

Food and Beverage Industry

Highlights of Industry Efforts Related to Health and Safety of Workforce During COVID-19

Situation:

- Like other Americans, workers throughout the food supply chain - from farms to food processing facilities to retail food outlets -- are becoming infected with the virus causing COVID-19, as anticipated.
- Protocols have been established and published for companies to follow when employees have COVID-19.
- In some cases, lack of sufficient physical distancing in the community at large is being noted as a factor.

Actions Being Taken/Reported:

- Companies are eager to understand and implement best practices for operating in the COVID-19 environment. Today, this includes:
 - o physical distancing
 - o risk-based use of PPE
 - o staggering workforce when possible
 - o decreasing line speeds/throughput in order to decrease worker density/need
 - o evaluating health of employees upon arrival to work
 - o limiting # of employees in specific areas
 - o limiting # of customers in retail stores, etc.
- PPE has historically been used in much of the food industry to protect workers, and address foodborne illness risks.
- In addition, PPE is now needed by farms, food manufacturers, distributors and retail stores to protect workers from the risks they are taking by reporting to work as Critical Infrastructure Essential Employees.
- Food industry companies are reporting that state and local governments are now increasingly confiscating PPE from the food production facilities to divert to medical centers for the public health community, and/or vendors are reprioritizing their customers based on governmental pressure.
- It is important to note that the food and agriculture industry supports and is complying with the guidelines/understanding that medical grade PPE is prioritized for public health workers.
- However, the food system workers still rely on, and are in critical need of, available hand sanitizer, cloth masks (NOT N95 masks) and disposable gloves in order to safely produce food and to maintain their own health and a healthy work environment.
- As positive clusters are detected in communities, one alarming response taken by some local authorities is to shut down the food processing facility for 14 days rather than adhere to the previously issued CDC guidance that recommends thorough sanitation, which could be completed in a matter hours, rather than 14 days.
- The CDC guidelines, known to be safe and effective, would allow for facilities to return to producing food, protecting workers, and keeping the U.S. food supply chain functional at a time when food security and economic stabilization are of concern.

Current Outcomes and Unintended Consequences:

- As PPE is reallocated away from the essential workers in our food supply chain, food companies will not be able to operate.
- PPE is required to protect and keep food company workers safe which is a top priority for employers and the communities where they are located.
- Food facilities are closing for longer than is warranted, based on CDC guidelines for safety, and longer than is viable to reliably keep producing and shipping food to American consumers.

Objectives for Industry, Companies, Communities and Essential Workers:

- *Critical Infrastructure Food companies need immediate assistance from local jurisdictions to assure that appropriate physical distancing is happening in the communities where their businesses are located.*
- Food companies are in need of immediate assistance assuring that PPE appropriate for their companies is available and delivered on time.
- The food industry wishes to have all Governors utilize the same guidelines in each State in order to ensure consistent guidelines for safety, public health and the ongoing efficient and effective operation of essential food companies.

Proposed Steps and Solutions:

- Disseminate this fact sheet to the local authorities and key influencers/governing bodies in each State using various distribution channels, along with other interested parties who can support the objectives noted above and share the facts provided.
- Resources and CDC guidance is below:
 - o <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html> which states "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."