

COVID-19 and Food Service

I. Background

COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. It is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. Symptoms can be mild or severe and include fever, cough and difficulty breathing. Public health experts continue to learn about COVID-19, but based on current data and similar coronaviruses, the virus is believed to be spread between close contacts via respiratory droplets or contact with contaminated surfaces. The virus is not known to be spread by food and there is no evidence imported food or goods can transmit the virus.

On March 15th, 2020, Governor Pritzker issued COVID-19 Executive Order No. 5 that states effective March 16th, 2020, at 9:00pm, restaurants, bars and other food service establishments must suspend service of food or beverages for on-site consumption.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this interim guidance is to provide information on COVID-19 prevention in various food service operations and address the Governor's Office mandate.

III. Guidance

Because the virus is known to be transmitted by droplets produced by coughing or sneezing, avoiding close human contact is vital, especially with anyone who is sick. People should avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands. Hands should be washed with soap and water for 20 seconds.

If an employee is ill, they should stay home. Watch for respiratory symptoms and a fever of 100.4F or greater. It's best for ill persons to call medical providers first rather than go to their office.

If you are mildly ill, stay home for 72 hours after fever has resolved or for 7-days after symptom onset. Consult your physician if you have fever, cough, trouble breathing or other influenza-like symptoms (or are worsening after 24-48 hours). If you are pregnant, immunocompromised or an older adult (>60 years), you should call your health care provider.

Employee Monitoring Tool

<http://dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/Employee%20Monitoring%20Tool.docx%2003092020.pdf>

Although the main transmission method for the virus is not via environmental surfaces, [cleaning and sanitizing](#) ALL surfaces in a food service operation remains important. Frequently touched items, customer areas and high traffic areas should be the focus. Businesses that have utensils, equipment or other surfaces that are touched by customers frequently may consider alternate methods, such as providing disposable utensils or having employees handle equipment for the customer. It is important to continue to dispense food in a sanitary manner.

The Governor’s Office Executive Order states the following:

“Section 1. Beginning March 16, 2020 at 9 p.m. until March 30, 2020, all businesses in the State of Illinois that offer food or beverages for on-premises consumption—including restaurants, bars, grocery stores, and food halls—must suspend service for and may not permit on-premises consumption. Such businesses are permitted and encouraged to serve food and beverages so that they may be consumed off-premises, as currently permitted by law, through means such as in-house delivery, third-party delivery, drive-through, and curbside pick-up. In addition, customers may enter the premises to purchase food or beverages for carry-out. However, establishments offering food or beverages for carry-out, including food trucks, must ensure that they have an environment where patrons maintain adequate social distancing. Businesses located in airports, hospitals, and dining halls in colleges and universities are exempt from the requirements of this Executive Order. Hotel restaurants may continue to provide room service and carry-out. Catering services may continue.”

For further guidance on restaurant, retail food and food service establishments, contact your local health department. For further guidance on manufactured food or dairy firms, contact the Illinois Department of Public Health at dph.fdd@illinois.gov.

IV. **Additional online resources**

More information is available from the following Internet links.

Governor’s Executive Orders:

<https://www2.illinois.gov/government/executive-orders>

IDPH Coronavirus Disease 19 Business Guidance:

<http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/diseases-and-conditions/diseases-a-z-list/coronavirus/business-guidance>

FDA COVID-19 Food Products Q&A:

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

USDA Coronavirus Disease and Food Safety Q&A:

<https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>

OSHA COVID-19 Topic Page: [https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/controlprevention.html)

[19/controlprevention.html](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/controlprevention.html)

IDPH COVID-19 Page with Link to CDC Resources:

<http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/diseases-and-conditions/diseases-a-z-list/coronavirus>

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. Who is in charge of enforcing this order?

A1. Per the COVID-19 Executive Order No. 5, Section 3, enforcement responsibilities will be a cooperative effort of the Illinois State Police, Illinois Department of Public Health, the State Fire Marshal, and the Illinois Liquor Control Commission. When it comes to enforcement of this Executive Order, the focus of the local health departments (LHDs) should be on helping restaurants and food service facilities voluntarily comply with the order. If this can't be successfully achieved, IDPH and LHDs have the authority to order the closure of a facility and law enforcement is authorized to carry out such orders. Please consult your States Attorney as needed.

Q2. Are guests allowed to enter a food establishment to order or pick up food/carry out?

A2. Yes, patrons may enter the premises to purchase food or beverages for carry-out, but the food establishment must ensure that they have an environment where patrons maintain adequate social distancing, which consists of maintaining at least a six-foot distance between people.

Q3. Can restaurants do car-side/curb-side delivery?

A3. Yes, and is encouraged in order to reduce the number of patrons coming into the restaurant, forming lines, or being in groups.

Q4. Are restaurants allowed to cater and deliver to business and residences?

A4. Yes, catering services may continue.

Q5. Is there limit on the amount of food workers and patrons allowed within the restaurant at the same time?

A5. Yes, the requirements are still in place for groups located inside a single room or a single space at the same time (as of 3/16/20, 50 people or more is prohibited) and remember the importance of social distancing, even in smaller groups.

Q6. Is there a mandated posting for our door regarding the closure and/or limited operations?

A6. Posting signage is not required, but highly recommended in order to properly notify customers and others that may visit the establishment.

Q7. Can grocery stores or hotels continue to offer buffet style salad or hot bars?

A7. Although these types of establishments can still operate their food service, it is highly recommended that customers are not able to serve themselves. Salad and hot bars can be served by an employee, but customer self-serve should be avoided due to the handling of utensils, potential for contamination, and lines where people are in close proximity.

Q8. Can gaming parlors and gaming areas located within establishments remain open?

A8. The Illinois Gaming Board has suspended all video gaming operations at all licensed video gaming establishments.

Q9. Can large retail stores such as Costco and Sam's Club with food service still remain open?

A9. Yes, but only for customers to order and take the food as carry out. The food cannot be consumed on the premises.

Q10. Can movie theatres still serve food?

A10. No, because the food and drink cannot be consumed on site. Also, the requirements are still in place for groups located inside a single room or a single space at the same time (as of 3/16/20, 50 people or more is prohibited) and remember the importance of social distancing, even in smaller groups.

Q11. Can customers walk into sandwich shops to place their orders as long as they take the food to-go?

A11. Yes, but the requirements are still in place for groups located inside a single room or a single space at the same time (as of 3/16/20, 50 people or more is prohibited) and remember the importance of social distancing, even in smaller groups.

Q12. Can convenience stores still serve food and offer customer self-service areas such as donuts, roller grills, soda fountains, and grab and go hot and cold food items?

A12. Gas stations are currently allowed to be in operation, but those with food service should limit it, as it is highly recommended that customers are not able to serve themselves. The food can be served by an employee, but customer self-serve should be avoided due to the handling of utensils, potential for contamination, and lines where people are in close proximity.

Q13. Can food courts and restaurants/food establishments located in shopping centers still operate?

A13. Yes, but they cannot allow for on-premises consumption of the food. The seating in the food court or restaurant must be closed and customers can only take the food to-go.

Q14. Can shelters and other community organizations still provide family style dining?

A14. Close contact, sharing of utensils, and common eating areas are discouraged in establishments such as these. They should try offer to-go type meals in their individual rooms or a non-communal area.

Q15. What if a food establishment runs out of single-service (to-go) products, like containers? Can customers bring refillable containers from home to use?

A15. Yes, but only in accordance with the 2017 FDA Food Code 3-304.17, which requires the food establishment to first inspect the container to ensure it is made of a material allowable by the food code and is in good repair. Next, the food employee must wash, rinse, and sanitize that personal container prior to filling it.

Q16. What about banquet halls, can they still operate?

A16. Yes, but they cannot offer food or beverages for consumption on-site. Also, the requirements are still in place for groups located inside a single room or a single space at the same time (as of 3/16/20, 50 people or more is prohibited) and remember the importance of social distancing, even in smaller groups.

Q17. Can gas stations or restaurants open for carry out still allow patrons to use self-service soda machines?

A17. Yes, but it is strongly recommended that they are performing routine environmental cleaning on the common surfaces patrons touch (soda buttons, ice lever) and only allow customers to fill single-use disposable cups.

Q18. Can Local Health Departments/Local Jurisdictions be stricter than the Executive Order, for instance, not allowing patrons to enter any restaurants and only allow curb side pick-up or drive thru?

A18. No, unless the intent is to promote social distancing to decrease spread.

Q19. When an establishment employee has COVID symptoms or tests positive for COVID, what should the establishment do?

A19. The affected employee would call their medical provider and seek advice. The local health department communicable disease section would be involved as well, especially if the patient tested positive.