

19 March 2020

Advice for food businesses on Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

Key messages

- Ensure that the regulatory requirements laid out by Regulations Governing General Hygiene Requirements for Food Premises, the Transport of Food and Related Matters (Regulation No R.638 of 2018) are met as a minimum requirement.
- Everyone should practice good hygiene when preparing and handling food.
- Practice good hand hygiene – wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Good manufacturing practices to be followed – clean and sanitise food preparation surfaces.
- There is currently no evidence that COVID-19 is spread through food.
- Normal cleaning and sanitation measures will minimise the risk in a food service.

Q&A

Q: Can it be spread by foodborne transmission?

A: There is currently no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus.

EFSA's chief scientist, Marta Hugas said: "Experiences from previous outbreaks of related coronaviruses, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) and Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), show that transmission through food consumption did not occur. At the moment, there is no evidence to suggest that coronavirus is any different in this respect."

Q: How long does COVID-19 last on surfaces?

A: According to the World Health Organization, it is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

If you think a surface may be contaminated, clean it with a common household disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others. Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

The following link outlines some preliminary research which includes survival time frames for different materials as follows:

- Plastic and stainless steel: 2-3 days
- Metals (e.g. aluminium and copper): 4 hours
- Wood materials (e.g. cardboard and paper): 24 hours

- Aerosols: 3 hours

<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.09.20033217v2>

Q: Do you recommend additional packaging wipe down and sanitation procedures for transportation of product?

A: There is currently no recommendation to include additional packaging wipe down and additional sanitation procedures for transportation of product. Care should be exercised to ensure that packaging is not contaminated in any way. In general, human coronaviruses are not particularly stable on dry surfaces. Inactivation in dry conditions generally occurs within a period from a few hours to a couple of days. Due to the low environmental stability of coronaviruses, a transmission of the pathogen via this method seems unlikely in most cases. The drivers and handlers are therefore requested to practice good hand hygiene regularly.

Q: Should food businesses use disposables instead?

A: There is currently no evidence to suggest there is any benefit in switching to disposables. It is important that the measures we take to minimise transmission are effective. The most effective measures you can take are practising good hand hygiene and cleaning, with particular focus on shared frequently touched surfaces.

Q: Can coronavirus survive on crockery and cutlery?

A: While we are still finding out about the characteristics of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), we do know quite a bit about other related coronaviruses, which are likely to be similar in terms of susceptibility to inactivation.

Coronaviruses are enveloped viruses. The envelope surrounds the entire virus and without an intact envelope, the virus loses its infectivity (ability to infect a cell).

The envelope is a relatively delicate structure and makes the virus more susceptible to degradation in the environment. Due to the delicate nature of the viral envelope, coronaviruses are relatively sensitive to both heat and detergents (including soap).

For this reason, normal washing of dishes in hot water (or better still, a dishwasher) using detergent is likely to completely inactivate any coronavirus present.

Q: What should a food business do to protect against coronavirus?

A: All business as usual information about food safety is relevant and protective.

Food businesses can continue to practice good food handling hygiene. A food handler should already wash their hands:

- before starting work
- before handling cooked or ready-to-eat food
- after handling or preparing raw food
- after handling waste

- after cleaning duties
- after using the toilet
- after blowing nose, sneezing or coughing
- after eating drinking or smoking
- after handling money

Be aware of how used dishes are collected from a table. Minimising the risk of cross contamination by avoiding touching areas that have been in direct contact with the customer or food.

More frequent cleaning of shared surfaces, this could include door handles (front door, fridge/freezers, toilets/bathrooms), tables and chairs (arm rests or areas used to pull out the chair) salt and pepper shakers, sugar bowls, communal cutlery containers, access keypads.

Q: Do tables need to be 1 meter apart in cafes and restaurants?

A: The current advice is to practice social distancing. That means, just as it sounds, to create more space between each other in social situations. Placing tables at least one meter apart will help customers feel comfortable and achieve the social distancing currently advised. Some food businesses won't need to do anything as they already meet the distances, others might need to rearrange tables and chairs.

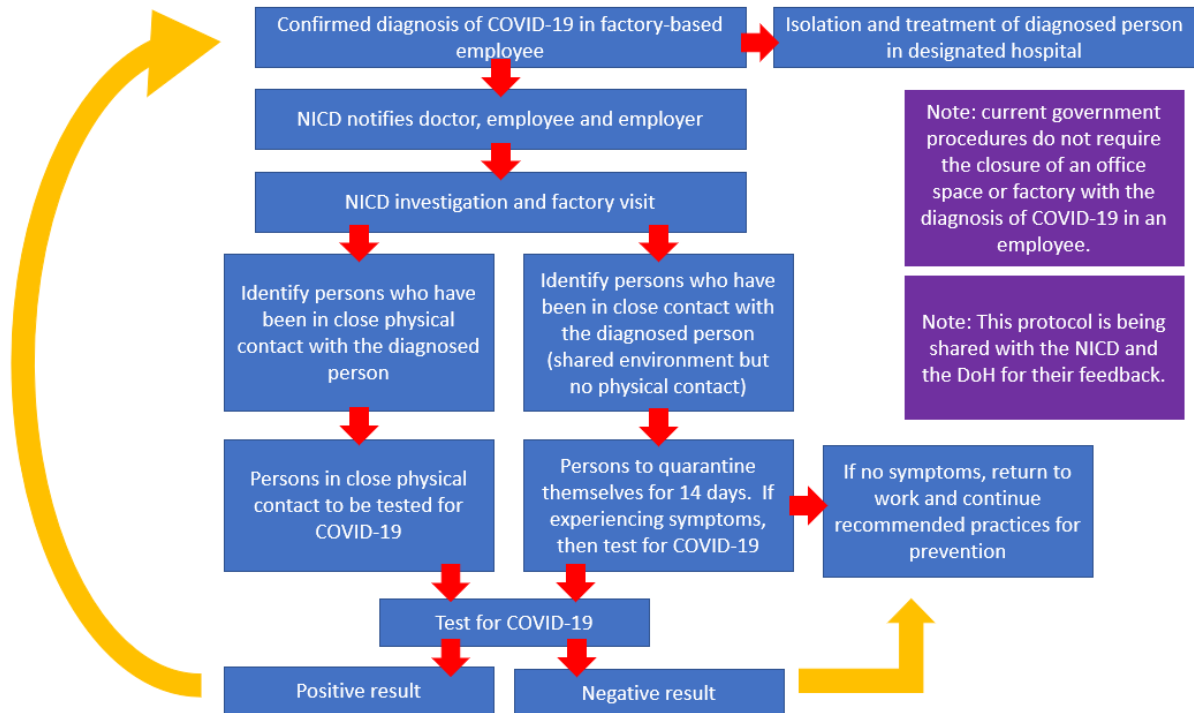
Q: Assuming an employee in a food manufacturing facility is diagnosed with COVID-19, is a factory closure required? If so, what is the protocol around this?

A: For now, neither the DoH nor NICD require the closure of a food manufacturing facility if an employee in the facility is found to have COVID-19. We have requested that the NICD develop guidelines specific to the food sector. For now, we have been referred to the general information available on the NICD and WHO's websites. The employees are requested to stay home if they feel unwell and follow the directions of their local health authority. According to a recent NEDLAC statement, employers and trade unions agreed to work together to manage issues like short time, shift work, changing working hours and lunch breaks to reduce too many workers congregating in one place.

<http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/>

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

One of our members has developed a flow diagram outlining a proposed procedure, which we are seeking inputs on from the NICD and the DoH. Please see below as reference in the interim.



Q: Who can we contact for more information on COVID-19 relating to the food sector?

A: At this stage, there is no specific contact point for the food sector. There are two public hotline numbers that can be used for this purpose for the time being i.e. 0800 029 999 and 0800 111 132.

Specific food worker and establishment guidance issued by the Washington State Department of Health

Review Employee Health Policies and Procedures

- Employee health policies should prohibit food workers from working in food establishments while sick.
- Review your sick leave policies and expand upon paid leave options for your workers, if possible. Offering paid sick leave will help mitigate the economic impacts of missed work for your employees, while simultaneously keeping the rest of your employees and customers well.
- Talk with your workers about employee health requirements and expectations. Now is a good time to retrain your employees as needed to make sure everyone is on the same page.
- Workers that are possibly sick with the symptoms matching COVID-19 should stay home. If possible, employees with family members/caregivers with symptoms matching COVID-19 should also stay home.
- Food workers and managers with coughing, shortness of breath, fever, or other symptoms of illness should not return to work until they are symptom-free. Current guidance is to stay

home until at least 72 hours after symptoms have gone away. This may be altered by medical diagnosis, local health direction, changing community conditions, or other factors.

- Per United States Centres of Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, employers are encouraged not to require employees to provide a doctor's note to return to work, because doing so will burden the medical system.

Increase Hand Hygiene

- Ensure all employees wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Make sure each handwashing station is always stocked with soap, paper towels, and warm, running water.
- Even with proper handwashing, Washington requires that food workers use a barrier such as tongs, gloves, or other utensil to prevent direct hand contact with food. The virus is likely to be inactivated by proper cooking temperatures; it is important to use gloves or other barriers to prevent touching foods that will not be fully cooked.
- Recommend all employees cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. If a tissue is not available, employees can sneeze into their shirt sleeve, but NOT into their hands. Discard tissues into a lined garbage bin and wash hands immediately with soap and water after each cough or sneeze.
- Remind employees to avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth to help slow the spread of germs. The current food safety rule requires workers wash their hands whenever they touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.
- To help customers keep their germs to themselves, provide tissues, no-touch waste bins, and alcohol-based hand antiseptic rubs (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol as the active ingredient) in customer areas.

Clean and Sanitize

- It is expected that the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is, like other coronaviruses, also susceptible to United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered sanitizers and disinfectants. As of now there is no recommended change to currently approved sanitizers.
- Only use sanitizers registered with EPA as a sanitizer. Read the sanitizer label and follow usage directions. Be sure to measure the concentration of the sanitizer with test strips to make sure the active ingredient is available. The EPA has a list of registered sanitizers labelled for use against the novel coronavirus. Note: There may be additional disinfectants that meet the criteria and EPA will update the list as needed.
- When disinfecting for coronavirus, EPA recommends following the product label use directions for enveloped viruses, as indicated by the approved emerging viral pathogen claim on the master label. If the directions for use for viruses/viricidal activity list different contact times or dilutions, use the longest contact time or most concentrated solution.
- Note: These disinfection concentrations may exceed the allowable levels allowed for use on food contact surfaces such as dishes and utensils. Be sure to follow the label directions for

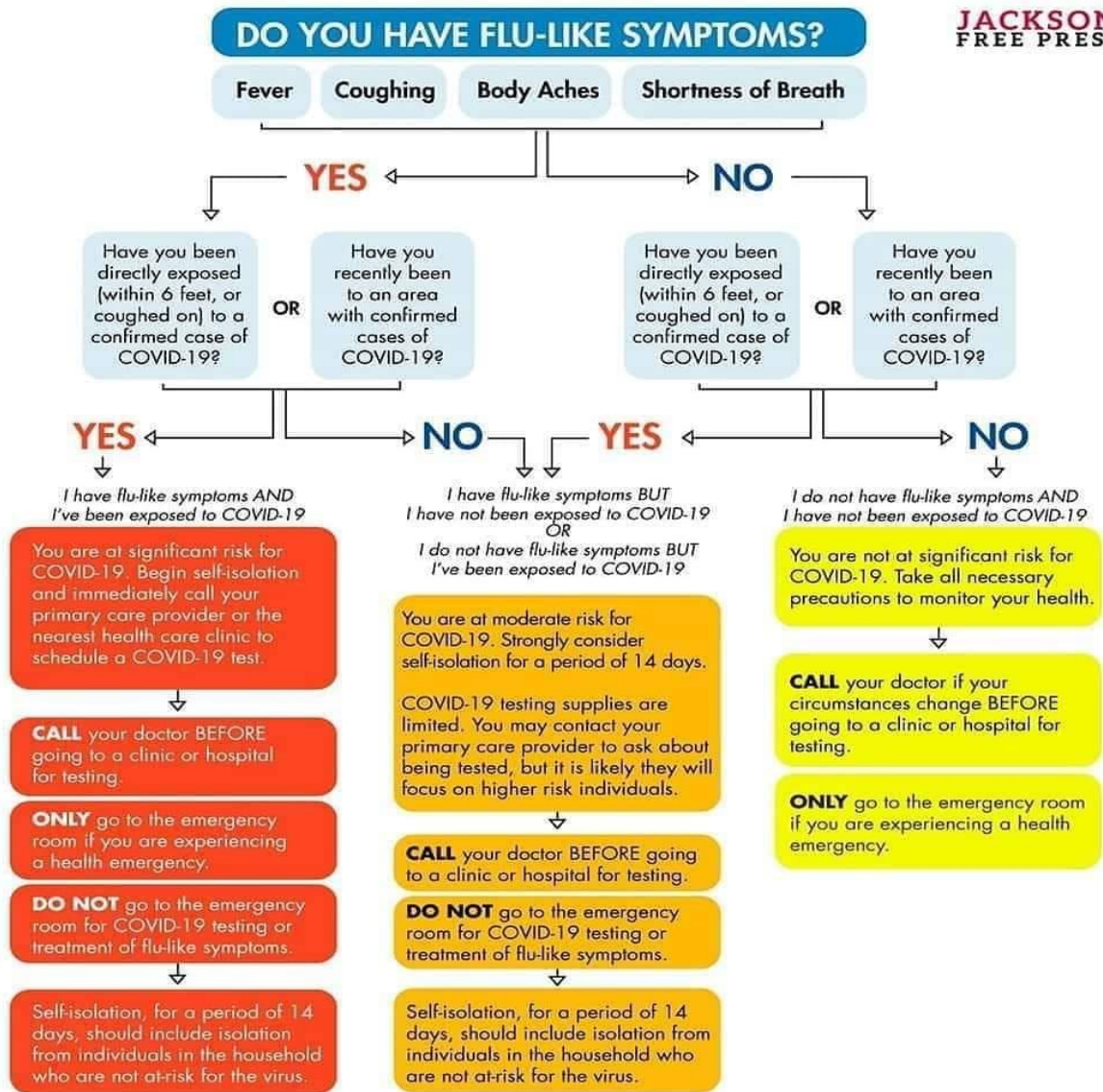
FOOD CONTACT SURFACES when using the chemical near or on utensils and food contact surfaces.

- If you have questions about your particular sanitizer, please carefully read the package label or reach out to your chemical provider for more information.
- Be sure to wash and rinse equipment of visible dirt or debris before sanitizing. Sanitizers work better on clean surfaces.
- All food contact surfaces such as utensils, cutting boards, and serving ware must be washed, rinsed, and sanitized often throughout the day. Be sure dishes are properly washed and sanitized with chemicals or a high-heat dishwasher after each customer's use.
- All non-food contact surfaces, such as equipment, counters, menus, tables, chairs, bathrooms, and doors should be cleaned of spills as needed and sanitized often. Wash, rinse, and sanitize non-food contact surfaces that employee and customers touch throughout the day.
- To help protect your workers and customers, increase the frequency of cleaning and sanitizing customer-access areas. Use a separate wiping cloth and sanitizing solution when sanitizing the front of house/customer-access areas.
- Consider removing decorative objects, papers, and other unneeded materials from counters to allow for thorough sanitization of unobstructed surfaces.
- Sanitize outside of condiment containers and other items frequently handled such as doorknobs, backs of chairs, faucet handles, tabletops, and menus at least daily.
- At this time, there are no state-wide restrictions on customer self-service such as beverage dispensers, bulk food containers, or salad bars. To help customers reduce illness wash, rinse, and sanitize tongs and other utensils in self-service areas often throughout the day and provide alcohol-based hand antiseptic rubs at the entrance to the facility.

Provincial Communicable Disease Control Directorate and Port Health and Environmental Health Contacts

Provincial Communicable Disease Control Directorate			
Eastern Cape	Thomas Dlamini Nosimphiwo Mgobo	thomas.dlamini@echealth.gov.za Nosimphiwo.Mgobo@echealth.gov.za	083 378 0189 060 579 9027
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Western Cape	Charlene Jacobs	Charlene.Jacobs@westerncape.gov.za	072 356 5146 / 021 483 9964
Port Health and Environmental Health			
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Northern Region (Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West)	Ockert Jacobs	Ockert.Jacobs@health.gov.za	012 395 9417 082 372 0556
Coastal Region (KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, Western Cape)	Antoinette Hargreaves	Antoinette.Hargreaves@health.gov.za	031 301 0381 083 460 0935

The following decision-tree can be adapted for use in businesses.



SOURCE: MSDH and the CDC

Practice heightened hygiene standards.

WASH YOUR HANDS regularly, and always after public exposure or contact. 20 seconds of handwashing (sing happy birthday twice) is required for effective cleansing of COVID-19. If soap and water is unavailable, hand sanitizer with a minimum 60% alcohol content is the next best thing.

PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING. Keep your distance from others, avoid shaking hands, and take care to avoid public surfaces and objects, such as in public bathrooms.

AVOID LARGE GATHERINGS where possible. Gatherings of over 250 people especially should be reconsidered while the spread of the virus is being assessed.

Please note that in South Africa, gatherings of more than 100 people are not permitted and that the sale, dispensing or transportation of alcoholic beverages is prohibited between 6pm-9am Mon-Sat; Sun/public holidays 1pm-9am.

References

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/food-safety/food-businesses/covid-19-and-food-business>

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020/FoodWorkers>

<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.09.20033217v2>

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