

The ‘New Normal’

in Food Service

FOOD PROTECTION CONNECTION

COVID-19 has made us hyper-aware of things we’ve taken for granted our entire lives



For months we’ve been celebrating frontline workers in healthcare and institutional settings that have remained open during the pandemic. This focus has mostly been on doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals; however, the silent unsung heroes are all of the foodservice workers and managers that have shown up every day to feed those frontline medical professionals, patients, and residents. Quarantines, Safer at Home orders, and other social distancing measures are a privilege and a luxury that most healthcare and institutional foodservice employees have not been afforded during this pandemic. I begin this article with a round of applause for each and every one of you and say “thank you” for all of your hard work and continued dedication to service each day!

COVID-19 has made us hyperaware of things we’ve taken for granted our entire lives and so many people are asking, “When will things go back to normal?” Things may never return to normal—at least not what we knew pre-pandemic. There will be a new normal and we will adapt to it—with updated industry standards and a new consumer. Not that your actual consumer will change, but their perspectives, attitudes, and expectations will be vastly different from what they were a few short months ago. People have become fearful of other people, afraid that everyone has the virus and has the potential to spread it. This is not only true of our consumers, but our employees as well. Food service is a tough business to practice social distancing measures. Kitchen layouts were designed



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for efficiency and the fewest possible steps necessary to complete each task. This close proximity which was once a good thing, now—under the current circumstances—makes it impossible to keep a safe distance from others.

VIRUS VS. FOODBORNE PATHOGEN

Let's review the basics of coronavirus, also known as SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19. COVID-19 is an emerging biological hazard that is a virus. What we do know is that viruses cannot grow outside of their host or replicate in food, and they do not consume nutrients, respire, or produce toxins. Viruses can, however, survive freezing and live in the environment for a period of time while they slowly become inactive. As it's been broadcast

While the virus can survive on surfaces, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) still warns that the main way the virus spreads is through person-to-person contact, even among those who are asymptomatic. The primary way to prevent infection, the CDC says, is by practicing social distancing and staying at least six feet away from others, wearing a cloth face covering over your mouth and nose when in public, washing your hands with soap and water, and cleaning and disinfecting frequently-touched areas.

FACE MASKS IN FOOD SERVICE—BENEFIT VS. RISK

More than 200 diseases spread through food, but the probability that you can be infected by coronavirus through food consumption is

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on the news repeatedly, most people have become familiar with the varying lengths of time the virus can survive on different surfaces. The standard mantra states 24 hours on cardboard and two hours to nine days on woods, plastics, and metals (including stainless steel). These survival rates are dependent on environmental conditions like heat and humidity levels. And, while the virus may be detectable at nine days, its viability may be greatly diminished based on these varying environmental conditions.

exceptionally low risk; however, there is still uncertainty because this is a novel virus and there are many unknowns. COVID-19 is a respiratory virus and is not known to transmit illness through exposure to food or food contact surfaces, including packaging. The real risk of COVID-19 in food service is the potential for virus present on the skin or gloves to transfer and infect via the respiratory system, meaning hand to mouth or nose transmission.

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This raises an interesting topic of discussion and that is, should face masks be worn in foodservice operations? The United States is not traditionally a mask-wearing society, and donning a mask is foreign to most people. It feels uncomfortable and strange, it makes glasses fog and it muffles voices, making it difficult to hear what's being said. All of these things lead to touching and adjusting masks. The addition of the face mask as personal protective equipment on food handlers could lead to another food safety risk, and that is the cross-contamination risk posed by food handlers touching their faces more often, and the possibility that there will be increased incidence of foodborne illness linked to food handlers touching saliva containing pathogens and spreading it to food and/or surfaces, putting coworkers and clients at risk.

It is imperative that a vigorous training program be developed around specific criteria outlining the proper usage, wear, removal, and laundering of face coverings to reduce the spread of germs from face and mask handling. Certainly no one wants one illness prevention measure to be the cause of another. Wearing a face mask is a complementary measure, meaning that there must be other proactive preventative measures in place in addition to masks, such as good personal hygiene and social distancing measures to ensure optimal effectiveness in a foodservice environment.

RISK-BASED PREVENTION MEASURES

Studies show COVID-19 is not particularly resistant to traditional biocidals. It is an enveloped virus, making it easy to kill. Enveloped viruses like COVID-19 have their genetic material encapsulated by a lipid matrix. Soap opens the envelope “packaging” and allows penetration to easily denature and kill the virus. What this means for operations is

that there are many options available to kill this virus.

The foodservice industry is fortunate in that it already employs stringent risk reduction and control measures around hand washing, hygiene, sanitization, and cross-contamination as a benchmark of service excellence. What we have already works and we have many tools in our arsenal. Yet, we need to remember that SARS-CoV-19 is a novel virus, so there are a lot of unknowns in its repertoire also. Additionally, don't be afraid to consider new and alternative methods of sanitizing and disinfecting that may not have been used traditionally in foodservice applications, but have real promise moving forward in the new normal, such as electrostatic spray guns that disinfect with a solution made of only salt and water. Check out the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) comprehensive list of products that are approved for use against emerging viral pathogens which can be used to combat COVID-19, and may prove beneficial to foodservice operators looking for alternatives to their current products, or who are willing to explore outside the box disinfecting options.

The healthcare and institutional foodservice segment is well-known for robust training initiatives and stringent policies and procedures supporting the risk prevention approach. The Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) process we use to control food safety risks, which is a prerequisite to producing safe and wholesome food, can be aligned to the new risk of COVID-19 and serve as a guide to provide the steps of hazard identification/analysis and critical control measures to put in place in operations to contain the spread of COVID-19 among employees and consumers. It is important to remember that HACCP should be applied to a specific product, process or



operation, therefore it's much easier to apply this preventative risk-based approach when it's broken down by areas of concern into more manageable sections. One of the major areas of concern is people, and specifically employees' health.

In a previous article I outlined employee illness reporting, restriction and exclusion measures in foodservice operations, including reportable symptoms, diagnoses, and exposure. Even though coronavirus is not foodborne, one of the most important things you can do to protect your employees and others in your facility is to revise your policies and procedures around fitness to work guidelines to reflect COVID-19 as a reportable illness. Include specific symptoms, exposure, and diagnosis with clear definitions around reporting guidelines, quarantine, and paid/unpaid leave, to name a few topics.

MOVING FORWARD

Be sure to utilize up-to-date, trusted, and reliable sources of information about the virus as we continue to learn more and move forward navigating this uncertain terrain in the foodservice industry. Food safety is the same regardless of the foodservice venue, so if someone in the industry is doing it right, pay attention and borrow their best practices and learn from what others are already doing. Many of the large restaurant chains, hotels, airlines, and others have published their step-by-step approaches to reopening on their websites, providing assurances through transparency by outlining how the customers and employees will be protected. There are a lot of great reminders, new procedures, and inventive technologies being employed to combat and prevent the spread of COVID-19, and there's nothing wrong with letting the "big guys" do the heavy lifting and then following their lead to a successful and safe outcome in your own operation.

If you can, stay at home. If not, take precautions and be deliberate in every action you take—not just to protect yourself, but to protect the lives of every other person you come into contact with. Stay safe to stay healthy! **E**

SEE PAGE 18 FOR CE QUESTIONS



RELIABLE COVID-19 RESOURCES

[cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)
[epa.gov](https://www.epa.gov)
[fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov)
and your state's health department.



This Level II article assumes that the reader has a foundation of basic concepts of the topic. The desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and facilitate application of knowledge to practice.

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Reading *The 'New Normal' in Food Service* and successfully completing these questions online has been approved for 1 hour of Sanitation continuing education for CDM, CFPPs. CE credit is available ONLINE ONLY. To earn 1 SAN CE hour, access the online CE quiz in the ANFP Marketplace. Visit www.ANFPonline.org/market and select "CE Articles." If you don't see your article title on the first page, then search the title, "*The 'New Normal' in Food Service.*" Once on the article title page, purchase the article and complete the CE quiz.

1. Kitchen layouts designed for efficiency make _____ impossible.
 - A. Social distancing
 - B. Proper cleaning and sanitizing
 - C. Hand washing
2. COVID-19 is a respiratory virus and is not known to transmit illness through exposure to food or food contact surfaces, including packaging.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. What is the main risk of COVID-19 in food service?
 - A. The ability to spread illness through food to customers
 - B. The potential for virus present on the skin or gloves to transfer and infect via the respiratory system
 - C. The ability of the virus to live for 30 days on stainless steel prep tables
4. What is the primary risk of food handlers wearing face masks and PPE?
 - A. Their glasses will fog
 - B. It makes it difficult for residents/patients to understand them
 - C. The potential to transmit foodborne pathogens from saliva after touching their face to adjust the mask
5. Wearing a face mask is a complementary measure, meaning there must also be other proactive preventative measures in place to ensure optimal effectiveness in a foodservice environment. Which of the following is not a proactive preventative measure that needs to be in place?
 - A. Good personal hygiene
 - B. Social distancing measures
 - C. Wearing safety goggles
6. COVID-19 is particularly resistant to traditional biocidals, making it hard to kill.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. Risk-based prevention methods similar to HACCP can be focused around employee health as an effective tool to combat the spread of COVID-19 in foodservice operations.
 - A. True
 - B. False



Professional Practice Standards Available for CDM, CFPPs

Professional Practice Standards serve as the basis for quality dietetic practice for dietary managers. They are a guide for self-evaluation to determine the education and skills needed to advance an individual's level of practice.

Thirteen Professional Practice Standards are available free of charge from ANFP, and most have been recently updated. Check them out today at www.ANFPonline.org/practice-standards