

3-21-20

## Food Industry Q & A (from FIC Food Safety SME) regarding COVID-19...

### QUESTION:

Reaching out to see if anyone knows how the state health departments are treating positive COVID 19 cases within manufacturing facilities. You don't need to disclose the company name but I'm curious as to whether facilities are being totally shut down, or if lines are being shut down or if the state HD is telling manufacturers to intensify cleaning/sanitation but keep manufacturing can continue. And if someone turns up positive, what about the employees that may have worked on the same line? Do they then need to go home for 2 weeks and self-monitor?

I have not seen definitive guidance on this situation. I'm trying to prepare as I believe it is inevitable as time moves forward. Any insight you can provide would be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,

XXXXX

Thank you, any guidance is helpful.

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### ANSWER:

On Mar 21, 2020, at 7:57 PM, Donna Schaffner <[dfschaff@njaes.rutgers.edu](mailto:dfschaff@njaes.rutgers.edu)> wrote:

What I've been seeing from the NJ DOH is that FDA guidance says it is highly unlikely for the virus to be spread through food, so they do not expect to see food recalled because of COVID-19. (That said, they may change their mind when the positive cases start showing up in food processing employees.)

So far anyone who has been in close contact with confirmed cases of the virus are sent into quarantine, so the same would probably apply to workers in processing plants.

I've heard that some companies are starting to stagger shifts and separate people as much as possible during breaks and lunches, in order to cut down on the number of people "in close contact" when cases start being confirmed.

"Run-Rules" regarding how many employees are required in order to run a processing line: needs to be established ASAP, before larger numbers of employees are missing from the workplace due to illness or having to care for ill family members.

Business disruptions due to factors other than actual illness of your employees will add to the burden of absenteeism, so be prepared to make decisions regarding how long you can keep the facility open, and at what point you don't have enough staff there to safely run production.

Good luck!

Donna

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**Subject:** Re: FW: COVID-19 Resources