

STAY HOME. SAVE LIVES.



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**Oregon COVID-19 Joint Information Center, media.covid-19@state.or.us,
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COVID-19: No known transmission through food or food packaging

Given the recent plant closures across the U.S. and some in Oregon, the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) want to assure Oregonians there is no evidence that human or animal food—or food packaging is associated with the transmission of COVID-19. Food products do not need to be withdrawn or recalled from the market if someone on the farm or in the processing plant tests positive.

“The virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person, such as between people who are in close contact with one another, or through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes,” said Paul Cieslak, M.D., senior health adviser for OHA’s COVID-19 response. “A person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface that an infected person has touched, which is why it is so important to get in the habit of washing your hands often including before and after preparing meals, before eating and after you come home if you’ve been out.”

ODA and OHA, in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), are working together offering guidance to employers as they work to ensure the health and safety of their employees and the food and agricultural workforce that help keep the food supply chain strong. Workers are the backbone of this critical infrastructure.

“Our top priority is to provide as much support and guidance to our grocery stores, food banks, food processors and agriculture industry as we can to help protect their workforce and the public,” said ODA Director Alexis Taylor. “Our food safety inspectors are still on the job offering remote and in-person inspections, doing their best to keep the food supply moving and helping provide the safest food possible to all Oregonians.”

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Grocery stores, food processors and distributors have been provided guidance on how to protect their workforce and consumers from COVID-19. This includes the following CDC and FDA recommendations:

- Enforce physical distancing in lines, separate customers and employees by six feet whenever possible.
- Implement visual cues, such as tape on the floor every six feet, to help customers keep a six-foot distance from others whenever possible.
- Install floor markings to require customers to stand behind, until it's time to complete the transaction.
- Consider limiting the number of people in the store at one time; implement a maximum capacity and assign staff to manage the number of people entering.
- Consider setting special hours for vulnerable populations, such as the elderly or immuno-compromised. Recommend allowing these populations to enter the store earliest in the day to reduce chances of exposure and ensure access to inventory.

Guidance was also provided for sanitization and employee protection to further inhibit transmission in manufacturing environments and grocery stores. Some recommendations include:

- Do not allow symptomatic (fever of 100.4° F or greater, signs of a fever, or other symptoms) or ill employees to report for duty.
- Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces to limit employee contact and increase frequency of cleaning and sanitizing of common touch points (door handles, touchscreens, keypads).
- Consider altering store hours to allow for increased cleaning and restocking without customers present.
- Cross-train employees and rotate staff between cashier, stocking and other duties, to limit mental fatigue in adhering to social distancing measures.
- Consider installing sneeze-guards at cashier stations.
- Schedule handwashing breaks every 30-60 minutes. Employees should wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60-95 percent alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water.

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- Assign a relief person to step in for cashiers so they can wash their hands with soap for a full 20 seconds. Provide hand lotion so workers' hands don't crack.
- Consider providing hand sanitizer at cash registers for staff and customer use in between transactions.
- Consider only operating every other register or check-out lane to create more social distance.

Additional guidance on “What to do if you have a COVID-19 Confirmed Positive or Exposed Workers in Your Food Production, Storage, or Distribution Operations” is available from the FDA and posted on its website.

<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/what-do-if-you-have-covid-19-confirmed-positive-or-exposed-workers-your-food-production-storage-or>

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