

THE **FOOD** for THOUGHT Newsletter

Fall 2020



Employer Notification Process

Employer notification is the process we go through when someone who is employed has tested positive for COVID-19. There are 3 main parts of this process. The first part is the general case investigation. This is when the positive employee's information goes to a general case investigator for contact tracing. During contact tracing, the person will notify the case investigator if they are employed and if they worked during the time when they were potentially contagious. The contagious period is 2 days before the start of symptoms through 10 days after the start of symptoms. If someone does not have symptoms, the contagious period is 2 days before the positive test date through 10 days after test date. If public health staff determine that the positive employee potentially exposed anyone in their workplace, the case investigator will fill out an employment follow-up form, which is sent to our epidemiology team. They determine whether this is an isolated case or if it is part of an outbreak. An outbreak is any place of employment where there are two or more employees that worked while contagious, unless this is a long term care facility, where only one positive case is required to declare an outbreak.



The next part is the employer interview team. An interviewer from this team will call the employer to verify the positive person works for them and has told them that they tested positive. They will define who a close contact is and request that the facility gathers a complete list of close work contacts within 24 hours. A close work contact is anyone who:

- Was within 6 feet of the positive employee for 15 or more minutes.
- Frequently shares tools or equipment with ungloved hands or is not sanitized between users.
- Carpools to and from worksite, whether that is at the start of the day, during the day, or the end of the day.
- Eats lunch or take breaks with their co-workers.

After the phone call, the interviewer will reach out, through a secure portal, requesting the list of close contacts. This will help maintain confidentiality. Each person on the close contact list is contacted by the interviewer to discuss their status as a close contact, what quarantine looks like for each close contact and answer any questions.

The interviewer will also discuss what actions and preventative measures need to be taken by the employer for employee safety. This might include cleaning, disinfecting, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements and/or screening requirements.

The final part is the site visit team. A site visit is not an inspection. It is a cooperative conversation with the employer, based on individual needs, focused on education,

encouragement, and empowerment. The site visit team will walk through the facility, talk about current safety standards and provide recommendations on how to meet them. If the facility has an outbreak, the site visit is required. If the facility only has a single case, a site visit is optional. After the site visit, the team will write up a summary report that includes observations, what was discussed, and recommendations for the facility. This report is emailed to the employer, along with any additional resources that may be useful.

Resources for Employers:

[COVID-19 Info for Businesses/Employers](#)

[Business Contact Information for COVID-19 Response](#)

[The Role of Employers in Effective Contact Tracing.pdf](#)

[Safe Start Plan Template.pdf](#)

[COVID-19 Contact Tracing What to Expect](#)

If an employee reports that they have tested positive, email: CDQuestions@snohd.org with your contact information. Please do not send an employee's personal medical information by email. An example of an appropriate email would be "An employee has reported that they tested positive for COVID-19 at my workplace. As the (supervisor, owner, manager), I would like to consult with public health staff. My contact number is _____."



Prevent the Spread of Foodborne Illness

Many people get sick each year from food. This year, it is even more important to prevent this as much as possible. The Washington State Department of Health has determined that many cases of illness could be prevented by three main things:

Proper handwashing

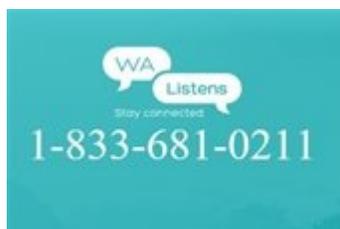
Washing hands the right way, for the right amount of time, will remove the germs that can be so harmful. Make sure that every employee is using soap and warm water and scrubbing their hands for 20 seconds each time they wash.

No bare hand contact

Avoiding bare hand contact with ready to eat foods will prevent the spread of germs from a food worker's hands to the food they are preparing. Make sure that every employee is using some type of barrier, such as gloves, utensils or deli tissue, when working with ready to eat foods.

Excluding ill workers

Removing or excluding workers when they are ill helps to keep the germs out of the establishment. Make sure that employees understand when and why they should stay home. Posting and going over the Snohomish Health District's [Restriction and Notification of Ill Food Workers](#) sign will inform employees of what is expected of them.



WA Listens

In response to COVID-19, Washington has launched Washington Listens, a support program and phone line to help people manage elevated levels of stress due to the pandemic. People who call the Washington Listens support line will speak with a support specialist and get connected to community resources in their area. The

program is anonymous. The Washington Listens support line is 1-833-681-0211. It is

available from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. TTY and language access services are available by using 7-1-1 or their preferred method. The support line has translator services available. Please feel free to share this resource with anyone who may benefit. Other resources and tips available at www.walistsens.org

Face Coverings

Disposable face masks must be worn by every employee in food service, except when working alone or when the job involves no in-person interaction. Employers must provide disposable face masks to employees. The purpose of a face mask is to contain the droplets that come out of your mouth during regular talking, laughing, sneezing and coughing. Face masks protect others. People can have COVID-19 and spread it without any symptoms. Wearing a face mask keeps it from spreading.

Face shields worn instead of a face mask are not appropriate for food service employees because they do not contain the droplets. The droplets can drop out of the bottom of the face shield. You can only wear a face shield in addition to a face mask. There are some people who require medical accommodations. They are required to submit a medical statement to their employer, from their doctor, that a medical accommodation is needed. This would allow them to wear a face shield with a cloth extension around the perimeter of the shield. Labor and Industries has created a helpful [FAQ on face masks](#).



Customers are also required to wear face coverings in a food service establishment. They are required when interacting with food service staff, anytime they are not seated (while being seated or leaving, or while walking to the restroom) and while talking at tables and not eating. The Washington State Department of Health has created guidance on enforcing the face covering orders: [Overview of COVID-19 Statewide Face Covering Requirements.pdf](#)

Materials are available for displaying at your business to notify or remind both customers and employees of the health requirements. Email communications@snohd.org to request a free window cling and bathroom stickers to be mailed to you. You can find [Posters for Download](#) from Snohomish Health District online.



We encourage you to go to the Snohomish Health District website for any [Novel Coronavirus 2019](#) related questions, concerns or resources.

Food Code Changes

The Washington State Department of Health is still reviewing the proposed food code changes. These changes are set to be finalized and adopted in October of this year. We wanted to remind you of those proposed changes and let you know there is still time for public comment. The Washington State Department of Health has created an outline and description of the [Top 10 Potential Changes](#) for review.

Proposed changes include:

- Active Managerial Control and the duties of the Person in Charge.
- Certified Food Protection Manager requirements.
- Employee health, illness and hygiene.
- Clean up of vomiting and diarrheal events.
- Clarifying allowable bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food.
- Date marking for 7-day shelf life of unpackaged refrigerated foods.
- Mobile food units, commissary, and plan review requirements.
- Donated food operating requirements, facility clarifications, and modifications to food source.
- Refilling reusable consumer-owned containers.
- Cooking temperatures for ground meat and poultry.
- Modification of consumer advisory and requirements for parasite reduction in fresh fish.
- Dogs in select indoor and outdoor areas of food establishments.
- Time-temperature safety standards of fresh rice noodles.

Submit written comments until September 29, 2020.

Email: Peter.Beaton@doh.wa.gov

Online: [Rules Comment](#), Search for Chapter 246-215 WAC and Add Comment.

U.S. Mail: Peter Beaton, Department of Health, Office of Assistant Secretary,
Environmental Public Health, PO Box 47820, Olympia, WA 98504-7820

Attend the ONLINE public hearing on October 13, 2020 at 1:30 pm. To register for the meeting online: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/4735583794817723406>
Or dial-in with your phone. Call 1-562-247-8422 and enter Access Code: 521-354-641.

Pathogen Profile: *Bacillus cereus*

Bacillus cereus is a spore-forming bacteria that is highly resistant to heat and produces toxins in food. These toxins cause food poisoning and can make a person ill. *Bacillus cereus* is usually associated with rice products, but it can also be found in other starchy foods, cheese products, leftovers and mixed foods like sauces, soups, casseroles and puddings. People usually get sick 30 min to 6 hours after the food was eaten and symptoms last about 24 hours. Symptoms are nausea and vomiting and occasionally diarrhea and abdominal cramps. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.



To reduce the likelihood of food poisoning from *Bacillus cereus*, keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Make sure to cool foods properly. Use the shallow pan method and make sure that the food is uncovered and no more than two inches thick while cooling. Foods should also be reheated quickly so they can reach 165° F within two hours. These measures keep food out of the danger zone (41° F - 135° F) as much as possible and reduce the amount of time the bacteria can multiply.

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