The world’s food regulatory authorities have had a more limited role in responding to the rapid spread of the coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) than their counterparts involved with drugs and devices/diagnostic tests. Related to food, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), for example, has taken action against dietary supplements and other products under its jurisdiction for making fraudulent claims about preventing or curing COVID-19. See our coverage of seven recent warning letters issued jointly by FDA and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

FDA also has addressed COVID-19 concerns for food products, among several other topics, on a Q&A website, updated on March 13, 2020. FDA acknowledges it is possible that the virus that causes COVID-19 can survive on surfaces or objects but states there is currently no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. While making no specific new recommendations, FDA’s Q&A points to the regulation of restaurants and retail...
food establishments at the state and local and notes that FDA-regulated food manufacturers are required to maintain clean facilities, including, as appropriate, clean and sanitized food contact surfaces, and to have food safety plans under the FSMA Final Rule for Preventive Controls for Human Food.

- In Europe, where the full brunt of COVID-19 was felt earlier than in the United States, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) issued a statement on March 9, 2020 that is specifically aimed at calming consumer fears of potentially contracting the virus from food. EFSA’s chief scientist noted that transmission through food consumption did not occur during previous outbreaks of related coronaviruses, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) and Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), and there is no evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 virus is any different in this respect. Nevertheless, EFSA noted precautionary recommendations on good hygiene practices, including advice on food handling and preparation, outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO).

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