

Environmental Health Division

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Guidance for Food Businesses

Food Safety and COVID-19

Adapted from Public Health England

What you need to know about coronavirus and food

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness and is not known to be transmitted by food.

Although there is no evidence that coronaviruses are transmitted through food, it is imperative for the food service industry to reinforce personal hygiene measures and food hygiene principles to eliminate and reduce the risk of food surfaces and food packing becoming contaminated with the virus from food handlers. It is also strongly advised to introduce physical (social) distancing and stringent hygiene and sanitation measures to protect the staff and customers from becoming contaminated with the virus.

Food business operators must continue to follow the Food Safety Standards set forth by the Environmental Health Division before COVID-19.

Any food handler who is unwell should not be at work. If they have symptoms, they should follow government advice and stay at home.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Fever
- Shortness of breath
- Cough

Food Hygiene Guidance

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 at least 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 and disinfecting products. If using household bleach (Clorox), use ¼ cup of Clorox to 1 gallon of water for non-food contact surfaces.

Food businesses can refer to the Government of the Virgin Islands webpage at www.bvi.gov.vg/covid-19 for a list of approved disinfectants.

Food preparation guidance is intended to ensure that staff follows good hygiene practices to prevent the spread of disease to food. Key safety points include:

- being fit for work
- washing hands for at least 20sec with soap and water
- wearing aprons or other clean clothing as appropriate
- avoiding touching eyes, nose, mouth
- using food-grade gloves properly when required
- covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue and discard properly after use

Wash hands:

- Before and after handling raw foods
- After using the restroom
- After taking out the garbage

- Before beginning a new task
- After coughing and sneezing
- After touching your body
- Before and after glove-use
- Generally, when your hands become soiled

Cashiers, stockers, delivery personnel, etc. should wash hands as often as possible or use an alcohol based (>60%) hand-sanitizer.

Note: Kitchen staff should not use hand sanitizer. They should wash their hands for at least 20sec with soap and water.

Managing Ill Employee

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home immediately and instructed to call the COVID-19 hotline at 852-7650 or the Public Health Unit at 468-2274. Clean and disinfect the workspace area.

If you or an employee is experiencing symptoms, call the COVID-19 hotline or the Public Health Unit. In an emergency, call 911 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.

Workers with a cough, runny nose, jaundice, diarrhea, vomiting, or nausea should not be permitted to work.

Cleaning, Sanitizing and Disinfecting

Frequently disinfect surfaces repeatedly touched by employees or customers such as door knobs, equipment handles, credit card machines, check-out counters, and grocery cart handles, etc.

Wash, rinse, and sanitize food contact surfaces, dishware, utensils, food preparation surfaces, and beverage equipment after use. Use 1 tablespoon (1 cap) of Clorox to 1 gallon of water.

Frequently clean and disinfect floors, counters, and other facility access areas.

Verify that your dish-washing machines are operating at the required wash and rinse temperatures and with the appropriate detergents and sanitizers.

Hot water (171°F for 30-60sec contact time) can be used in place of chemicals to sanitize equipment and utensils in manual ware-washing machines.

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 6 feet 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. If water and soap is not available, provide hand sanitizers for customers at the entrance of the establishment and throughout.

Various recommendations for social distancing include:

- use additional signage to ask customers not to enter the shop if they have symptoms
- allow a certain amount of persons to prevent overcrowding
- use floor markings inside the commercial spaces to facilitate compliance with the social distancing advice of 6 feet, particularly in the most crowded areas, such as serving counters and cashiers
- use vertical signage to direct customers into lanes if feasible to facilitate movement within the premises while maintaining 6 feet distance
- make regular announcements to remind customers to follow social distancing advice and clean their hands regularly
- place plexi-glass barriers at counters if feasible, as an additional element of protection for workers and customers
- provide additional temporary handwashing stations or facilities, providing soap, water and hand sanitiser

- discontinue operations (self-serving), such as salad bars, buffets, and beverage service stations that require customers to use common utensils or dispensers

Maintaining Social Distancing in Specific Food Business Settings

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 to avoid congestion
- implementing queue management systems to limit crowds gathering at entrances and maintain the 6 feet distance
- reminding customers to only buy what they need
- making frequent announcements for hand hygiene and social distancing

Staff Lunch Room and Rest Areas

Workplace lunch rooms may remain open where there are no practical alternatives for staff to obtain food.

- as far as reasonably possible, a distance of 6 feet 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
- increase the number of hand washing stations available

Restaurants Offering a Pick-up Service

Restaurants must only offer delivery or pick up services.

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, depending on the size of the business place
- businesses should discourage crowding outside the premises. Where possible, use queue management systems to maintain the 6 feet separation and make frequent announcements for hand hygiene and keeping social distance

Outdoor Food Markets and Farmers Markets

The main concern with outdoor food markets is to avoid crowds gathering. Additionally, all vendors must have a temporary hand-wash station at their respective stalls.

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

Food Delivery Service

Practice social distancing when delivering food, e.g., offering “no touch” deliveries and sending text alerts or calling when deliveries have arrived.

Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold by storing in appropriate transport vessels.

- Keep cold foods cold by keeping enough coolant materials, e.g., gel packs, ice.
- Keep hot foods hot by ensuring insulated cases are properly functioning.

Ensure that any wrapping and packaging used for food transport is done so that contamination of the food is prevented.

Routinely clean and sanitize coolers and insulated bags used to deliver foods.

Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces within the vehicle by wiping down surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.