



# Information Update

## COVID-19 Disease and SARS-CoV-2 Virus - Food Safety Implications

29 March 2020

Please note that this document presents a consensus of the different guidelines available from regulatory bodies from Europe and North America, and from private companies

### Advice to Food Operators / Operations

1. It is important to continue to apply fitness to work procedures stipulating that infected workers do not handle food:
  - Staff with any symptoms of COVID-19 should be prevented from food operations and should stay home.
  - Staff whose immediate family – sharing the same residence / place of living – is affected by COVID-19 should be prevented from food operations and should stay home.
2. It is important to reinforce good personal hygiene requirements for food operators:
  - a. *Proper and routine multiple hand washing:*
    - Before starting work
    - After coughing, sneezing or blowing nose
    - Before handling ready to use / eat or cooked food
    - After handling or preparing raw food
    - After handling waste
    - After cleaning duties
    - After using the washroom
    - After eating, drinking or smoking
    - After handling money
    - After handling received products and touching multiple packaging surfaces of non-controlled origin

**Handwashing** should use warm water, where possible, and soap. It should be thorough and last twenty (20) seconds, at minimum, rubbing all hand surfaces. Rinsing should be completed under running water and drying should be accomplished using either disposable paper towels, where possible, or clean towels.

#### b. *Protective gear*

- Food operators should maintain their regular protective gear: blouses, hair cover, boots, where applicable, with added attention to their level of cleanliness.

- There is no need to wear masks if these were not part of the occupational health requirements during regular operations. This advice also applies to operators that may be in contact with external partners, such as cashiers, baggers, etc.

Additional measures of social or physical distancing – staying at least 6 feet away from another individual – must be applied.

c. *Gloves*

There is no need to add gloves to your protective gear if your normal operations do not require them. It is perfectly acceptable to prepare and handle food with bare hands provided proper hand washing procedures are in place.

Should gloves be used during normal operations, continue to use them. They must be changed frequently and hands must be washed between changes, in addition to when gloves are removed. Gloves must be changed after carrying out non-food related activities, such as opening doors, handling money or touching unsanitized non-food surfaces.

*\*Gloves should not give a false sense of protection – proper hand washing must be maintained before putting on and removing gloves. Bacteria can build up rapidly on the skin and multiply inside gloves due to the moist and warm environment. Handwashing must always be thorough upon removing gloves. If gloves tear or are removed without handwashing a high number of bacteria can be transferred to the food.*

### 3. Adapt establishment sanitation requirements

- It is advised to multiply the frequency of sanitation practices particularly for surfaces.
- **All touch points**, such as trollies, door handles, phones, ramps, remote controls should be sanitized more frequently.
- Ladles, tongs, condiment and spice holders should be washed and / or sanitized more frequently.
- Where possible – and it does not / may not introduce other hazards – keep doors open and where possible minimize contact.
- In an overly cautious approach, if one decides to clean the external surface of the product packaging with soapy water, an alcoholic solution at 70% alcohol or an approved sanitizer, this should not compromise the integrity of the product and would not introduce other hazards.
- In all activities, and when changing sanitation protocols and procedures to account for the management and prevention of the SARS-COV-2 virus, **ensure that no other food hazards are introduced.**
- Use approved sanitizers in all activities.

### 4. Other adaptation measures

- a. Social / physical distancing. Where possible adapt work practices to enable physical distancing:
  - Limit the number of individuals in a given food preparation area.
  - Space out workstations and food preparation areas, if possible.
  - Limit the number of people – staff, delivery drivers, customers – who may come at a given time to avoid contact.

- Use spacing measures among clients and customers (6 feet or 2 meters between two individuals).
  - Use a ticketing system if / where appropriate, with the relevant associated sanitation and cleaning measures.
- b. Enhance staff awareness
- Share information about transmission of the SARS-COV-2 among staff and operators in a simplified manner.
  - Ensure psychological well-being of staff is enhanced: while awareness is improved, there should be measures to limit anxiety and / or panic.
  - Reinforce food safety teachings
- c. Make available / facilitate hand sanitation through multiplication of sanitation stations and / or opportunities to wash hands and / or change gloves
- Ensure staff and contractors report any symptoms and signs of illness and be attentive for them.
  - Facilitate and ease additional cleaning / disinfection of delivered / transported products to your facility.
  - Ensure all other food safety management measures are maintained – cooking temperatures, pest management – either as part of HACCP / preventive measures or prerequisite programs.
  - Evaluate effectiveness of measures on a regular basis and adapt them.
  - Solicit feedback from staff and operators on impact of new measures and their effectiveness, stimulate involvement and innovation.

## References from various food regulatory agencies and other sources

- ❖ US FDA Food Safety and COVID-19, [here](#).
  - A temporary policy regarding preventive controls and food supplier verification program for food industry in the US, [here](#).
  - And some FAQ about daily operations in food production, processing, retail settings, [here](#).
  - <https://www.fda.gov/media/136142/download>
  
- ❖ Canada
  - [https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/agriculture-pecheries-alimentation/publications-adm/Covid-19/GM\\_covid19\\_manipulateur\\_positif\\_MAPAQ.pdf?1585664595](https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/agriculture-pecheries-alimentation/publications-adm/Covid-19/GM_covid19_manipulateur_positif_MAPAQ.pdf?1585664595)
  - <https://www.inspection.gc.ca/covid-19/cfia-information-for-industry/eng/1584462704366/1584462704709>
  
- ❖ Europe.
  - <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/coronavirus-no-evidence-food-source-or-transmission-route>
  - <https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/349/can-the-new-type-of-coronavirus-be-transmitted-via-food-and-objects.pdf>
  - <https://www.fsai.ie/faq/coronavirus.html>
  
- ❖ Other resources:
  - <https://www.foodchainid.com/about/covid-19-resources/covid-19-reports-webinars/> (Emerging issue digest: download)
  - <https://securite-alimentaire.public.lu/fr/professionnel/Coronavirus-SARS-CoV-2-questions-reponses.html>
  - [https://mygfsi.com/news\\_updates/update-on-temporary-audit-measures-during-covid-19-pandemic](https://mygfsi.com/news_updates/update-on-temporary-audit-measures-during-covid-19-pandemic)