NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

NORTH AMERICA
United States

COVID-19 FAQs

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GENERAL:

Can SARS-CoV-2 be transmitted through food?

FDA- Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19.

Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses like norovirus and hepatitis A that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a virus that causes respiratory illness. Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission.

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. This includes between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

In what environments does SARS-CoV-2 thrive?

SARS-CoV-2 is not a living organism and needs a host to thrive. Once in the environment, it starts to break-down and has varying survival times depending on the surface.

Can SARS-CoV-2 survive on the outgoing food packaging material?

At this time there is no evidence that SARS-CoV-2 is transmissible via food packaging material. For precaution, the length of time in the supply chain can reduce risk if it is greater than 2 to 3 days.

Can SARS-CoV-2 survive in beer long enough to infect a consumer?

Beer is a relatively inhospitable environment for most human pathogens when taking into account the number of hurdles a pathogen must survive in order to successfully infect someone who drinks the product (alcohol, hops, pH, low oxygen, etc.). As the primary mode of transmission for SARS-CoV-2 is respiratory and not foodborne, infection of the consumer in this manner is very unlikely.

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GENERAL (continued):

Are there any regulatory requirements mandated by the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) for food processing facilities in regards to COVID-19 ?

The U.S. Food Safety Modernization Act and its supporting Preventive Control Rules do not specifically address COVID-19. They require facilities to implement food manufacturing practices and develop and implement risk-based food safety plans. Cleaning and sanitation are required as part of cGMPs and specific Sanitation Preventive Controls may be identified in a facility's food safety plan. However, facilities are required to maintain a clean and sanitary plant environment and food contact surfaces and are required to use EPA-registered sanitizer products. It is the responsibility of the facility to assess risk and ensure that food is processed in a clean and sanitary manner. Food safety plans may need to be updated if there is any change in risk profile.

What are prevention methods we can be using when receiving product/ingredients from suppliers to ensure that it is safe for our employees to interact with?

Minimizing person to person interaction is a key prevention method, with less concern about products and packaging. Where possible, increase isolation time by relaxing just in time production methods. Provide truck drivers with hand sanitizer in cabs and handwashing facilities when at the plants. Keep clip boards and pens clean and sanitary, and implement no touch delivery methods where possible.

What challenges to SARS-CoV-2 cleaning and sanitizing do you foresee in dry environments?

Limiting dust and the proper use of wipes are key challenges. Dry equipment is often less compatible with chemicals compared to equipment that is designed for wet environments. Careful consideration and consultation for selected chemistry for cleaning and sanitizing to ensure compatibility is also a key concern.

Should non-sanitation employees be cleaning surfaces for SARS-CoV-2 before the sanitation team arrives?

Only if they are properly trained and proper PPE is provided.

Do high-touch areas need to be cleaned after each touching. i.e. microwave handle in cafeteria should be cleaned after each employee touches it? Or should it be every few hours?

The frequency of sanitation and disinfection depends on the number of people who are touching the surface, the soil load and type, and surface type. The best way to determine is to conduct a risk assessment to see how many and how often people are touching the high-touch surfaces. We have seen facilities cleaning these between 2 and 5 times per day. Some facilities report sanitizing high-touch areas (e.g. those touched by hands) every 1.5-2 hours and work areas sanitized at lunch and breaktimes. Encourage no-touch options such as using a tissue, napkin or other means to prevent direct contact.

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GENERAL (continued):

What are the recommendations for plan of action if there is a COVID-19 case in your business?
The Food & Beverage Industry Beverage Alliance has published " Food Industry Recommended Protocols When Employee/Customer Tests Positive for COVID-19" and it is available as a PDF on their website. (https://www.feedingus.org/)

If a plant has a confirmed case, and the plant followed the intensive cleaning procedure, is it necessary to quarantine the area where the employee was working or is it enough with the intensive cleaning?
Due to the ≤ 3-days on stainless steel viability or SARS-CoV-2, and the potential of spread through the ventilation system, some companies are choosing to close for 3 days after they complete the intensive cleaning. If you have the availability to intensively clean the air handling system, your risk may be reduced. You will need to run a risk assessment and remember this is a transmissability concern.

OSHA - Employers are obligated to provide their workers with PPE needed to keep them safe while performing their jobs. The types of PPE required during a COVID-19 outbreak will be based on the risk of being infected with SARS-CoV-2 while working and job tasks that may lead to exposure.

Examples of PPE include: gloves, goggles, face shields, face masks, and respiratory protection, when appropriate. During an outbreak of an infectious disease, such as COVID-19, recommendations for PPE specific to occupations or job tasks may change depending on geographic location, updated risk assessments for workers, and information on PPE effectiveness in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Employers should check the OSHA and CDC websites regularly for updates about recommended PPE.

Are temperature checks effective? What is the temperature that we should be looking for if we conduct temperature checks before letting employees come into the facility?
Temperature checks can be effective in detecting symptomatic employees but may not detect those employees who are infectious but do not show symptoms (asymptomatic) or identify those employees who have taken fever-reducing medications. Ideally, temperature checks and assessment of symptoms should happen before the individual enters the facility. Consider supplementing assessment of symptoms with questions about symptoms and exposure to COVID-19. The CDC recommends employers measure the employee's temperature and assess symptoms prior to them starting work. The CDC defines a fever as 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38.0 degrees Celsius).

What is the best way to dispose of soiled towels and/or cloths after cleaning/disinfection for SARS-CoV-2? Is there a best or recommended practice?
The data shows SARS-CoV-2 only survives on soft surfaces like towels or fabrics for no more than 24 hours. If you consider the fabrics you describe are used for cleaning and sanitizing, any significant survival of SARS-CoV-2 would be unlikely. Dispose of as you would for any refuse.

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HAND HYGIENE:

Why is the use of soap effective against SARS-CoV-2?

Research has shown a minimum 10-15 second scrub is necessary to remove transient pathogens from the hands and when an antimicrobial soap is used, a minimum of 15 seconds is required. Soap is important for the surfactant effect in removing soil from the hands and a warm water temperature is important in achieving the maximum surfactant effect of the soap.

Coronaviruses, like SARS-CoV-2, are expelled from cells in a package that is wrapped in a lipid membrane envelope. This greasy encapsulation means that this virus can be deactivated using a simple household chemical that we all have: soap. The Centers for Disease Control state that cleaning your hands often is a key step you should take to protect yourself from infection. The preferred method is to wash your hands using soap and water.

Is there an advantage to the use of antibacterial soap in a non-clinical setting?

There is continued study underway to help determine how these kinds of soaps can help reduce risks, in a food handling environment for example.

How effective are alcohol-based hand sanitizers against SARS-CoV-2?

if access to soap and water are not readily available, the WHO and CDC recommend the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers/hand rubs as an effective measure to protect against COVID-19.

I've heard Ecolab is making hand sanitizer which complies to the World Health Organization (WHO) formula. Why are you doing this and how do I order it?

Ecolab is here to help support customer hand hygiene needs and our customers during this time where there is an increased demand for hand sanitizers. We are producing limited pack sizes to help our customers during this current pandemic. This has been made possible by our ability to shift the production process of this new formula to plants that don't normally produce hand sanitizer.

Please reach out to your Ecolab representative if you are interested in ordering this product.

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CHEMICALS:

How do you breakdown the lipid envelope found in SARS-CoV-2?
The lipid envelope can be broken down by the surfactant activity of soap. The soap molecules disrupt the envelope.

What had surface sanitizer should be used and how to be used for environmental sanitization?
In production areas, increase frequency and use the right product per the label instructions. Please visit Ecolab.com or reach out to your Account Manager for the most up-to-date information.

Can hard surface sanitizers not listed on the EPA's List-N Disinfectants for SARS-CoV-2 be effectively used against the virus?
No.

What is the effectiveness of surface cleaners against SARS-CoV-2?
Surface cleaners remove soils including virus particles. These products are not designed to kill as much as they are designed to break down and remove types of soils. Although there is not an effectiveness measure, cleaning a surface and removing as much as possible is an important step to minimizing the number of microorganisms remaining and maximizing the effectiveness of the disinfectant so it can more easily contact the viral particles.

Can I use a different dilution and contact time than what the label instructs?
No.

How do I find shelf life of hard surface sanitizers or disinfectants?
Contact your account manager. They will be able to provide a guidance document.

How often should I replace my use solution of hard surface sanitizer or disinfectant?
Per shift or no greater than 24 hours.

How do I make my own wipes?
Contact your account manager. They will be able to provide a guidance document.

How effective are alcohol-based hard-surface sanitizers against SARS-CoV-2?
Whether or not a product is effective against certain microorganisms is listed on the product label and can be application specific. Carefully read your label. In addition, products that are likely to be effective against SARS-CoV-2 can be found on EPA List N.

What are the best alternatives for alcohol-based hard surface sanitizers in dry cleaning facilities?
First, analyze the SSOPs and ensure alcohol-based hard surface sanitizers are absolutely needed. In many instances, a non-alcohol-based hard surface sanitizer can be utilized, allowing you to conserve the alcohol-based hard surface sanitizers for those areas where necessary. Typically, a diluted quat based hard surface sanitizer (per the label) can be made in a pail or spray bottle. Wring out a single use towel or mist a single use towel and wipe the surface. Allow to maintain saturated for the required time and then wipe dry.

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CHEMICALS (continued):

For dry sanitation applications, is there a better way of sanitation which does not add water?
Effective HEPA (99.97%@0.3microns, MERV 17-20) filtered vacuums and minimizing the use of pressurized air will help to prevent the disruption of the surfaces. Increasing the amount of time that you can leave surfaces undisturbed can be helpful in reducing risk as well.

Is Fogging an effective way to kill SARS-CoV-2? What is the difference between Fogging, Misting and Gassing?
Difference between Fogging/Misting/Gassing is typically defined by droplet size: Fog 10-30 micron; Mist 30-60 micron; Gas < 10 micron.

Fogging can be effective - but it depends on the critical factor consideration (e.g. where it will be applied, surfaces intended to achieve needs (surfaces, penetration into equipment surfaces, air, etc.) and other critical factors. The EPA label will identify acceptable methods of application for the chemistry and must be followed. For example, the label must include a fogging application method if you want to fog. The correct application and contact time must be used. If you are trying to treat the air, this can be effective, however it may not be as effective on vertical surfaces - application system design, technique, contact time, good application all are critical factors.

What concentration range should I use for fogging?
You must follow the EPA-registered product label directions for concentration for fogging for the intended application.

What are the recommendations for fogging welfare areas? Should food manufacturing be performing misting in the work space on a set frequency? What are the drawbacks, if any?
Appropriate ventilation and additional PPE (per the label) is required. Not following proper PPE protocols could result in human health risks. Additionally, fogging could lead to deterioration of surfaces.

Do spray sanitizers for "ambiance" work to clean the area air?
A spray or fog application for an EPA-registered sanitizer can be effective depending on the intended application. Critical factors and the uniqueness of the facility should be taken into consideration. Application system design, technique, contact time, good application all are critical parameters.

Critical factors include but are not limited to where sanitizer spray will be applied, surfaces intended to achieve needs (surfaces, penetration into deep equipment surface/crevices, air, etc.) and other such as size/volume of the room – ability to reach all surfaces. It can be difficult to reach all vertical surfaces, for example, when facility is "treating air". Chemistries must have claim that product is effective and an allowable method of application in line with what you want to use.

Are sanitation showers or tunnels for people effective?
No, we don't sell products that are approved for use in disinfection tunnels or disinfection booths and we're not aware of any disinfectant products that are approved for this use. There may be serious unintended health consequences from exposing people to disinfectants in this way.

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PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE):

Are face coverings necessary in food packaging facilities?
Follow the CDC recommendations on the use of face coverings and be sure to follow local regulatory guidance.

Is there a protective face covering in use that has proven effective when 6 feet distance isn't practical in a food plant?
We recommend following guidance from public health professionals. The use of masks and what type to use is an evolving situation that takes into account the availability of masks and who needs them. What is clear is that using masks does interfere with the transmission of respiratory droplets which is a means of spreading the virus.

Can I clean my face shield with heat to help kill SARS-CoV-2? If so, how hot should the water have to be if I place them in my COP tank? And, how long do I hold the temperature for?
Per CDC - contaminated eye protection devices (goggles or face shield) should be reprocessed in an area where other soiled equipment is handled. Eye protection should be physically cleaned and disinfected with the designated disinfectant, rinsed, and allowed to air dry. Gloves should be worn when cleaning and disinfecting these devices. Follow manufacturer instructions.

What is the recommendation on cleaning reusable cloth mask?
According to USDA, FDA and CDC recommendations, cloth face coverings should be laundered before each daily use and be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

How often should I change face coverings in an 8 hour shift?
It depends on the wearer and the plant environment. Exposure to soil, contaminants, moisture in the environment and how often you remove the face coverings can affect how often a face covering should be changed. As per USDA guidance, face coverings should be maintained in a sanitary manner and should not be distracting or offensive to others.

Additional information on how to make and wear cloth face coverings is available on the CDC website.

CDC recommends that face coverings should:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face;
- be secured with ties or ear loops;
- include multiple layers of fabric;
- allow for breathing without restriction;
- and be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

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PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) (continued):

In a CIP room should I wear a face covering during COVID-19?

Proper PPE should be followed in CIP rooms which will often include gloves, aprons, boots, goggles and face shields, COVID-19 or not. If you are working within 6 feet of other individuals in the CIP room then you may need to identify if additional face covering is required to prevent respiratory droplets carrying the virus from being spread. These coverings do not take the place of wearing proper PPE for the chemical hazards.

What is the proper PPE when handling chemicals with fumes during COVID-19?

Chemical fume inhalation hazards can be identified by looking at the SDS and labels for chemicals present. Follow the instructions on the SDS and labels for PPE, COVID-19 or not. To assess whether adequate ventilation is present in areas that use chemicals with exposure limits we recommend customers contract a reputable industrial hygienist to measure the levels and assess the risk.

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