

3-19-20 News for Food Processors sent out by NJDOH

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To: Donna Schaffner, Food Innovation Center at Rutgers

Subject: Food Safety & COVID-19

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) hosted a briefing for the food industry with speakers Frank Yiannas, deputy commissioner of the Office of Food Policy and Response, Michael Rogers, assistant commissioner for human and animal food operations in the Office of Regulatory Affairs; and Dr. Susan Mayne, director of the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

Many questions that members of the food industry have can be answered in the FAQs at [FDA.gov/food](https://www.fda.gov/food). A few important points were made:

- There is no evidence of transmission of COVID-19 via food or food packaging, as this is a respiratory illness not gastrointestinal.
- There are no anticipated recalls if a person in a food facility is diagnosed with COVID-19.
- FDA is trying to reassure the public that everyone can have confidence in the safety of the food supply.
- Domestic inspections will be focused on mission-critical and for-cause inspections. Examples include the support of a foodborne illness outbreak investigation or a Class 1 recall or outbreak related to COVID-19.
- Routine surveillance inspections will be postponed. Inspections must also take into effect local geographical limitations (ie. curfews, shelter in place) and the firm's operations. The majority of inspections will now be pre-announced as opposed to unannounced.
- For areas in which restaurants are still open, it is recommended that no self-service buffets or salad bars remain in operation.
- If a worker is diagnosed with COVID-19, they should consult with their local health department, follow U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, and perform deep cleaning/sanitizing. However, no food is required to be recalled or put on hold in such instances. The main focus is to prevent person-to-person spread within the plant, store, etc.
- Food suppliers are considered a critical infrastructure sector and should not be shut down. Reach out to the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](https://www.fema.gov) if you have any issues.
- With regard to screening employees with thermometers: FDA knows that there are shortages in touchless thermometers. Local health departments can also assist with this.