

John Hutchings
District OneGary Edwards
District TwoTye Menser
District Three

THURSTON COUNTY
WASHINGTON
SINCE 1852

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Guidance for Food Establishments in Thurston County

- **Reinforce basic food safety procedures, especially hand washing**
- **Don't work while ill**
- **Increase cleaning and sanitizing of surfaces**

Schelli Slaughter,
Director**Updated 12 March 2020**

The respiratory illness (COVID-19) caused by a novel coronavirus is in our community. Help reduce the concerns of your employees and customers by following these guidelines.

COVID-19 BASICS:

- **Symptoms:** The common symptoms are: fever (100.4 °F or greater), cough and shortness of breath. It takes 2 to 14 days after being exposed to become ill.
- **Spread:** Coughing or sneezing, spreading droplets to others' noses or mouths is the primary way in which it spreads. Picking the virus up from surfaces is another possible way to get the disease.

KEEP DOING THESE THINGS: Basic food safety practices are very helpful in preventing disease, including: washing hands, keeping bare hands off ready-to-eat foods, not working while sick and keeping surfaces clean and sanitized. Food workers and managers that have the above symptoms should stay home **for at least 72 hours after fever and symptoms have gone away**. We do **not** recommend requiring a doctor's note to return to work because of the burden that will place on medical resources.

- **Retrain employees on sick policies:** Having a sick employee at work is a good way to lose anxious customers and to spread disease. Reinforce the above symptoms but don't forget about the other classic symptoms of concern (vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat and jaundice). Also review how and when to call in sick.
- **Wash your hands, do not touch your face, cover your cough/sneeze:** These are all of the same things you and your employees do daily. Remind employees to either use tissues or their sleeve to contain their cough/sneeze and wash their hands afterwards. Remind employees to wash their hands after touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

WHAT TO DO DIFFERENTLY: Sanitizing levels effective for this virus should be the same as for other viruses. Contact your chemical supplier or carefully read the full instructions on your sanitizer for directions. Generally, the contact time for disinfecting is longer than for general sanitizing (example: 2 minutes instead of 30 seconds). *Be sure to follow label directions for FOOD CONTACT SURFACES.* Some chemicals may need to be used at higher concentrations and require rinsing afterwards. Sanitizers are more effective on clean surfaces so clean with soapy water, rinse, then sanitize surfaces.

- **Increase surface cleaning:** Protect your employees and your customers through more frequent surface cleaning and sanitizing. A quick wipe-down with a bleach rag is not enough. Clean surfaces with soapy water, followed by a rinse, then effective sanitizing (remembering the contact time needed), include condiment containers, menus, backs of chairs and other often-touched surfaces at least daily. Use a separate cloth for front of the house cleaning and sanitizing.

- **Look at what items can be coughed on:** Reduce the potential for customers to cough/sneeze on your service ware or other items left out. This is exactly why we have sneeze guards to protect food items but what about the plates they will put the food on? Are there ways to reduce the amount left out at any one time, or to cover them or keep them behind the counter, available upon request?
- **Check Supplies Often:** Employees should be washing hands more, and your customers will be doing the same, so check frequently to make sure restrooms and handwash sinks are stocked with soap and paper towels.
- **You may want to consider:** There are many ways to change your business' normal practices to reduce direct contact between staff and customers in an effort to protect both and still provide good service. For example, some locations have chosen to not use customer's reusable containers, such as coffee cups, in an effort to reduce staff contact with items from customers.

KEEP IN SUPPLIES: We hope that recent stock piling by the public will calm down but you may face shortages in supplies, especially at the large quantity/discount sellers of such items as cleaners, sanitizers, paper towels and toilet paper. Look for alternate sources or types of these supplies, especially commercial distributors as their supply chains may be less impacted. Of the two most commonly used sanitizers, "quat" quaternary ammonia is not well known by the public and was more available than bleach. Don't forget to get and use test strips specific to the sanitizer you are using. Using the right concentration will keep you from wasting supplies and damaging skin, clothing, and surfaces.

KEEP CURRENT: Keeping your employees informed and discussing what can be done to protect them will help avoid unnecessary worry. We will post updated information specific for the food industry as needed at:

<https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/phss/phssdocuments/COVID-19> Advice for restaurants and other food businesses.pdf

General Thurston County information can also be found at:

<https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/phss/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

The Washington Department of Health will also have information

www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus

Nationally, the Centers for Disease Control has a lot of information at:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

We are here to provide assistance for you so please contact us with your questions. This community's response to this disease will likely last for many weeks and conditions and recommendations will change so please check out our webpage for updated information. You can reach us at 360.867.2667 or foodapplication@co.thurston.wa.us.