



GUIDANCE FOR FOOD FACILITIES – COVID-19 UPDATE 04.08.20

[Governor Brian Kemp's Executive Order 04.08.20.02](#) extends Georgia's State of Emergency relative to COVID-19 for an additional 30 days, effective through midnight on Wednesday, May 13. In addition, [Executive Order 04.02.20.01 regarding Georgia's Shelter-in-Place](#) was extended through midnight on Thursday, April 30. Non-essential businesses must cease all in-person operations and close to the public under the Shelter-in-Place order. **All essential businesses under "critical infrastructure" may continue operations. The operation of critical infrastructure shall not be impeded by any county, municipal or local ordinances.**

Food and agriculture sectors (including agriculture production, food processing, distribution, retail and food service and allied industries) are considered "essential" components of critical infrastructure here in Georgia and across the U.S. Read more in the latest [GDA press release here](#), along with this DHS [Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce](#) (03.28.20) document. All industries deemed critical infrastructure as defined by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) shall be exempt from compliance, so long as such businesses maintain full compliance with any and all public health directives and guidance issued by the federal or state authority having regulatory jurisdiction over said business. **Note: A formal letter should NOT be required for essential employees to travel to work, but you may wish to keep a copy of the DHS memo in worker vehicles, along with employer identification (ID badge, business card, letter from company leadership).**

Food has not been identified as a likely source of COVID-19 infection at this time. However, it is important to follow current food safety standards and [Administrative Orders issued by the Georgia Department of Public Health](#) (DPH), to help protect workers and customers from COVID-19. In addition, expanding current food safety practices can help slow the spread of respiratory viruses in the community, and help reduce working days lost due to illness. The following includes guidance from our office in response to questions we have received. We are also working to post the information to the [GDA COVID-19 website](#), for your ease of access and to help keep the information updated as more is known with this fluid situation. Please also review [Governor Kemp's News](#) site for updates.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR, SPECIFIC TO COVID-19:

- Signs and symptoms of infection with COVID-19 include **fever** (100.4°F or more with an oral thermometer), **cough**, and **shortness of breath**. Symptoms may appear within 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus.
- Workers who are possibly sick with the symptoms matching COVID-19 should stay home.
- If possible, employees with family members/caregivers with symptoms matching COVID-19 should also stay home.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A POSITIVE EMPLOYEE:

Please review the [DPH Administrative Order](#) (03.28.20) relative to this. If an employee is showing any signs of illness, they should not be allowed in the food production areas. If there is an employee who tests positive and they are on-site, you should:

- Immediately have them leave the facility and return home to contact their local healthcare provider. They should not go to an emergency room or doctor's office until after contacting their physician and their local health department.
- Notify the local health department for the county your facility resides in.
- Notify the GDA Food Safety Division about the illness by calling our main food safety line, 404-656-3627.

On April 8, [new guidance was released](#) about **implementing safety practices for critical infrastructure workers who may have been exposed to a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19** by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). To ensure continuity of operations of essential functions, CDC advises that critical infrastructure workers *may be permitted to continue work following potential exposure to COVID-19*, provided they remain asymptomatic and additional precautions are implemented to protect them and the community. **Testing is not recommended for people without symptoms.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FACE-MASK USAGE:

On April 3, an updated [recommendation](#) regarding the use of cloth face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19 was issued by the CDC. Simple cloth face coverings are recommended as a voluntary public health measure in public settings where other social distancing measures may be difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies). **Note:** These are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance. For workers on farms and in food production, processing, and retail settings who do not typically wear masks as part of their jobs, consider the following if you choose to use a cloth face covering:

- Maintain face coverings in accordance with parameters in [FDA's Model Food Code](#) sections 4-801.1, Clean Linens and 4.802.11 Specifications.
- Launder reusable face coverings before each daily use; review the CDC's [additional information on the use of face coverings](#), including washing instructions and information on how to make homemade face covers.

HOW TO MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING IN YOUR FACILITY

Social distancing means avoiding large gatherings and maintaining distance (~6 feet) from others when possible (e.g., breakrooms and cafeterias). The following 16 recommendations should be implemented during the Shelter-in-Place order:

1. Screening and evaluating workers who exhibit signs of illness (fever over 100.4 degrees F, cough or shortness of breath);
2. Requiring workers who exhibit signs of illness to NOT report to work and/or to seek medical attention;
3. Enhancing sanitation of the workplace, as appropriate for your operations;
4. Requiring hand washing and sanitation by workers within the business establishment;
5. Providing personal protective equipment (PPE) as available and appropriate;
6. Prohibiting group gatherings of workers during working hours;
7. Permitting workers to take breaks/meals outside, in an office or personal workspace, or in other areas where social distancing is attainable;
8. Implementing teleworking for all possible employees;
9. Implementing staggered shifts and flexible hours for all possible employees;
10. Holding meetings and conferences virtually, whenever possible (or postponing non-essential meetings or events);
11. Delivering intangible services remotely whenever possible;
12. Discouraging employees from using each other's phones, desks, offices, or other work tools/equipment;
13. Providing disinfectant and sanitation products for employees to clean their workspace, tools/equipment;
14. Prohibiting handshaking and other unnecessary person to person contact in the workplace;
15. Placing notices that encourage hand hygiene around the workplace; and
16. Suspending the use of Personal Identification Number ("PIN") pads, PIN entry devices, electronic signature capture, and any other credit card receipt signature requirements to the extent permitted by agreements with credit card companies/agencies.

MAINTAINING HEALTHY BUSINESS OPERATIONS:

If possible, identify a workplace coordinator who will be responsible for COVID-19 issues and their impact at the workplace. If you have not yet considered these additional areas of impact to your business, please review and implement changes as needed:

- Increase cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting frequencies for all areas of the firm, especially high-contact surfaces such as door handles, tables, chairs, and restroom fixtures.
- Ensure disinfecting and sanitizing agents are effective against the spread of COVID-19 (see the [EPA list](#)).
- Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- Implement internal flexible leave policies and do not require health care provider notes to return to work.
- **Determine how you will continue operations if absenteeism spikes** due to flexible leave policies.
- Increase physical space between employees and customers; post visual reminders and utilize spacing tools to help people maintain appropriate distance (such as colored tape on the floor marking spots for standing).
- Consider limiting or prohibiting self-serve foods and beverages (including hot bars, cold bars and buffets).
- Downsize operations or hours of operation and deliver products through curbside pick-up or delivery.

Assess essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your services or products.

- Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize existing customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed).
- Identify alternate supply chains for critical goods and services, as some may be in higher demand or unavailable.
- Cross-train employees to perform essential functions so the workplace can operate even if key employees are absent.

WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

- [Coronavirus: What Can You Do?](#) – National Restaurant Association
- [Steps to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 if You Are Sick](#) – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- [Retail Food Protection: Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook](#) – U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA)
- [Food Safety & The Coronavirus \(FAQs\)](#) – FDA (regularly being updated)
- [Interim Guidance for Business and Employers to Plan and Respond to COVID-19](#) – CDC
- [COVID-19 Worker and Employer Resources](#) – U.S. Dept. of Labor (DOL)
- [Getting Your Workplace Ready for COVID-19](#) – World Health Organization (WHO)
- [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Situation Summary](#) Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH)
- [AFDO Coronavirus Resource Page](#) - The Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO)

Thank you for your work in food safety and for sharing your food safety knowledge and practices with your staff and customers. Please feel free to reach out to your inspector or contact our main line at 404-656-3627 during business hours.

Sincerely,

Your Georgia Department of Agriculture Food Safety Team