COVID-19

Guidance for food businesses

This guidance is correct at the time of publishing.
However as it is subject to changes, please ensure that the information at time of issue is accurate and correct.
This guidance will assist food businesses in responding to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This guidance may be updated in line with the changing situation.

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 to self-isolate. 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 guidance on good hygiene practices in food preparation and their Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) processes.

The situation with coronavirus means that food business operators must evaluate, adapt and change to ensure that the risk of spread is minimised while maintaining a degree of business continuity. It is also extremely important that food supplies are maintained during this time and providing safe, nutritious food is vital to reduce any additional burdens on the health service. See Food businesses and coronavirus for further advice.

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

Food hygiene guidance

You must have procedures in place to control food safety following existing food hygiene guidance. If your business operations have changed, you may need to review and update your existing procedures.

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) 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. Ensure that posters, leaflets and other materials are on display and made available to staff.
**Food packaging**

The World Health Organization 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’ food safety procedures. Staff should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of working. No additional precautions need to be taken.

**Cleaning and waste disposal**

Refer to the local guidance on [cleaning in non-healthcare settings](#) to help businesses reduce the spread of coronavirus.

When bins are put out for collection, please **disinfect the handles**. After taking back in, disinfect the handles again and wash your hands thoroughly. Please also adhere to the following:

- Waste should be placed in external bins that can be closed/sealed, are of sound condition and can be easily cleaned and disinfected.
- In order to reduce the risk of attracting animals and pests (dogs, birds, rodents etc.) waste must not be allowed to accumulate outside external bins or overflow from the top of bins.
- Bins should be emptied at a frequency which prevents waste from accumulating in external areas.
- External waste storage areas should be cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis.

**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 self-isolation guidance.

They should be advised to seek clinical advice by using the online assessment at [gov.im/covidtest](http://gov.im/covidtest) to determine whether a call needs to be made to the **COVID 111 helpline**. They must self-isolate for 14 days from the onset of symptoms, regardless of whether the test result is positive or negative. If the test is positive, details will be passed to the Public Health Contact Tracing Service so any contacts can be followed up and advised. In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured, or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, MEDS 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 [business closure information page](#) for further updates.
The Food Standards Agency’s *fitness for work* 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

For further information see guidance on social distancing in the workplace

**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
We support measures to allow safe privileged access for the elderly and essential workers such as NHS 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:
• Where possible, it is recommended that orders are taken over the phone or online. If orders are taken within the premises, appropriate social distancing must be maintained at all times.
• customers could have staggered collection times - customers should be discouraged from entering the premises until their order is ready
• 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 / 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
This document has been localised for Isle of Man use and adapted using wording taken from the Public Health England COVID-19: guidance for food businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19).