Safe food strategies

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there currently is no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of coronaviruses.

The World Health Organization has issued precautionary advice for food handling and preparation, including following good hygiene practices, such as washing hands, cooking meat thoroughly, and avoiding potential cross-contamination between cooked and uncooked foods. Thoroughly cooking food for at least 30 minutes at 60 degrees Celsius or 140 degrees Fahrenheit is effective in killing coronaviruses. Using different chopping boards and knives for raw meat and cooked foods is another food safety recommendation.

Food safety strategies should be implemented to evaluate how food is delivered. Design plans to avoid food distribution in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd. Consider options such as “grab-and-go” bagged lunches or meal delivery.

Employee health policies should be re-examined and updated to ensure ill food workers are excluded from working in a food establishment. Per the Centers for Disease Control guidelines, employers should not require a doctor’s note to return to work because doing so will burden the medical system. Before granting permission to return to work, food workers suspected of illness should be symptom-free. Work conditions should be flexible to encourage employees with symptoms, as well as family members and caregivers with symptoms, to stay at home.

Personal hygiene

Encourage employees to maintain daily personal hygiene, similar to practices for seasonal flu, to help prevent coronavirus spread. These practices include:

1. Washing hands for 20 seconds with soap and water.
2. Using hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
3. Avoiding shaking hands.
4. Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or into a shirt sleeve.
5. Disinfecting frequently touched objects using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
6. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
7. Staying home when sick and avoid close contact with those who are sick.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland recommends that food workers wash hands:

1. Before starting work.
2. Before handling cooked or ready-to-eat food.
3. After handling or preparing raw food.
4. After handling waste.
5. After cleaning duties.
6. After using the toilet.
7. After blowing the nose, sneezing, or coughing.
8. After eating, drinking, or smoking.
9. After handling money.
Worker protection

It is highly recommended that any employees who are showing flu-like symptoms should be excluded from the workplace until they are symptom-free. The CDC recommends employees traveling from areas with widespread, ongoing community spread (Level 3 Travel Health Notice Countries) stay home and practice social distancing for 14 days from the time they left the area. Employers should frequently check CDC Travelers' Health Notices to advise employees on travel precautions.

According to the CDC, the spread of COVID-19 occurs when people are in close contact — less than 6 feet — with an infected person. If a customer has flu-like symptoms, follow these steps:

1. Provide the customer with additional napkins or tissues to use when they cough or sneeze.
2. Make sure hand washing sinks with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer is available for customers to use.
3. Be sure to clean and sanitize any objects or surfaces that may have been touched.

The Food Industry Association has developed the following steps to take in the event there is a bodily fluid incident, e.g., diarrhea, or vomit:

1. Ensure the employee who is cleaning up the area is using Personal Protective Equipment, such as a pair of nitrile gloves, surgical mask, and face shield. In case of gross contamination or large contaminated areas, employees should ask for assistance from supervisors or contract outside vendors to perform the cleanup.
2. Block off the contaminated area.
3. Dispose of any exposed food.
4. Ensure any utensils that might have been exposed are cleaned and sanitized.
5. Clean and sanitize the area to include the floor, walls, and any other contaminated objects.
6. Properly dispose of any of the equipment and waste that was used for area cleanup.

Surface decontamination measures

Some viruses, such as coronaviruses, can remain viable on surfaces for several days. Frequent and thorough cleaning and sanitation measures can help eliminate viruses from frequently touched surfaces and objects. Disposable disinfectant wipes should be used to wipe down commonly used surfaces, e.g., countertops, doorknobs, light switches, and tables, before use. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label. A cleanup kit should be available with proper cleaning and sanitizing instructions and include:

1. PPE, such as a pair of nitrile gloves, surgical mask, and face shield.
2. Paper towels and cleaning tools needed for effective cleanup. Note: Re-usable sponges and mops are highly discouraged from being used. If re-usable tools are used, they must be cleaned using a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency registered disinfectant following the manufacturer’s instructions.
3. Absorbent materials to contain bodily fluids and an approved disinfectant. The American Chemistry Council has a list of products that are effective against coronaviruses.
4. Tape, signage, or some other means for blocking the affected area.
5. Waterproof bags for employees to discard PPE after use and used cleanup supplies.
6. A biohazard bag to appropriately dispose of waste.