

Food Safety Advice for COVID-19

Can COVID-19 be transmitted in food?

Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with the transmission of COVID-19. The primary risk of transmission is from close contact with an infected person, either directly (droplets from coughing, sneezing, etc.) or indirectly (contact surfaces). Current information suggests that the virus may survive up to 72 hours on hard surfaces depending on the material, so extra care should be taken to reduce the risk during food handling activities.

What can food businesses do to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

- Exclude staff from entering the workplace if they are ill or have symptoms of respiratory illness
- Advise a supervisor if a food handler suspects they may have contaminated food
- Clean and sanitise food contact surfaces as well as disinfect other touch points such as door handles, light switches, bathroom fixtures and EFTPOS keypads
- Practice good personal and hand hygiene
- Maintain safe food practices such as cooking food thoroughly and storing potentially hazardous food under temperature control
- Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing, sneezing or sore throat
- Practice social distancing where possible (e.g. consider position of staff)
- Avoid handling money and encourage the use of contactless payments. If employees must handle money, it is important to wash hands afterwards and always prior to handling food
- Provide hand sanitiser where possible
- Leave doors open, where possible, to minimise contact. Practicable measures must be taken to prevent the entry of pests such as flies
- Avoid leaving chairs in waiting areas as these will need to be cleaned and sanitised regularly

When is handwashing required?

Food handlers must wash hands with soap and warm running water:

- After coughing, sneezing or blowing their nose
- Before handling cooked or ready-to-eat food, or after handling raw food
- After handling waste, rubbish bins or undertaking cleaning duties
- After eating, drinking, smoking or using the toilet
- After handling money, touching his or her hair, scalp, mouth, nose or ears
- Upon entering a kitchen and in any instance where hands may contaminate food

Note: Hand sanitisers may be used as an added measure only, and should not replace hand washing.

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Are food handlers required to wear gloves?

Food handlers must take practicable measures to prevent unnecessary contact with ready-to-eat foods such as cooked or cured meats, salads, fruit, sandwiches and cakes. Common ways to achieve this are with the use of food-grade disposable gloves and/or utensils.

Where disposable gloves are used by food handlers, they must ensure:

- Hands are thoroughly washed between glove changes to prevent transferring contamination from the used gloves to the replacement ones. Never reuse gloves once removed
- Gloves are used for single tasks only and are changed frequently to prevent the transfer of pathogenic microorganisms and other contaminants
- Gloves are changed between handling raw food and handling ready-to-eat food, or between non-food related activities such as cleaning, opening/closing doors by hand, handling money, emptying bins and removing garbage

Food handlers must be aware that wearing gloves can allow bacteria to build up on the surface of their hands, so hand washing is important when gloves are removed to avoid subsequent contamination of food.

Food businesses providing takeaway and delivery

Food businesses offering takeaway and home deliveries should implement ways to reduce risk. Examples include:

- Limiting the number of people who come into the food business at any one time, especially if space is limited at the entrance of the shop
- Implementing spacing measures (e.g. floor markers) at tills or queues where possible
- Having signage on the door informing the number of people allowed in the shop at any one time
- Consider prohibiting 'keep' cups/containers as an extra precautionary measure
- When delivering, leaving food at door, alert customer, then moving back to a safe distance so there is no contact
- Using an app for delivery details and transactions, or a display delivery note to direct couriers where to leave deliveries
- Keeping delivery vehicles, hot bags/eskies and ice bricks clean and sanitised
- Ensuring food is delivered promptly and within correct temperatures

It is vital for food businesses to be extra vigilant with all aspects of health and hygiene, to ensure no-one contaminates surfaces within the food service or processing environment due to illness or unhygienic habits.

For further details, please contact Health Services

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