

Department of Family and Consumer Sciences and Department of Food Science

HANDLING TAKEOUT AND DELIVERED FOOD SAFELY

March 2020

*Janie Burney, PhD, RD, Professor and Nutrition Specialist
Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
Nathan Miller, Food Safety Extension Assistant
Department of Food Science*

Ordering food for takeout or delivery is a good option for many people who do not cook, who want to maintain social distances, and who want to support individuals who work in the restaurant industry. COVID-19 is already changing how we manage and handle food. How concerned should you be about the transmission of the coronavirus from food prepared outside your home?

Takeout and Delivery

Are there risks for ordering food for takeout?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), currently, there is no evidence, or data, that food or food packaging is associated with transmission of COVID-19 (coronavirus). However, the virus may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials including food packaging. If you are ordering food for takeout or delivery, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water and clean and sanitize any surfaces or utensils that touch food packaging.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has published a list of disinfectants that have shown to be effective on surfaces. A disinfectant is a product that kills germs. Washing surfaces first before disinfecting will make it easier for the disinfectant to kill germs. Table 1 shows a few of the products that are effective against COVID-19. (Note: University of Tennessee

Extension does not endorse any company or product over others.) Some of these are suitable for food contact surfaces and some are not. **Be sure to read the label and any special instructions for food contact surfaces.** You may need to dilute concentrated products or rinse surfaces with clean water after you have disinfected to make them safe for contact with food. Go to [epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2](https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2) to see a complete list of products including those for other types of viruses.

Table 1. Examples of Disinfectants for Food Contact Surfaces

EPA Registration Number	Active Ingredients	Product Name	Contact time (in minutes)
777-66	Quaternary Ammonium	Lysol Brand All Purpose Cleaner	2
777-91	Quaternary Ammonium	Lysol Brand Kitchen Pro Antibacterial Cleaner	2
5813-50	Sodium Hypochlorite	Ultra-Clorox Brand Regular Bleach	5

If the products you use are not listed, look for an EPA registration number. If you find an EPA registration number on your product that matches one of the products on the EPA's list, it is an effective disinfectant.

Handling Takeout and Delivered Food Safely

Remember that when you use these products, you must allow the product to stay on the surface for the recommended contact time. Always follow the manufacturer's directions.

What about hand sanitizers?

Hand sanitizers are not listed because they are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). For more information on the proper use of hand sanitizers, visit www.fda.gov/consumers/if-soap-and-water-are-not-available-hand-sanitizers-may-be-good-alternative.

Are there risks for ordering food for home delivery?

Currently there are no indications, or data, that home delivered food will spread COVID-19. In some cases, these businesses have already instituted procedures so that there is no contact between the person making the delivery and the person receiving the food. In addition, you also can remove containers from the bag before bringing them inside, then throw the bag in the trash. When paying with cash, leave the exact amount plus a generous tip outside the door in an envelope.

Are there risks for using a credit card over the phone?

One way to avoid contact with someone who delivers your food is to pay ahead by credit card. Then, they can leave your order outside your door. If you are concerned about using your credit card over the phone, remember that you are protected from fraudulent charges. Your debit card is not guaranteed; however, some banks will work with you to get reimbursed if someone uses your card without your knowledge. You also can add notifications for your credit card such as "notify me if charges are over \$_____" or when the card number was used without the card. Then you can decide if you made the charge. You also should check your credit card statement or bank statement periodically to spot any charges you did not make.

Should I be worried that someone sick has prepared or handled my food?

Restaurants and food establishments should have procedures in place to prevent symptomatic individuals from working. In addition, cleaning protocols are set by local and state health departments for proper cleaning and sanitation in food service facilities, particularly when there is concern about the spread of a novel virus like COVID-19.

Restaurants in Tennessee are required to comply with the Tennessee Food Safety Act (Tennessee Code, Title 68, Chapter 14), which gives specific instructions on how to handle food safely and how to clean and sanitize.



There are currently no indications that takeout or home delivered food will spread COVID-19.

Food Safety at Home

Even though you are concerned about a novel virus, keep in mind that food prepared outside the home also has to be handled safely to prevent the growth of bacteria. Viruses and bacteria in food can make you sick. The major difference is that, unlike bacteria, viruses do not grow in food. They mainly come from cross-contamination, or the transfer from one object or food to another, and failure to wash hands properly. The following information can help you prevent the growth of harmful bacteria in your food and stay healthy.

Handling Takeout and Delivered Food Safely

Hot Takeout or Delivered Food

Keep hot foods hot.

Keep hot food hot at an internal temperature of 140 F or above because just keeping food warm is not safe. Bacteria grow best between 40 and 140 F. When you pick up food or have it delivered, pay attention to how long the food stays in this danger zone. Eat food within 2 hours, or 1 hour if temperatures are above 90 F. Use a food thermometer to monitor the internal temperature of the food. A preheated oven, chafing dishes, preheated warming trays or slow cookers may be used to keep food above 140 F.

When you cannot eat hot food within the safe time frame, takeout or delivered food should be divided into smaller portions or pieces, placed in shallow containers, and refrigerated at 40 F or below. When you reheat hot foods, make sure you heat to 165 F and use a food thermometer to check the temperature. Reheat soups, sauces and gravies to a boil.

Cold Takeout or Delivered Food

Keep cold foods cold.

Cold takeout or delivered foods should stay below 40 F to prevent the growth of bacteria. Refrigerate them as soon as possible, always within the 2-hour (or 1-hour) safe time frame. Take a cooler with ice or ice packs to the food service establishment when you pick up food,

especially if you do not plan to return home right away.

The Bottom Line

This is a new virus and scientists are still gathering data about the safety of takeout and home delivered food. Therefore, if you are at increased risk due to your age or health, treat food packaging as if it could be contaminated.

- Always wash your hands after receiving food and before eating.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and utensils that have come in contact with food packaging.
- Stay informed. Advice may change as we learn more about this new virus.

Additional Sources of Information

Frequently Asked Questions About Takeout and Food Safety

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/agriculture/documents/foodsafety/COVID19_guidance.for.take.out_3.24.pdf

Food Safety and the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19)

<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>



UTIA.TENNESSEE.EDU

D 89 03/20 20-0191 Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and resource development. University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating. UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.