectant wipes or spray.
- Don’t forget to wash your hands when touching utensils, emptying the dishwasher, and refreshing drink containers.



In The Grocery Store:

- Limit risk by limiting trips – Go only when you **Have to Go**. Reduce the amount of time you spend at the store by creating a plan before you go. Deciding on meals and snacks before you shop can save both time and money.



- Make a grocery list of what ingredients are needed, then check to see what foods you already have on hand and make a list for what you still need to buy.
- Organize your list according to the section of the store these items are located in. This will prevent you from having to run from one end of the store to the other.
- Wipe down cart and basket handles before shopping. Many stores offer disinfectant wipes to clean your cart and or you can use your own personal hand sanitizer.
- When you return home from your grocery trip, remember to wash your hands and to put the perishable foods in the refrigerator or freezer right away. Wiping down high touch, hard plastic surface containers like milk jugs and their handles may be advisable and does not harm the foods safety. Coronaviruses can remain on hard surfaces such as steel and plastic (e.g., car door handles, building door handles, shopping cart/basket handles, elevator buttons) for up to 3 days so these are the highest risk surfaces to touch.
- It is **not** advisable to use soap, bleach or vinegar to clean fresh food such as fruits and vegetables. Wash [Fruits and vegetables](#), even if their peel will not be eaten. They should be rinsed under cool running water and dried with a clean cloth or paper towel. It is recommended that firm produce, such as melons, avocados, grapefruit or cucumbers, be scrubbed with a clean produce brush. Soap, bleach or commercial cleaning products should never be used when [washing fresh produce](#).

When Ordering Takeout Food:

- When ordering or having food delivered practice social distancing, maintaining a distance of six feet whenever possible.
- Currently there is no evidence of food, food containers, or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. Like other viruses, it is possible that the virus that causes COVID-19 can survive on surfaces or objects. For that reason, it is critical to follow the key steps of food safety
- If possible, pay online or on the phone when you order.
- Accept deliveries without in-person contact whenever possible. Ask for deliveries to be left in a safe spot outside your house (such as your front porch or lobby), with no person-to-person interaction. Otherwise, stay at least 6 feet away from the delivery person.
- After receiving your delivery or bringing home your takeout food, wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Take packaged food out of its wrapping or container and place food on your own dishes. Discard the packaging, sanitize the counter top it was on and wash your hands again.



Links to Sources quoted here:

1. **Eating Right –COVID Guide:** <https://www.eatright.org/coronavirus>
2. **How to Shop safely:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/essential-goods-services.html>
3. **How to Clean Fruits and Vegetables:** <https://www.eatright.org/homefoodsafety/four-steps/wash/should-you-wash-all-food>
4. **Have a Clean Kitchen:** <https://www.eatright.org/homefoodsafety/multimedia/videos/wash-how-clean-is-your-kitchen-motion-graphic-video>
5. **Nutrition and Wellness During COVID19:** <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/2020/03/25/food-safety-nutrition-and-wellness-during-covid-19/>