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Guidance

Guidance for food businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19)

Published 25 March 2020

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What you need to know about coronavirus and food

It is very unlikely that you can catch coronavirus from food.

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness. It is not known to be transmitted by exposure to food or food packaging.

Any food handler who is unwell should not be at work. If they have symptoms, they should follow government advice and stay at home (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>).

Although it is very unlikely that coronavirus is transmitted through food, as a matter of good hygiene practice anyone handling food should wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This should be done as a matter of routine, before and after handling food, and especially after being in a public place, blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Food business operators should continue to follow the Food Standard Agency's ([FSA](https://www.food.gov.uk)) guidance on good hygiene practices (<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-hygiene>) in food preparation and their Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point ([HACCP](https://www.food.gov.uk)) processes.

We support measures to allow safe privileged access to supermarkets and food businesses for the elderly and essential workers such as NHS staff.

Food hygiene guidance

A Food Safety Management System ([FSMS](https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/food-hygiene-for-your-business)) that includes existing food hygiene guidance (<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/food-hygiene-for-your-business>) and [HACCP](https://www.food.gov.uk) processes should be followed.

Employers should stress the importance of more frequent handwashing and maintaining good hygiene practices in food preparation and handling areas. Employees should wash their hands for 20 seconds, especially after being in a public place, blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing.

Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products. Food businesses can refer to the Food Standards Agency's safer food, better business ([SFBB](https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/safer-food-better-business)) (<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/safer-food-better-business>) guidance for further guidance on expected food hygiene standards.

Businesses can help reduce the spread of coronavirus by reminding everyone of the government's public health advice. Posters, leaflets and other materials (<https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/101/resources/5016>) are available online.

The [FSA](https://www.food.gov.uk)'s guidance on good hygiene practices (<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-hygiene>) in food preparation and their [HACCP](https://www.food.gov.uk) processes guidance is intended to ensure staff follow good hygiene practices to prevent the spread of disease to food. Key safety points include being fit for work, washing hands and wearing aprons or other clean clothing as appropriate. The [FSA](https://www.food.gov.uk) Safe Method checklist (<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/personal-hygiene-fitness-to-work.pdf>) allows employers to assess the personal hygiene and fitness to work practices in their workplace.

Food packaging

The World Health Organization ([WHO](https://www.who.int)) advises that the likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low. The risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, travelled, and exposed to different conditions and temperature is also very low.

While food packaging is not known to present a specific risk, efforts should be made to ensure it is cleaned and handled in line with usual food safety practices.

Cleaning should be in line with food hygiene practice and the environmental controls set out in the business' HACCP. Staff should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of working. No additional precautions need to be taken.

Cleaning and waste disposal

The government has provided guidance on cleaning and waste disposal (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>) to help businesses reduce the spread of coronavirus.

Managing employee sickness

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>). If you or an employee are experiencing symptoms, visit NHS 111 online or call 111 if there is no internet access. In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured, or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home unless government policy changes. You should keep monitoring the government response to coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) for further updates.

The Food Standards Agency's fitness for work (<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fitnesstoworkguide.pdf>) guidance for staff who handle food products provides advice on managing sickness in a food business. Understanding this guidance and applying it on both a personal and business level can help to prevent the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Social distancing

The advice on social distancing measures applies to everyone. You need to minimise opportunities for the virus to spread by maintaining a distance of 2 metres between individuals. This advice applies to both inside the food business and in the external public areas where customers may need to queue. People should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds and more frequently than normal.

The practical implementation of this advice will depend on the local circumstances. This may be best evaluated by the store manager, however a few general indicators may be relevant to the majority of retail outlets:

- use additional signage to ask customers not to enter the shop if they have symptoms
- regulate entry so that the premises do not become overcrowded
- use floor markings inside the commercial spaces to facilitate compliance with the social distancing advice of 2 metres, particularly in the most crowded areas, such as serving counters and tills
- use vertical signage to direct customers into lanes if feasible to facilitate movement within the premises while maintaining 2 metre distance

- make regular announcements to remind customers to follow social distancing advice and clean their hands regularly
- place plexiglass barriers at tills and counters if feasible, as an additional element of protection for workers and customers
- encourage the use of contactless payments where possible, without disadvantaging older or vulnerable customers
- provide additional pop-up handwashing stations or facilities if possible, providing soap, water and hand sanitiser

Further information on social distancing and adults who are at increased risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>) can be found on GOV.UK.

Maintaining social distancing in specific food business settings

Food processing plants

Food safety practices in food processing plants should continue to be delivered to the highest hygiene standards including the use of some personal protective equipment and frequent hand washing.

All employers are expected to follow social distancing guidance, including food businesses, as far as is reasonably possible. Where the production environment makes it difficult to do so, employers should consider what measures may be put in place to protect employees. Once staff have left the food processing areas and removed protective clothing, social distancing and further hand washing guidance should be adhered to.

Supermarkets

Supermarkets need to avoid crowding and create adequate spacing between individuals.

Effective measures to support this will vary by store and location but could include:

- monitoring the number of customers within store and limiting access to avoid congestion
- implementing queue management systems to limit crowds gathering at entrances and maintain the 2 metres distance
- reminding customers to only buy what they need

Public Health England (PHE) supports measures to allow safe privileged access to elderly and essential workers such as NHS and Social Care staff.

Staff canteens and rest areas

It is very unlikely that coronavirus is transmitted through food. Workplace canteens may remain open where there are no practical alternatives for staff to obtain food.

- as far as reasonably possible, a distance of 2 metres should be maintained between users
- staff can continue to use rest areas if they apply the same social distancing
- notices promoting hand hygiene and social distancing should be placed visibly in these areas
- if possible, increase the number of hand washing stations available

Takeaways and restaurants offering a pick-up service

For these services:

- no orders should be taken in person on the premises - this should be communicated to customers by appropriate means such as signage
- businesses should therefore only take orders online or by telephone
- customers could have staggered collection times - customers should be discouraged from entering the premises until their order is ready
- customers arriving without having already placed an order should be encouraged to leave the premises to place their order by telephone or online and to return at a designated time for collection
- customers whose orders are ready should enter one at a time to collect orders and make payments
- businesses should discourage crowding outside the premises. Where possible, use queue management systems to maintain the 2 metres separation

Outdoor food markets and farmers markets

The main concern with outdoor food markets is to avoid crowds gathering. Local Authorities may have decided to close such markets as part of actions taken to maintain social distancing.

Where markets are still in operation, we encourage food market operators to consider how they can safely sell their products without encouraging crowds and ensure hygiene measures are in place. This can be done by:

- taking orders online or by telephone in advance and pre-packing orders to limit face-to-face time in the market
- considering delivery services if possible