



How Can Retail Food Regulatory Programs Be Better Prepared for the Next Public Health Emergency?

Local health departments should work toward implementing the following six recommendations to improve retail food safety activities and strengthen preparedness for the next public health emergency.

1

Foster communication and positive relationships with food service establishments.

- Rebuild trust through clear messaging, collaborative relationships, and the inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making. Messaging should acknowledge and explain the information being used to make decisions as well as share the work being done to fill existing knowledge gaps.
- Establish positive relationships with food service operators to ensure that the LHD and the establishments it regulates can work collaboratively to protect public health.



Consider racial and other social factors in decision-making.

- Strive to improve relationships and trust with underserved communities by establishing an open dialogue when instructing food safety practices during non-emergency times.
- Build trust with consumers through messaging that targets safe food handling practices and behaviors among low-income and minority populations.

2

3

Improve methods to conduct effective virtual inspections during public health emergencies.

- Develop a plan of action that allows for virtual technology to be used to observe kitchen operations and prevent the spread of foodborne illness without the risk of disease transmission.
- Consider ways to create a new method for virtual inspections, update points of focus during routine inspections, or design a reframing of the interaction between regulators and food service operators.





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4

Use food safety culture to characterize retail food establishments by public health risk.



- Use food safety culture to determine inspection frequency by identifying “high-risk” establishments to prioritize for inspections during a public health emergency.
- Standardize characteristics that indicate an establishment’s food safety culture and educate inspectors on how to evaluate those characteristics during routine inspections.



Create a template to evaluate food safety performance following a major event.

5

- Conduct a “hotwash”, or evaluation of performance during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as following other major events.
- Create a template for retail food regulatory programs to use to help identify successes and failures regarding food safety operations.

6

Provide support and resources to address workplace harassment among food safety professionals.

- Develop and implement support structures within the workplace to ensure the personal and professional safety of public health practitioners, especially regulators in the field performing food safety inspections.
- Create more formalized reporting systems to detect, monitor, and report harassment.



Acknowledgments

This publication was made possible through support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Cooperative Agreement Grant No. OT18 1802. NACCHO is grateful for the support from the Food Safety Workgroup members as well as our federal partners. Its contents are solely the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the sponsor.