Interim Guidance about COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease) for Food and Beverage Industry in the Caribbean
March 13, 2020

This document provides information on the COVID-19 for the food and beverage industry in the Caribbean. This information is based on currently available scientific evidence and expert opinion and is subject to change as new information becomes available. It should be read in conjunction with relevant national legislation, regulations and policies. This document has been adapted for the Caribbean situation, and therefore may differ from guidance developed by other agencies.

Key Points
• There is an outbreak of pneumonia caused by a new coronavirus, which is a family of viruses that includes the common cold, named COVID-19. The outbreak started in Wuhan, China and has spread to over 50 countries.
• Person-to-person spread is occurring in multiple countries, increasing the risk of international spread by travellers.
• The immediate health risk from COVID-19 to the general public in the Caribbean is very high as sustained community transmission has been reported in countries with direct flights to Member States.
• Travel warnings have been issued by the US Center for Diseases Control (CDC)
• Many Caribbean countries have issued travel restrictions for countries with sustained community transmission
• Travellers to Caribbean countries may be asked questions about their health and travel history upon arrival and may be quarantined by port authorities when they arrive.
• This notice will be updated as more information becomes available on the outbreak.

Background
On March 11, the Director-General (DG) of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a novel coronavirus, COVID-19 Public Health Emergency of International Concern, as a pandemic, due to its rapid spreads across the world. The virus has rapidly spread from China to over 100 countries. The International Health Regulations ‘Emergency Committee is not recommending trade or travel restrictions at this time. The US CDC has issued travel advisories in countries where there is demonstrated sustained transmission.
To date, 36 COVID-19 cases have been reported from 12 Caribbean countries. The rapidly evolving situation now requires a shift in mindset in all countries from preparedness to readiness and rapid response. CARPHA has upgraded the risk of disease transmission to the Caribbean Region to Very High. The revised risk level is based on international risk assessment guidelines, particularly in keeping with MERS-CoV and pandemic influenza and since multiple countries outside the epicentre of the outbreak have reported secondary cases from imported cases, including an increasing number of countries reporting sustained community transmission and sustained transmission of disease in countries with direct flights into the Caribbean Region, and reports of confirmed cases in at least two countries in the Caribbean sub-region.

What is the COVID-19?

The virus belongs in the same family of coronaviruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), 2002/03 outbreak (Reuters, CDC) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), 2012 outbreak. This 2019 virus is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. The cases in the Wuhan pneumonia outbreak have tested negative for both SARS and MERS-CoV.  

What are common signs and symptoms of infection?

A person infected may have the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Shortness of breath
- Cough
- Breathing difficulties
- Other flu like symptoms
- More severe cases: pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death

How is it transmitted?

Currently, the source of the outbreak is yet to be identified. Early information found samples from the environment in the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan City, but several of those infected did not visit the market. The virus has also been detected in health care workers caring for ill cases. Cases who have come in contact with sick persons have developed illness, indicating that person-to-person transmission has taken place. Precautions must therefore be taken to prevent human-to-human transmission of the disease.

It is currently unclear what the routes of transmission of COVID-19 are. However, from what we know from experience with other coronaviruses such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), they are mainly transmitted by:

---

• large respiratory droplets and direct or indirect contact with infected secretions
• Body fluids (e.g., blood, sweat, saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit, urine, or diarrhea)
• there have been some instances when airborne transmission of other coronaviruses was thought to have taken place through exposure to aerosols of respiratory secretions and sometimes faecal material
• Coughing or sneezing
• The COVID-19 can be spread by individuals that exhibit no symptoms
• COVID-19 is NOT spread by water, mosquitoes or food.

How a COVID-19 Outbreak Could Affect Workplaces

Similar to influenza viruses, SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, has the potential to cause extensive outbreaks. Under conditions associated with widespread person-to-person spread, multiple areas may see impacts at the same time. In the absence of a vaccine, an outbreak may also be an extended event. As a result, workplaces may experience:
  ■ Absenteeism: Workers could be absent because they are sick; are caregivers for sick family members; are caregivers for children if schools or day care centers are closed; have at-risk people at home, such as immunocompromised family members; or are afraid to come to work because of fear of possible exposure.
  ■ Change in patterns of commerce: Consumers may change shopping patterns because of a COVID-19 outbreak. Consumers may try to shop at off-peak hours to reduce contact with other people, show increased interest in home delivery services, or prefer other options, such as drive through service, to reduce person-to-person contact.
  ■ Interrupted supply/delivery: Shipments of items from geographic areas severely affected by COVID-19 may be delayed or cancelled with or without notification.

Steps All Employers Can Take to Reduce Workers’ Risk of Exposure to COVID-19

Develop an Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan

If one does not already exist, develop an infectious disease preparedness and response plan that can help guide protective actions against COVID-19.
Stay abreast of guidance from federal, state, local, tribal, and/or territorial health agencies, and consider how to incorporate those recommendations and resources into workplace-specific plans.

Plans should consider and address the level(s) of risk associated with various worksites and job tasks workers perform at those sites. Such considerations may include:
  ■ Where, how, and to what sources of COVID-19 might workers be exposed, including: { The general public, customers, and coworkers; and { Sick individuals or those at particularly high risk of infection (e.g., international travelers who have visited locations with widespread sustained (ongoing) COVID-19 transmission, healthcare workers who have had unprotected exposures to people known to have, or suspected of having, COVID-19).
Non-occupational risk factors at home and in community settings.
Workers’ individual risk factors (e.g., older age; presence of chronic medical conditions, including immunocompromising conditions; pregnancy).
Controls necessary to address those risks. Follow national and regional recommendations regarding development of contingency plans for situations that may arise as a result of outbreaks, such as:

- Increased rates of worker absenteeism.
- The need for social distancing, staggered work shifts, downsizing operations, delivering services remotely, and other exposure-reducing measures.
- Options for conducting essential operations with a reduced workforce, including cross-training workers across different jobs in order to continue operations or deliver surge services.
- Interrupted supply chains or delayed deliveries.

Plans should also consider and address the other steps that employers can take to reduce the risk of worker exposure to COVID-19 in their workplace, described in the sections below.

**Prepare to Implement Basic Infection Prevention Measures**

For most employers, protecting workers will depend on emphasizing basic infection prevention measures. As appropriate, all employers should implement good hygiene and infection control practices, including:

- Promote frequent and thorough hand washing, including by providing workers, customers, and worksite visitors with a place to wash their hands. If soap and running water are not immediately available, provide alcohol-based hand rubs containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Encourage workers to stay home if they are sick.
- Encourage respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes.
- Provide customers and the public with tissues and trash receptacles.
- Employers should explore whether they can establish policies and practices, such as flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), to increase the physical distance among employees and between employees and others if state and local health authorities recommend the use of social distancing strategies.
- Discourage workers from using other workers’ phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible.
- Maintain regular housekeeping practices, including routine cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, equipment, and other elements of the work environment.
Develop Policies and Procedures for Prompt Identification and Isolation of Sick People, if Appropriate

- Prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a critical step in protecting workers, customers, visitors, and others at a worksite.
- Employers should inform and encourage employees to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 if they suspect possible exposure.
- Employers should develop policies and procedures for employees to report when they are sick or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
- Where appropriate, employers should develop policies and procedures for immediately isolating people who have signs and/or symptoms of COVID-19, and train workers to implement them. Move potentially infectious people to a location away from workers, customers, and other visitors. Although most worksites do not have specific isolation rooms, designated areas with closable doors may serve as isolation rooms until potentially sick people can be removed from the worksite.
- Take steps to limit spread of the respiratory secretions of a person who may have COVID-19. Provide a face mask, if feasible and available, and ask the person to wear it, if tolerated. Note: A face mask (also called a surgical mask, procedure mask, or other similar terms) on a patient or other sick person should not be confused with PPE for a worker; the mask acts to contain potentially infectious respiratory secretions at the source (i.e., the person’s nose and mouth).
- If possible, isolate people suspected of having COVID-19 separately from those with confirmed cases of the virus to prevent further transmission—particularly in worksites where medical screening, triage, or healthcare activities occur, using either permanent (e.g., wall/different room) or temporary barrier (e.g., plastic sheeting).
- Restrict the number of personnel entering isolation areas.
- Protect workers in close contact with (i.e., within 6 feet of) a sick person or who have prolonged/repeated contact with such persons by using additional engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE. Workers whose activities involve close or prolonged/ repeated contact with sick people are addressed further in later sections covering workplaces classified at medium and very high or high exposure risk.

Develop, Implement, and Communicate about Workplace Flexibilities and Protections

- Actively encourage sick employees to stay home.
- Ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
- Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- Do not require a healthcare provider’s note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.

- Recognize that workers with ill family members may need to stay home to care for them.
- Be aware of workers’ concerns about pay, leave, safety, health, and other issues that may arise during infectious disease outbreaks. Provide adequate, usable, and appropriate training, education, and informational material about business-essential job functions and worker health and safety, including proper hygiene practices and the use of any workplace controls (including PPE). Informed workers who feel safe at work are less likely to be unnecessarily absent.
- Work with insurance companies (e.g., those providing employee health benefits) and state and local health agencies to provide information to workers and customers about medical care in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak.

Classifying Worker Exposure to COVID-19

Worker risk of occupational exposure to COVID-19 during an outbreak may vary from very high to high, medium, or lower (caution) risk. The level of risk depends in part on the industry type, need for contact within 6 feet of people known to be, or suspected of being, infected with COVID-19, or requirement for repeated or extended contact with persons known to be, or suspected of being, infected with COVID-19. Most workers in the food and beverage industry will fall in the medium or low categories.

Medium Exposure Risk

Medium exposure risk jobs include those that require frequent and/or close contact with (i.e., within 6 feet of) people who may be infected with COVID-19, but who are not known or suspected COVID-19 patients. In areas without ongoing community transmission, workers in this risk group may have frequent contact with travelers who may return from international locations with widespread COVID-19 transmission. In areas where there is ongoing community transmission, workers in this category may have contact be with the general public (e.g., in schools, high-population-density work environments, and some high-volume retail settings).

Lower Exposure Risk (Caution)

Lower exposure risk (caution) jobs are those that do not require contact with people known to be, or suspected of being, infected with COVID-19 nor frequent close contact with (i.e., within 6 feet of) the general public. Workers in this category have minimal occupational contact with the public and other coworkers.

Jobs Classified at Lower Exposure Risk (Caution): What to Do to Protect Workers

For workers who do not have frequent contact with the general public, employers should follow the guidance below:
Administrative Controls

■ Monitor public health communications about COVID-19 recommendations and ensure that workers have access to that information.
■ Collaborate with workers to designate effective means of communicating important COVID-19 information.

Personal Protective Equipment
Additional PPE is not recommended for workers in the lower exposure risk group. Workers should continue to use the PPE, if any, that they would ordinarily use for other job tasks.

**Jobs Classified at Medium Exposure Risk: What to Do to Protect Workers**

In workplaces where workers have medium exposure risk, employers should follow the guidance below:

*Engineering Controls*
■ Install physical barriers, such as clear plastic sneeze guards, where feasible.

*Administrative Controls*
■ Consider offering face masks to ill employees and customers to contain respiratory secretions until they are able leave the workplace (i.e., for medical evaluation/care or to return home). In the event of a shortage of masks, a reusable face shield that can be decontaminated may be an acceptable method of protecting against droplet transmission.
■ Keep customers informed about symptoms of COVID-19 and ask sick customers to minimize contact with workers until healthy again, such as by posting signs about COVID-19 in stores where sick customers may visit.
■ Where appropriate, limit customers’ and the public’s access to the worksite, or restrict access to only certain workplace areas.
■ Consider strategies to minimize face-to-face contact (e.g., drivethrough windows, phone-based communication, telework).
■ Communicate the availability of medical screening or other worker health resources (e.g., on-site nurse; telemedicine services).

*Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)*
When selecting PPE, consider factors such as function, fit, decontamination ability, disposal, and cost. Sometimes, when PPE will have to be used repeatedly for a long period of time, a more expensive and durable type of PPE may be less expensive overall than disposable PPE. Each employer should select the combination of PPE that protects workers specific to their workplace.
Workers with medium exposure risk may need to wear some combination of gloves, a gown, a face mask, and/or a face shield or goggles. PPE ensembles for workers in the medium exposure risk category will vary by work task, the results of the employer’s hazard assessment, and the types of exposures workers have on the job.
What can workers do to be prepared for COVID-19?

- Stay informed about the COVID-19 situation in your country. Updates will regularly be released by CARPHA and can be accessed at: [www.CARPHA.org](http://www.CARPHA.org). Additionally, information can be found through the WHO or US CDC websites.
- Be cautious of rumours and false statements that are made to spread fear. There are many rumours and lies going around on social media like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and others. Always check with a reliable source to see what the latest true news updates are. Knowing the truth will help you feel calmer and more confident in your ability to keep yourself and loved ones safe.
- Reduce exposure to COVID-19 and a range of illnesses by doing the following:
  - Frequently clean hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer
  - When coughing and sneezing cover your mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – throw tissue away immediately and wash hands
  - Avoid close contact with anyone who has fever and cough
  - If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early and share travel history or possible exposures with your health care provider
  - Stay home when you are sick to avoid the chance of infecting other people
- Know how to report customers or other staff with symptoms and exposure history compatible with COVID-19 to your supervisor.
  - Customers or staff who have symptoms AND exposure history consistent with the disease, should call an appropriate healthcare provider. Be sure to inform them that you suspect you were exposed to COVID-19 and ask if they can handle such patients or recommend a specific provider.
  - Seek guidance from your country’s Ministry of Health for which facilities in your area are prepared to handle possibly infected persons.
- Know who to contact in public health in your country, as well as first responders and healthcare providers, in case you have any questions or concerns.
- Procedures should be in place in the store / office for separating ill customers/staff from the rest of the store/goffice population and for minimizing the exposure of customers/staff to potentially contaminated environments while Public Health authorities are called.

What if a person with COVID-19 visits your store?

Not every person that sneezes, coughs, or is ill has COVID-19. There are many reasons a person may be ill and a person can sneeze or cough without being ill. So first, remain calm. There are a number of actions and precautions you can take to protect yourself.

Cleaning Staff

- Should a suspect case be identified in the store/office staff should feel safe to clean the environment as basic cleaning agents will sufficiently kill the virus. Staff should wear gloves, eye protection, a face mask, and protective gown only during the cleaning process or when in the same room with the sick person.
• It is important to ensure that environmental cleaning and disinfection procedures are followed consistently and correctly. Thoroughly cleaning high-touch surfaces with water and detergent and applying commonly used disinfectants (such as bleach) are effective and sufficient procedures. Equipment, laundry, food service utensils and waste should be managed in accordance with safe routine procedures.

• Used cloths, eating utensils, laundry and any other item in contact with a patient’s body fluids should be collected separately and disinfected in such a way as to avoid any contact with persons or contamination of the environment. Surfaces or objects contaminated with blood, other body fluids, secretions or excretions should be cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible using standard detergents/disinfectants. Manage laundry, food service utensils, and waste in accordance with safe routine procedures4, 5.
  
  o Bag or otherwise contain contaminated textiles and fabrics at the point of use
  o Handle contaminated textiles and fabrics with minimum agitation to avoid contamination of air, surfaces, and persons
  o Use leak-resistant containment for textiles and fabrics contaminated with blood or body substances
  o Identify bags or containers for contaminated textiles with labels, colour coding, or other alternative means of communication as appropriate
  o Don’t use laundry chutes
  o If hot-water laundry cycles are used, wash with detergent in water ≥160°F (≥71°C) for ≥25 minutes

What if staff members become ill?

Staff members may become ill from exposures at the store/office or outside of the store / office. Any staff member who exhibits symptoms while at home, should stay home. Working while sick could expose other staff members and other visitors. Staff that start to experience symptoms while at work should seek medical care on the onsite health facility if available. Staff should feel safe seeking care at the onsite health facility as they use anonymous health information systems to report illnesses. The medical staff there will give instructions on how to proceed. If there is no health facility onsite seek medical attention at an appropriate health facility. Call the facility to find out if they can receive potential COVID-19 patients or if they are referring these patients to another facility.

---


5 CDC 2003. Guidelines for Environmental Infection Control in Health-Care Facilities  https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5210a1.htm
Appendix A

For Further Information visit the following websites:


Appendix B

The following infographic from the WHO and IMO illustrates, in summary form, the key points to keep in mind for COVID-19 prevention when travelling on ships.

- Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub
- Cover nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with tissue or flexed elbow
- Avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms
- Thoroughly cook meat and eggs
Appendix C

How to properly put on and take off Personal Protective Equipment.

SEQUENCE FOR PUTTING ON PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

The type of PPE used will vary based on the level of precautions required, such as standard and contact, droplet or airborne infection isolation precautions. The procedure for putting on and removing PPE should be tailored to the specific type of PPE.

1. **GOWN**
   - Fully cover torso from neck to knees, arms to end of wrists, and wrap around the back
   - Fasten in back of neck and waist

2. **MASK OR RESPIRATOR**
   - Secure ties or elastic bands at middle of head and neck
   - Fit flexible band to nose bridge
   - Fit snug to face and below chin
   - Fit-check respirator

3. **GOGGLES OR FACE SHIELD**
   - Place over face and eyes and adjust to fit

4. **GLOVES**
   - Extend to cover wrist of isolation gown

USE SAFE WORK PRACTICES TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND LIMIT THE SPREAD OF CONTAMINATION

- Keep hands away from face
- Limit surfaces touched
- Change gloves when torn or heavily contaminated
- Perform hand hygiene
HOW TO SAFELY REMOVE PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)
EXAMPLE 2

Here is another way to safely remove PPE without contaminating your clothing, skin, or mucous membranes with potentially infectious materials. Remove all PPE before exiting the patient room except a respirator, if worn. Remove the respirator after leaving the patient room and closing the door. Remove PPE in the following sequence:

1. GOWN AND GLOVES
   • Gown front and sleeves and the outside of gloves are contaminated!
   • If your hands get contaminated during gown or glove removal, immediately wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
   • Grasp the gown in the front and pull away from your body so that the ties break, touching outside of gown only with gloved hands
   • While removing the gown, fold or roll the gown inside-out into a bundle
   • As you are removing the gown, peel off your gloves at the same time, only touching the inside of the gloves and gown with your bare hands. Place the gown and gloves into a waste container

2. GOGGLES OR FACE SHIELD
   • Outside of goggles or face shield are contaminated!
   • If your hands get contaminated during goggle or face shield removal, immediately wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
   • Remove goggles or face shield from the back by lifting head band and without touching the front of the goggles or face shield
   • If the item is reusable, place in designated receptacle for reprocessing. Otherwise, discard in a waste container

3. MASK OR RESPIRATOR
   • Front of mask/respirator is contaminated — DO NOT TOUCH!
   • If your hands get contaminated during mask/respirator removal, immediately wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
   • Grasp bottom ties or elastics of the mask/respirator, then the ones at the top, and remove without touching the front
   • Discard in a waste container

4. WASH HANDS OR USE AN ALCOHOL-BASED HAND SANITIZER IMMEDIATELY AFTER REMOVING ALL PPE

PERFORM HAND HYGIENE BETWEEN STEPS IF HANDS BECOME CONTAMINATED AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER REMOVING ALL PPE
Glove Use: Putting On and Taking Off

**Putting on gloves**
If wearing gown, extend to cover wrist of gown.

**Removing gloves**
*Remember: outside of gloves are contaminated*
1. Grasp outside of glove with opposite gloved hand; peel off.
2. Hold removed glove in gloved hand.
3. Slide fingers of ungloved hand under remaining glove at wrist.

---

Three Key Factors Required for a Respirator to be Effective

1. The respirator must be put on correctly and worn during the exposure.
2. The respirator must fit snugly against the user's face to ensure that there are no gaps between the user's skin and respirator seal.
3. The respirator filter must capture more than 95% of the particles from the air that passes through it.

*If your respirator has a metal bar or a molded nose cushion, it should rest over the nose and not the chin area.*