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## POINTS OF INTEREST

- Coronavirus contamination mainly comes from person to person contact.
- Common touch surfaces can promote cross contamination of virus particles.
- Surfaces like handles, knobs, switches, buttons, and touch screens must be cleaned and sanitized often.

## Handling the Coronavirus threat

Food Environmental Health Specialists are accustomed to helping to prevent viruses contaminating food, but the latest threat known as COVID-19 poses a new threat.

Although not known to contaminate food, it can be carried by food handlers as well as customers. Typical contamination comes from person to person contact meaning being closer than six or so feet from someone shedding the virus.

Surfaces must be cleaned before they can be effectively sanitized. Molecules of bleach (for example) can stick to molecules of soap and organic material, like food. If the sanitiz-

er has adhered to something else, it's not killing microbes. Washing can wash viruses away but it doesn't kill them.

Remember that our test strips are the cheap and easy way to test sanitizer strength, but don't tell the effectiveness. This leads to the recommendation to change sanitizer solutions regularly.

### COMMON TOUCH SURFACES

The COVID-19 virus presents a new challenge in that people can be infected and shed the virus a week or more before feeling sick or

showing symptoms, and some may be "spreaders" who never get sick.

It becomes even more critical to focus on the areas that many people touch including knobs, handles, touch screens, switches, appliance but-



tons, tables, chairs, railings, countertops, etc.

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## What you should know about...

### HAND SANITIZERS

The fear of contracting the Coronavirus (or other diseases) has prompted consumers to stock up on personal sanitizing products emptying store shelves. Some online sources have promoted

making your own. Recipes can be simple: combine isopropyl alcohol and aloe vera gel or may be glycerin.

But is this a good idea? The CDC says such products can work if

they contain at least 60% alcohol (70% is better). But many pharmacists say that getting the right combination on one's own is tricky and difficult to determine. Combining the alcohol and gel can

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## A new (actually old) way to clean produce?

Ridding fresh produce of surface bacteria has been a problem for the food service industry. Recent research finds that an old way recommended by FDA might be best.

The Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition at the University of Maine recently tested three popular options marketed to clean produce. Marketed products for cleaning produce might contain an acidic vinegar, or food sterilizing ozone devices. What researchers found was that using distilled water was



equally effective to using the commercial products. Their recommendation was that operators can save their money.

Other research conducted by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University experimented with the use of distilled vinegar and food grade hydrogen peroxide at the strengths typically marketed. The tests were done by putting each product in separate spray bottles. Produce was first sprayed with the vinegar, then with the hydrogen peroxide. Produce

was then thoroughly rinsed under potable water. Researchers also tried soaking produce in diluted vinegar for several minutes. While nonspecific, results were said to be very effective in killing bacteria.

Meanwhile, FDA still recommends rinsing all produce under running water prior to peeling, cutting or processing. FDA does not recommend a produce wash or a soap, but does suggest a produce brush as appropriate.

Produce can be dried on paper towels and then stored under refrigeration.

## Handling the Coronavirus threat (continued)

*(Continued from page 1)*

Clean thoroughly - soap and water is best - then rinse, and sanitize. This should be ongoing, not just occasionally. Touch screens available to customers should be cleaned as often as possible.

**“Viruses can survive for days, on inert surfaces, and plastic or stainless steel support the longest survival.”**

Although we know that viruses need a living cell to grow, viruses can survive on inert surfaces. Depending upon the surface, the survival might be hours or even days, and hard surfaces, like the plastic and stainless steel found in food-services, seem to support the longest survival.

A word of cau-

tion - a bleach solution strong enough to be most effective will be too strong for a food contact surface, but if used at a too-high strength to assure disinfecting, rinse the surface, then sanitize as usual and allow to air dry.

Handwashing, of course is vital for food employees and customers, especially before eating.

## What you should know about... (continued)

*(Continued from page 1)*

be difficult and can necessitate having an alcoholometer to measure the alcohol content, which needs to be at least 60% to kill viruses. Too weak and it won't be effective, but too strong is damaging to the skin even causing cracking and bleed-

ing, allowing germs to enter the body. And actually getting the alcohol and gel to mix can also be difficult to accomplish.

Better to stick to the commer-



cial products, or better yet, use soap and water. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization both agree on this.

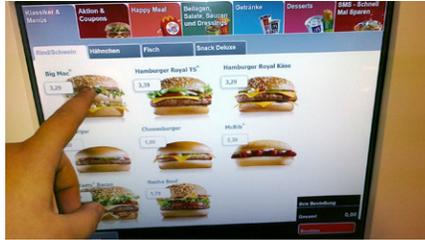
Hand sanitizers should never be the first line of defense.

## Touch screens can be microbe hot spots

“Order Here” the sign says over the big touch display. But are customers getting more than they bargained for by touching a screen touched by lots of other customers? This is a great example of the latest “common touch” or “high touch” areas just waiting to spread pathogens. But ordering touch screens can be even more of a concern because they are touched by members of the public, not foodservice employees who practice good hygiene. Foodservice workers should already be washing hands regularly, reducing the risk of cross contamination, but there is no

way to know if customers are washing hands at all. Virus particles are known to survive for hours, even days on inert surfaces, waiting to be picked up.

Inspectors, when spotting a touch screen in a food establishment, must ask the operator what the cleaning schedule is for touch screen terminals for customers. Remember, it’s not “if” they are cleaned, but “how often”, and



*Restaurant touch screen order terminals can be a cross contamination problem. They must be part of every establishment's cleaning / sanitizing schedule.*

the more often, the better.

Touch screens should be high on the list of other common touch surfaces that include, knobs, handles, buttons, terminals, etc. All need regular

cleaning and sanitizing. This need has become more acute as establishments deal with the COVID-19 virus, known to be highly contagious.

And remember proper hand washing!

## Foreign food facilities FDA's focus

Any food facility wanting to sell in the United States must register with the FDA. Food facilities in foreign countries continue to outnumber the domestic ones, says “Food Safety News.”

FDA says their data reveals that at the end of

last year, 221,843 facilities registered and 57% of them were located outside of the U.S. That represents a 7% rise from 2016.

Where does the foreign food come from? Data shows the countries with the most registrants were China, European Un-

ion, Japan, France, Italy, and Mexico.

The U.S. gets mostly processed fruits and vegetables, and juices from China; Wine, beer and snack foods from the European Union and Japan; and a lot of fresh vegetables and fresh fruit from Mexico.

Other source countries include Canada, Spain, Korea, and India.

**“The U.S. got \$1.2 billion in processed fruits and vegetables from China last year.”**

## Should Salmonella be called an adulterant?

Bill Marler, noted food safety attorney with Marler Clark has a petition pending with the USDA asking that meat containing any of 31 Salmonella serotypes be banned, as reported in Food Safety News. The 60-page petition was filed earlier this year on behalf of several victims of foodborne illness and several

food safety activist organizations.

With the time for public comments ending, industry groups like the North America Meat Institute say they need more time to comment on such a “significant policy change”.



The CDC has said that salmonellosis has caused more deaths than E. coli O157:H7 or botulism, yet is not banned in meat and poultry. The CDC estimates there are 1.35 million Salmonella illnesses yearly and over 400 deaths.



Food Protection Committee  
IEHA  
P O Box 457  
Indianapolis, IN 46206-0457

**FPC Email:**  
aayers@co.boone.in.us  
sdallas@co.hendricks.in.us  
**FPC Newsletter editor:**  
fsio99@gmail.com

## FOOD PROTECTION COMMITTEE

[www.iehaind.org](http://www.iehaind.org)

### IEHA MISSION:

*To promote, preserve and protect environmental public health in the State of Indiana, and to encourage a spirit of cooperation among all environmental health stakeholders while serving its members in the regulatory, industry and academic communities.*

The **Food Protection Committee (FPC)** is one of four standing subcommittees of the **Indiana Environmental Health Association, Inc.** The committee meets approximately four times per year with dates and locations chosen by the members. Its focus is to discuss food safety related issues of interest to its members. While all IEHA members and guests may attend meetings, only voting members, as specified in the IEHA Constitution and Bylaws, may vote. Meeting information is disseminated by email. To be added to the email list, contact one of the co-chairs, or your IEHA chapter representative.

**FPC Co-chairs:** Sarah Dallas , Amy Ayers

**FPC Newsletter Editor:** Ed Norris

## Tidbits and morsels

Due to the ongoing Coronavirus COVID-19 event, the March meeting of the Food Protection Committee was cancelled. The next regular meeting is set for June 18.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2017, almost half of the foodborne illness outbreaks from E. Coli O157:H7 involved leafy greens. That's nearly twice the percentage of similar outbreaks involving beef.



As Americans deal with the new strain of Coronavirus, COVID-19, officials at FDA say that the food supply is safe. Unlike Norovirus or Hepatitis A which are foodborne, the latest virus is a respiratory illness and there's no evidence it can

be transmitted by food. FDA says there is not a risk even if a worker in a processing or packaging plant may test positive for the COVID-19 strain. FDA adds there is no nationwide food shortage despite some localized problems.



The Environmental Working Group (EWG) has looked at the data released by USDA that shows the pesticide levels found in fresh fruits and vegetables. The EWG releases its "Dirty Dozen" listing each year, although groups like the Alliance for Food and Farming calls the list junk science as reported in *Food Safety News*.

It should be noted that under 1% of the produce tested had pesticide levels above legal limits. But the EWG thinks legal levels don't al-

ways mean safe levels. The Dirty Dozen list includes in order: Strawberries, Spinach, Kale, Nectarines, Apples, Grapes, Peaches, Cherries, Pears, Tomatoes, Celery, and Potatoes.

The group also creates a Clean Fifteen list. Leading that list is Avocados, followed by Sweet Corn, Pineapple, Onions, and Papaya.



The Food Protection Committee is open to all IEHA members, but only designated representatives may vote on issues.