

## Coronavirus & Retail Food Establishments

### Supply Chain Issues & Conservation Strategies

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Novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues to spread across the globe and here in Washington state. This pandemic is negatively affecting both the availability and cost of a wide variety of products used in food establishments. These impacts are expected to last for months. Take the time now to check your inventories, secure them on your premises to prevent theft, and prepare alternate plans for food supply and service.

### Employees and Staff

Our staff are key to controlling the spread of the virus. As our businesses adjust to closures or changes in the ways we provide service, we must do what we can to ensure the safety of our staff and customers.

- Remind staff to wash their hands often. Proper hand washing will reduce their risk of getting the virus and reduce the risk of spread. Hand sanitizers that are at least 60 percent alcohol can help, but they are in short supply at this time.
- Review and revise sick leave policies as needed to ensure staff can take time off if they get ill or need to take care of a sick family member. They should have enough time to fully recover from COVID-19. This may be up to 14 days. See more information here about the process for people who have symptoms: [What if I have symptoms?](#)
- Plan to communicate clearly to staff about expectations and sick leave policies. Ensure you have employees' emergency contacts and other contact information you may need.
- Cross-train staff to ensure all tasks can be safely conducted.
- Take into consideration that staff may have family or transportation limits imposed by the community response and plan for ways to support them.

### Fewer Customers and Reduced Dining Options

Prepare for fewer customers and make plans for take-out and delivery options that will work with the staff you have and your supply resources.

- Modify menus to meet customer demand with fewer available ingredients. Consider reducing your menu options or operating hours to reduce the potential for food waste.
- Use social media to communicate with your local customers--advertise to-go options and increase delivery, as possible.
- Consider increasing food donation if you have leftover menu items. Reach out to your local food donation partners in advance to determine safe foods they can use and accept. Follow [these guidelines](#) to safely donate food.
- Any major modifications to your style of service, such as adding delivery or meals-to-go, should be discussed with your local health department to ensure your risks are controlled.

## Food, Paper Goods, Gloves, Consumables

Remember you will need to balance your food safety requirements with all the potential changes within and outside your control.

- Gloves may be rationed for the medical community or otherwise in short supply. Review your menu to see where you can change procedures to reduce hand contact throughout the day.
  - Ensure gloves are used only when needed for food safety. Tasks such as handling raw meat that will be cooked, taking out garbage, and stocking store shelves do not need gloves.
  - Modify menus to reduce need to use gloves. Reduce salad offerings and increase soup offerings.
  - Prepare vegetables in the morning rather than on an as-needed basis to reduce the need to use gloves often throughout the day.
  - Task staff with identifying new ways to help your business safely reduce the use of consumables. They might find tongs work for handling toast or other procedures that work.
  - Specify staff to be task-specific when preparing ready-to-eat foods with gloves to reduce the need for changing gloves when tasks change.
- Identify back up sources or modify menus if ingredients and food supplies are not available.
- Check your food safety equipment. Purchase batteries and spare thermometers and test strips. Also make sure your first aid kits are stocked.

## Cleaning and Sanitizers

Cleaning and sanitizing products are required for food safety and for infection control by all sectors at this time. We expect them to be in high demand.

- Retrain staff on procedures for effective cleaning. Coronavirus can be destroyed when properly washed and sanitized.
- Monitor sanitizer concentrations to ensure effective, but not excessive, product is being used.
  - See this [Coronavirus FAQ](#) for more information on cleaning and sanitizing.
- Batch dishwashing if possible to reduce the use of detergents and sanitizers.
- Reduce the amount of space used in your business to reduce cleaning and sanitizing needs in both front of house and back of house.

## Third Party Suppliers

Partners will also be facing substantial limitations. Work with them now to prepare.

- Communicate with your third party suppliers such as food delivery, repair personnel, and cleaning partners to see if they have plans to work through any stoppage issues.
- Ensure equipment is in good working order. Identify backup available equipment or alternate plans for repair.
- Restaurant equipment and smallwares are often imported. Supply may be limited or delayed for the immediate future.
- Ensure any substitutions meet your quality expectations and food safety requirements.

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Contact the Food Safety Program by email at [food.safety@doh.wa.gov](mailto:food.safety@doh.wa.gov).

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