

How to Safely Share Meals with Others at Work During COVID-19 Pandemic

Clusters of healthcare worker infections at Duke have been linked to contaminated workroom environments where staff have gathered without wearing masks to eat or drink. This document provides guidance for DUHS team members on how to safely consume shared food with others in the hospital and clinic settings.

General information about the spread of COVID-19 infection

- Coronaviruses are spread from person to person through respiratory droplets.
- A person may get COVID-19 infection by touching contaminated surfaces/objects and then later touching their own mouth, nose or eyes.
- There is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient, refrigerated or frozen temperatures.
- COVID-19 is not a foodborne illness; ingestion of the virus is unlikely to result in infection. However, spread of COVID-19 may occur when touching common objects during mealtimes and when eating in close proximity to others.

Eating with others

When eating and drinking, face masks need to be removed and stored in a paper bag. To lower the risk of exposure to DUHS team members, the below measures should be followed:

- Within breakrooms, maintain at least 6 feet of separation from others.
- Limit the number of people in the breakroom at any given time, regardless of the number of masked and unmasked individuals in the room.
- Perform hand hygiene before and after mask removal or consumption of food and drink.
- Clean eating surfaces prior to and after consuming food and drink.



Sharing food

During this difficult time, many restaurants or individuals are donating food to DUHS team members as a generous gesture of appreciation. Please follow these guidelines to ensure that communal food consumption does not increase the risk of transmitting COVID-19 to our team members:

- All food donations should be referred to shannon.haney@duke.edu.
- Every attempt should be made to individually package portions of food and drink prior to distribution to DUHS team members.
- If individual packaging is not possible, individuals should perform hand hygiene before and after using serving utensils.

References

1. <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/newsletter/food-safety-and-Coronavirus.html>