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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Crisis management in food, animals and plants
Food hygiene

COVID-19 and food safety

Questions and Answers

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1. RISK OF INFECTION THROUGH FOOD

1.1. What is the risk of COVID-19 infection from food products?

Despite the large scale of the pandemic, there has been no report of transmission of COVID-19 via consumption of food to date. Therefore, as stated by the European Food Safety Authority¹, there is no evidence that food poses a risk to public health in relation to COVID-19. The main mode of transmission for COVID-19 is considered to be from person to person, mainly via respiratory droplets that infected people sneeze, cough or exhale.

1.2. As a food business operator, can I ask for guarantees from my suppliers with regard to COVID-19?

No. A “virus-free” certification cannot be justified as there is no evidence that food poses a risk to public health in relation to COVID-19. Any request for such guarantees is thus disproportionate and as a consequence not acceptable.

1.3. What is the risk of getting COVID-19 from food packaging?

Although according to a recent study² the causal agent of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) was shown to persist for up to 24 hours on cardboard and up to several days on hard surfaces such as steel and plastics in experimental settings (e.g. controlled relative humidity and temperature), there is no evidence that contaminated packages, which have been exposed to different environmental conditions and temperatures, transmit the infection. Nonetheless, to address concerns that virus present on the skin might be able to transfer to the respiratory system (for example by touching the face), persons handling packaging, including consumers, should adhere to the guidance of public health authorities regarding good hygiene practices, including regular and effective hand-washing.

2. FOOD PRODUCTION

2.1. Is the agri-food industry taking measures to avoid that the food they produce or distribute is contaminated by the virus?

Strict hygiene rules already govern the production of food in the EU and their implementation is subject to official controls. All food businesses must apply them. The hygiene controls to be implemented by food business operators are designed to prevent the contamination of the food by any pathogens, and will therefore also aim at preventing contamination of the food by the virus responsible for COVID-19. Regular training actions in food businesses on all these requirements are mandatory so that people working in the food industry know how to work hygienically.

Among the good hygiene practices required at all stages of food production, of particular relevance are cleaning and, where appropriate, disinfection of

¹ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/coronavirus-no-evidence-food-source-or-transmission-route>

² <https://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMc2004973?articleTools=true>

food producing facilities and equipment between production lots, avoidance of cross-contamination between categories of food and food at different stages of the process (e.g. raw versus cooked food), personal hygiene such as washing and disinfecting hands, wearing gloves and masks where required, use of dedicated hygienic clothes and shoes, or staying at home, away from work whenever feeling ill.

Furthermore, in the present context, food businesses should limit their external contacts to the absolute necessary, for example with suppliers or trucks while keeping distance from the drivers.

2.2. The lockdown may limit controls on the application of hygiene in food businesses. Does this undermine the safety of food in general?

Even though official controls are part of a safe food chain, the current limitations (including the possible risk-based postponement of some official control activities) are not considered to affect the safety of food, which first and foremost relies on the commitment of all actors of the food chain, from farm to fork, with the primary responsibility lying on food business operators. Food safety is primarily achieved through preventive measures (good hygiene practices). Food business operators have to demonstrate that these preventive measures are always in place during food production and that they are effective by means of checks and testing on their production process and food (so-called own-controls). This is in turn inspected by the food safety authorities. Even where the lockdown may affect the modalities of official controls, it does not affect the safety of food produced.

In that regard, the Commission adopted a Regulation³ allowing Member States to carry out control actions in a way compatible with movement restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19, under appropriate safeguards, so that food safety be not compromised. These measures apply for two months and will then be reviewed, based on information from Member States.

2.3. What happens if a food business employee is infected with COVID-19?

Specific protocols have been established within the food processing industry to safeguard the health of employees. These measures come in addition to usual food hygiene and workers safety practices, and they adapt to the possibilities on the ground. Such measures include social distancing while at work, plexiglass when distance cannot be maintained, no contact between truck drivers and the food facility, more hand sanitizers at disposal, working in turns to ensure no more workers than strictly necessary in the facility, or where possible working from home. Under the special recommendations for COVID-19 now in place, any person presenting symptoms indicative of COVID-19 is requested to stay at home, to prevent the spread of virus.

Even in the case where people might be infected while not (yet) ill (asymptomatic carriers of the virus), the existing legislation minimises the

³ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/466 on temporary measures to contain risks to human, animal and plant health and animal welfare during certain serious disruptions of Member States' control systems due to Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), OJ L 98, 31.3.2020, p. 30.

risk of virus particles coming into contact with foodstuffs, since every person working in a food-handling area must maintain a high degree of personal hygiene including wearing suitable, clean and, where necessary, protective clothing and constantly apply good hygiene practices (regular handwashing, no unhygienic behaviours allowed such as sneezing or coughing when producing or handling food, etc.).

There is every reason to believe that existing sanitation measures are as effective on COVID-19 as on other microbiological risks⁴. Furthermore, food businesses should perform additional sanitation measures when appropriate, based on risk, all the more in the case an employee results positive to the virus. These measures, combined with the fact that food is not known to be a source of transmission, provide assurance on the safety of food production.

2.4. There might be shortages of hand disinfectants due to distribution problems. How can this be addressed in a food business?

EU food safety legislation requires all food business operators to ensure that employees take adequate hygienic measures. This includes frequent washing of hands using soap. Where additional disinfection is necessary, this must be used as directed. In the case of shortage, local food safety authorities will consider such issues case-by-case and may help businesses find alternative safe solutions so that food safety remains ensured. These could include using alternative products or ensuring more frequent washing of hands with soap.

2.5. As a food business operator, how do I protect my employees from getting infected?

Food business operators must train the employees on how to properly use personal protective equipment and remind them on how important it is to follow instructions on personal hygiene and social distancing during breaks at work.

3. FOOD IN SHOPS

3.1. Can I get infected through the handling of food by people who may be infected?

According to food safety agencies in the EU Member States, it is very unlikely that you can catch COVID-19 from handling food. The European Food Safety Authority stated in addition that there is currently no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus⁵.

No information is currently available on whether the virus responsible for COVID-19 can be present on food, survive there and infect people. At the same time, there is no evidence to date that food has been a source or vehicle

⁴ https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Environmental-persistence-of-SARS_CoV_2-virus-Options-for-cleaning2020-03-26_0.pdf

⁵ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/coronavirus-no-evidence-food-source-or-transmission-route>

of infection while there is no doubt that people currently ill have been infected by contact with other infected people.

Theoretically, as is the case for any contact surface contaminated by an infected person, be it a door handle or another surface, food could also lead to indirect contamination through touching it. This is why everybody should follow the recommendations of public health authorities on the washing of hands.

Retailers are aware of hygiene requirements when handling food. Staff who needs to manipulate food (for example cutting meat, slicing meat or dairy products, cleaning fish, packaging fruit and vegetables) wears gloves and frequently replaces them, or otherwise frequently washes his/her hands.

Consumers should also play their role. As a general good hygiene practice, customers in shops should not handle food other than what they intend to purchase, so as to avoid contaminating it with any pathogen that may be present on their hands.

3.2. As a retailer, how can I protect myself and my clients from getting infected by other people when visiting my shop?

Make sure hygiene and cleaning routines are up to date and ensure strict compliance, including clear communication on customer hygiene behaviour rules. Retailers are also recommended to manage the entrance of external suppliers of products and services (cleaning, etc).

As the virus responsible for COVID-19 is mainly resistant on smooth inert surfaces such as plastic and stainless steel, retailers are recommended to clean these surfaces frequently: for example shopping carts or self-scans. Regular disinfection of the supermarkets hand baskets should take place. Retailers may invite also customers to bring their own shopping bags.

As requested by many authorities, ensure a safe physical distance between people as advised by public health authorities, for example by marking the floor at certain intervals and limit the number of people present in your shop at the same time. Retailers can also recommend consumers to use shopping carts to maintain that distance.

Food tastings for promotional campaigns should be avoided.

Where supplies allow, retailers can consider making available a hand disinfectant or disinfectant wipes at the entrance and/or even distribute single use gloves⁶ when people need to touch unpacked foodstuffs in shops (such as fruits or vegetables). When retailers do provide sanitation measures, they must insist that customers make use of them, and in the case of single use gloves, that they are appropriately disposed of.

⁶ If used correctly, gloves also contribute to protecting your fruits and vegetables from contamination by customers' handling. In some Member States the use of disposable gloves in the fruits and vegetable areas in the supermarket is in place since long-time and is supported by the customers.

If face-to-face service is needed and where it is not possible to maintain a safe distance among people, putting a glass or plexiglass screen between cashiers and customers (e.g. at checkout counters) is recommended as is encouraging the use of debit/credit card payments, preferably contactless, instead of cash. Periodical sanitisation of the card payment tool as well as the conveyor belt in the cashier is also recommended.

4. FOOD AT HOME

4.1. Can I get infected by the consumption of certain food?

According to food safety agencies in the EU Member States, it is very unlikely that you can catch COVID-19 from handling food. The European Food Safety Authority stated in addition that there is currently no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the COVID-19 virus⁷.

No information is currently available on whether the virus responsible for COVID-19 can be present on food, survive there and infect people. However, despite the large scale of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been no report of transmission of the COVID-19 via consumption of food to date. Therefore there is no evidence that food poses a risk to public health in relation to COVID-19.

The main mode of transmission for COVID-19 is considered to be from person to person, mainly via respiratory droplets that infected people sneeze, cough, or exhale.

4.2. Can I do something myself at home to minimise any potential risk from food conveying the virus responsible for COVID-19?

Yes.

First, washing thoroughly your hands (See ECDC tutorial on Effective Hand-Washing⁸) with soap and warm water before and after shopping is particularly important as it will protect yourself as well as others.

It is equally important to apply strictly the hygiene rules in your kitchen, that usually protect you from food poisoning.

Store your food properly (any contact between the food consumed raw and cooked food must be avoided), discard outer packaging before storage (for example cardboard outers where there is an inner plastic package) while keeping track of key information such as maximum duration limits.

Systematically wash fruits and vegetables with clean water, especially if they are not going to be cooked (COVID-19 will not survive cooking).

⁷ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/coronavirus-no-evidence-food-source-or-transmission-route>

⁸ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/poster-effective-hand-washing>

Avoid contamination by kitchenware (knives, plates, etc.) by carefully washing them with detergent in between using them for different food ingredients.

Respect cooking instructions (time, temperature) for food intended to be eaten cooked.

Wash your hands with warm water and soap before you start preparing or cooking food, as well as after having prepared food.

Fridge and kitchen surfaces should be cleaned routinely, though with increased frequency.

The precautions against COVID-19 should not make you forget the classic rules to avoid food poisoning when you cook at home that still apply and which protect you from foodborne illnesses that would further burden the healthcare facilities.

4.3. What about the food for my pet? What is the risk of COVID-19 infection of my pet from pet food?

As for human food, there has been no report of transmission of COVID-19 to animals via consumption of pet food (see 1.1 above). This assessment is also valid for feed for farmed animals. As for food for human consumption, it is very unlikely that you can catch COVID-19 from handling pet food. The recommendations regarding the handling of pet food packages are the same as for the handling of any other package (see 1.3 above).

5. MEMBER STATES RECOMMENDATIONS

Austria

<https://www.bmlrt.gv.at/land/produktion-maerkte/coronavirus-landwirtschaft.html>
<https://www.sozialministerium.at/Informationen-zum-Coronavirus/Coronavirus---Aktuelle-Maßnahmen.html>
<https://www.wko.at/service/aussenwirtschaft/coronavirus-wirtschaftskammer-als-anlaufstelle.html>
<https://www.bmlrt.gv.at/wasser/nutzung-wasser/wasserversorgung/coronavirus-lebensmittel-und-wasser.html>

Belgium

<https://www.info-coronavirus.be/>
<http://www.afsca.be/professionnels/publications/communications/coronavirus.asp>

Bulgaria

https://www.mzh.government.bg/media/filer_public/2020/04/06/vprosi_i_otgovori_new_11_06_04_2020_303b4mb.doc
<https://www.mh.government.bg/bg/informaciya-za-grazhdani/informaciya-otnosno-noviya-koronavirus-2019-ncov/>
http://www.babh.government.bg/bg/Page/ukazanie_kym_biznesoperatorite/index/ukazanie_kym_biznesoperatorite/COVID19%20Указан
<http://corhv.government.bg/?cat=28>
<http://www.babh.government.bg/userfiles/files/covid-19/%20%D0%BA%D1%8A%D0%BC%20%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%81%20%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%20%D0%B2%20%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%20%E2%80%9C%D0%A5%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8.doc>

Croatia

<https://www.hzjz.hr/priopcenja-mediji/pitanja-i-odgovori-o-bolesti-uzrokovanoj-novim-koronavirusom/>

[https://vlada.gov.hr/?id=28862&pregled=1&datum=Fri%20Feb%2028%202020%2018:03:29%20GMT+0100%20\(Central%20European%20Standard%20Time\)](https://vlada.gov.hr/?id=28862&pregled=1&datum=Fri%20Feb%2028%202020%2018:03:29%20GMT+0100%20(Central%20European%20Standard%20Time))

<https://zdravlje.gov.hr/koronavirus-i-mjere-prevencije/4952>

<https://www.koronavirus.hr/>

Cyprus

<https://www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus>

<https://www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus/en/index.html>

Czechia

Czech phone number for COVID19: 1212

<https://koronavirus.mzcr.cz/>

<http://www.szu.cz/>

<https://www.bezpecnostpotravin.cz/covid-19-informace-doporuceni-hygienicka-opatreni-bezpecnost-potravin.aspx>

<https://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/coronavirus-informace-mv.aspx>

<https://www.szpi.gov.cz/docDetail.aspx?docid=2264030&docType=ART&nid=13139> .

Denmark

[https://www.foedevarestyrelsen.dk/Leksikon/Sider/Coronavirus-\(COVID-19\).aspx](https://www.foedevarestyrelsen.dk/Leksikon/Sider/Coronavirus-(COVID-19).aspx)

Estonia

<https://www.terviseamet.ee/et/uuskoroonaviirus>

<https://vet.agri.ee/et/uudised/viiruse-tokestamise-juhised-toidukaitlejatele-ja-loomapidajatele>

<https://www.kriis.ee/en/basic-needs-food-medicinal-products-cash-communications-electricity-heating-and-fuel>

Finland

<https://www.ruokavirasto.fi/teemat/koronavirus-covid-19/> (Finnish)

<https://www.ruokavirasto.fi/sv/teman/coronaviruset-covid-19/> (Swedish)

France

<https://www.anses.fr/fr/content/coronavirus-alimentation-courses-nettoyage-les-recommandations-de-1%E2%80%99anses>

<https://www.anses.fr/fr/content/covid-19-pas-de-transmission-par-les-animaux-d%E2%80%99C3%A9levage-et-les-animaux-de-compagnie-0>

<https://agriculture.gouv.fr/covid-19-faq-alimentation-securite-sanitaire-et-protection-animale>

<https://agriculture.gouv.fr/covid-19-informations-sur-les-secteurs-du-ministere-de-lagriculture-et-de-lalimentation>

Germany

https://urldefense.com/v3/https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/can_the_new_type_of_coronavirus_be_transmitted_via_food_and_objects_-_244090.html

<https://www.bmel.de/DE/Ministerium/Texte/corona-virus-faq-fragen-antworten.html>

Greece

<http://www.efet.gr/index.php/el/enimerosi/deltia-typou/news-other-cat/item/4912-trofima-kai-koronoios-mas-rotate-sas-apantame>
<http://www.efet.gr/index.php/el/enimerosi/deltia-typou/news-other-cat/item/4904-enimerosi-katanaloton-kai-epixeiriseon-trofimon-o-neos-koronoios-sars-cov-2-ta-trofima-ta-metra-profylaksis>
<http://www.efet.gr/index.php/el/enimerosi/deltia-typou/news-other-cat/item/4906-anavoli-ekpaideftikon-programmaton-epitheoriton-kai-eksetaseon-xeiriston-trofimon>
<http://www.efet.gr/index.php/el/enimerosi/deltia-typou/news-other-cat/item/4907-anastoli-aftoprosopis-synallagis-me-to-koino>
<http://www.efet.gr/index.php/el/enimerosi/deltia-typou/kiroseis-cat/item/4909-anastoli-ypoxreosis-plieromis-prostimon>
<https://eody.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/covid-19-asfali-trofima.pdf>

Hungary

<https://koronavirus.gov.hu/>
<https://portal.nebih.gov.hu/koronavirus>

Ireland

<https://www.fsai.ie/faq/coronavirus.html>

Italy

<http://www.salute.gov.it/portale/nuovocoronavirus/dettaglioFaqNuovoCoronavirus.jsp?lingua=italiano&id=228#4>

Latvia

<https://www.zm.gov.lv/partikas-un-veterinarais-dienests/statiskas-lapas/covid-19-aktualitates?id=19855#jump>
[COVID-19 up-to-date information on the website of Ministry of Agriculture \(LV\)](#)
[COVID-19 info and helpline on the website of Cabinet of ministers \(EN\)](#)
[Order of the Minister for Agriculture No. 39 of Republic of Latvia Regarding Additional Regulations for the Handling of Food during the Emergency Situation Adopted 20 March 2020 \(EN\)](#)
[Order of the Minister for Economic Affairs No 1-6.1/2020/55 \(LV\)](#)
[Cabinet Order No. 103 of Republic of Latvia On Declaration of the Emergency Situation Adopted 12 March 2020 \(EN\)](#)

Lithuania

<https://vmvt.lt/aktualu-verslui-karantino-metu>

Luxembourg

<https://securite-alimentaire.public.lu/fr/consommateur/ConseilConsommateur/CORONAVIRUS-Questions-reponses.html>
<https://securite-alimentaire.public.lu/fr/consommateur/ConseilConsommateur/CORONAVIRUS-Questions-reponses/covid19-livraison-domicile.html>
<https://securite-alimentaire.public.lu/fr/professionnel/Coronavirus-SARS-CoV-2-questions-reponses.html>
<https://securite-alimentaire.public.lu/dam-assets/fr/publications/link-liste/professionnel/F-183-00-professionnels.pdf>
<https://securite-alimentaire.public.lu/dam-assets/fr/publications/link-liste/general/F-182-CORONAVIRUS-SARS-CoV-2.pdf>

Malta

<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/environmental/Pages/Home-Page.aspx>
<https://agriculture.gov.mt/en/vrd/Pages/home.aspx>

The Netherlands

<https://www.nvwa.nl/nieuws-en-media/actuele-onderwerpen/corona>
<https://www.rivm.nl/coronavirus/covid-19>
<https://www.rivm.nl/coronavirus/covid-19/vragen-antwoorden>
<https://www.voedingscentrum.nl/nl/thema/coronavirus-voeding.aspx>

Poland

<https://gis.gov.pl/aktualnosci/qa-dotyczace-zywnosci-i-koronawirusa/>
<https://www.wetgiw.gov.pl/inspekcja-weterynaryjna/zalecenia-dla-producentow-zywnosci-w-zwiazku-z-koronawirusem>

Portugal

<https://covid19estamoson.gov.pt>
<https://www.asae.gov.pt/espaco-publico/destaques/pode-o-novo-tipo-de-coronavirus-ser-transmissivel-atraves-da-comida.aspx>
<https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc22/comunicacao/noticia?i=covid-19-regras-para-uma-alimentacao-segura&fbclid=IwAR36I7WzkZ5p39aOX-linxmrQ7PH8AOPcUNUDGHfNeY1NUcNom4Vt1m3yd8>
<https://www.sns.gov.pt/noticias/2020/03/20/covid-19-orientacoes-na-area-da-alimentacao>
<https://nutrimento.pt/noticias/covid-19-orientacoes-na-area-da-alimentacao/>
<https://nutrimento.pt/activeapp/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Alimentac%CC%A7a%CC%83o-e-COVID-19.pdf>

Romania

<http://www.ansvsa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Recomandari-ANSVSA-COVID-19.pdf>
<http://www.ansvsa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Recomandari-fermieri-v2.pdf>
<http://www.ansvsa.ro/blog/recomandari-privind-aplicarea-unor-masuri-suplimentare-pentru-reducerea-riscului-de-contaminare-cu-covid-19-la-nivelul-unitatilor-de-vanzare-cu-amanuntul/>
<http://www.ansvsa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Recomandari-ANSVSA-pentru-operatori-si-consumatori.pdf>
<http://www.ms.ro/>

Slovakia

http://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4132:covid-19-zavery-z-ustredneho-krizoveho-tabu-sr-povinnos-nosenia-ruok-na-verejnosti-zatvorenie-obchodov-v-nedeu-tyleneny-nakupny-as-pre-seniorov-a-pod&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153
<http://www.svps.sk>
<https://www.uksup.sk/sk/covid-19>

Slovenia

<https://www.gov.si teme/koronavirus/>
<https://www.nijz.si/sl/koronavirus-2019-ncov>

Spain

<https://www.mscbs.gob.es/profesionales/saludPublica/ccayes/alertasActual/nCov-China/home.htm>
http://www.aecosan.mssi.gob.es/AECOSAN/web/noticias_y_actualizaciones/noticias/2020/coronavirus.htm

Sweden

<https://www.livsmedelsverket.se/livsmedel-och-innehall/bakterier-virus-parasiter-och-mogelsvampar/1/coronavirus>

6. OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

ECDC

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china/questions-answers>

EFSA

<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/fr/news/coronavirus-no-evidence-food-source-or-transmission-route>

Iceland

[FAQ: COVID-19 and foodstuff](#)

[FAQ: COVID-19 and animals](#)

<https://www.covid.is/english>

<https://www.covid.is/sub-categories/food-pets-and-animals>

<https://www.covid.is/categories/what-is-ban-on-public-events>

Norway

[Utbrudd av koronavirus | Mattilsynet](#)

Organisation Internationale des Epizooties

<https://www.oie.int/fr/expertise-scientifique/informations-specifiques-et-recommandations/questions-et-reponses-sur-le-nouveau-coronavirus2019/>

Switzerland

<https://www.blv.admin.ch/blv/de/home/das-blv/auftrag/one-health/coronavirus.html>

<https://www.blv.admin.ch/blv/fr/home/das-blv/auftrag/one-health/coronavirus.html>

<https://www.blv.admin.ch/blv/it/home/das-blv/auftrag/one-health/coronavirus.html>

United Kingdom

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-businesses/guidance-for-food-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

World Health Organization (see Les êtres humains peuvent-ils contracter la COVID-19 à partir d'une source animale ?)

<https://www.who.int/fr/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/q-a-coronaviruses>