

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE**

In re: **Requiring Processing Plants to Test for
SARS-CoV-2 and Warning Consumers of
Possible Presence of SARS-CoV-2
on Meat and Poultry Products**

Docket No. 20-02

EMERGENCY PETITION FOR RULEMAKING

ADDENDUM

SUBMITTED TO

Mary Porretta
Petitions Manager
Regulations Development Staff
Office of Policy and Program Development
Room 6071 South Building
Washington, DC 20250
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DATE

May 28, 2020

REPLY TO

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
c/o Mark Kennedy, Vice President of Legal Affairs
5100 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20016
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Dear Petitions Manager Porretta:

The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine submits this addendum to its petition for rulemaking in response to the Food Safety and Inspection Service's ("FSIS") notice of May 22, 2020, advising that the petition is under review.

FSIS regulations state,

- (a) A petition will receive expedited review by FSIS if the requested action is intended to enhance the public health by removing or reducing foodborne pathogens or other potential food safety hazards that might be present in or on meat, poultry, or egg products.
- (b) For a petition to be considered for expedited review, the petitioner must submit scientific information that demonstrates that the requested action will reduce or remove foodborne pathogens or other potential food safety hazards that are likely to be present in or on meat, poultry, or egg products, and how it will do so.
- (c) If FSIS determines that a petition warrants expedited review, FSIS will review the petition ahead of other pending petitions.¹

Regarding (a), the petition seeks "stringent and proactive rules, policies, and enforcement measures to prevent the continued contamination of meat and poultry." Specifically, the petition requests that FSIS "[r]equire all processing plants operating in the U.S. and all facilities shipping meat and poultry products into the United States to test their products for the presence of SARS-CoV-2 and immediately make their findings publicly available."

Regarding (b), FSIS's notice states, "The petition does not include scientific studies or other supporting information to demonstrate that COVID -19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging." However, the petition cites studies showing that the SARS-CoV-2 virus is easily airborne, remaining detectable for 30 minutes or more in air samples,² that infected handlers at slaughterhouses are repeatedly involved in transmission of viral pathogens,³ and that viruses kept at 4 degrees Celsius—the temperature recommended by USDA for meat and poultry storage—remain easily detectable for nearly a month.⁴

This addendum supplements that scientific information as follows: Studies also show that pathogens from meat products readily contaminate surfaces and cutting implements. According to a New England Journal of Medicine article published April 16, 2020, the SARS-CoV-2 virus is detectable for up to 4 hours on copper surfaces, 24 hours on cardboard, and 3 days on plastic

¹ 9 C.F.R. § 392.8.

² Ren SY, Wang WB, Hao YG, et al. Stability and infectivity of coronaviruses in inanimate environments. *World J Clin Cases*. 2020;8:1391–1399.

³ Velebit B, Radin D, Teodorovic V. Transmission of common foodborne viruses by meat products. *Procedia Food Science*. 2015;5:304–307.

⁴ Casanova LM, Jeon S, Rutala WA, Weber DJ, Sobsey MD. Effects of air temperature and relative humidity on coronavirus survival on surfaces. *Appl Environ Microbiol*. 2010;76:2712–2717.

or stainless-steel surfaces.⁵ A later review reported that coronaviruses can survive on polyfluorotetraethylene (Teflon), ceramic tile, glass, and stainless steel for at least five days.⁶ During these time periods, surfaces contaminated by infected workers—the petition notes at least 14,259 infected workers as of mid-May—transmit the virus to meat and poultry products.

More than 99,000 Americans have died as a result of the SARS-Co-V-2 virus,⁷ and the amount increases daily. The petition requests action that would enhance the public health by removing or reducing the possibility that this deadly pathogen might be present in or on meat and poultry products. As such the Physicians Committee requests expedited review of its petition.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Kennedy
Vice President of Legal Affairs

⁵ van Doremalen N, Bushmaker T, Morris DH, et al. Aerosol and surface stability of SARS-CoV-2 as compared with SARS-CoV-1. *N Engl J Med.* 2020;382:1564–1567.

⁶ Ren, *supra* note 2.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (May 28, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>.