Interim Guidance on Food Safety during the COVID-19 
Pandemic (Coronavirus Disease) in the Caribbean 

May 12, 2020

This document provides information on Food Safety practices for food establishments and their workers in the Caribbean during the COVID-19 pandemic. 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.

Background
On 11 March 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a novel coronavirus, COVID-19 as a pandemic. The majority of Caribbean countries have reported at least one confirmed case of COVID-19. CARPHA has assessed the risk of continued transmission in and to the Caribbean Region as Very High. The aim for all countries now, is to stop transmission and prevent the spread of the virus. Most countries in the region have implemented significant and effective measures in this regard. Border closures, implementation of social distancing norms, and the restriction of movement to essential personnel have helped to slow the spread of the virus. Notwithstanding, CARPHA urges continued efforts which will keep the region safe.

What is COVID-19?
The virus that causes COVID-19 disease (SAR-CoV-2) 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 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.¹,²

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What are common signs and symptoms of infection?
A person infected may have the following symptoms:
- Fever
- Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- Persistent Cough
- Diarrhoea
- Other flu like symptoms

How is it transmitted?
The virus can be spread by individuals from 2 days before and until 14 days after the onset of symptoms. Precautions must therefore be taken to prevent human-to-human transmission of the disease. Currently, COVID-19 has been shown to spread by:
- Direct contact with large respiratory droplets often produced by coughing or sneezing which land on a person or surface and transferred to the mouth or nose
- Direct or indirect contact with 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
- The COVID-19 may be spread by individuals that exhibit no symptoms
- There is no evidence that COVID-19 is spread by food, water, or mosquitoes.

COVID-19 and Food Service
The virus that causes COVID-19 disease is a respiratory virus. It is spread from person to person by direct contact with respiratory droplets produced by sneezing and coughing. It is not a food borne illness. The virus requires a living host to replicate and for transmission. The virus could be passed between customers and food service staff by respiratory droplets left on common high touch surfaces (e.g. counters, doorknobs...). Workers and businesses should implement strict hygiene, sanitation methods, and structural and administrative controls to ensure the virus is not spread by their workers or customers.

Personal Hygiene for Food Service Workers

Food handlers should always practice good personal hygiene, especially handwashing. A refresher training should be held on proper food handling and food hygiene to ensure food service workers know how to work safely.

- **Proper hand hygiene**: Before working with food and any time hands are visibly soiled, handlers should use soap and water for at least 20 seconds to wash their hands. Food handlers should wash their hands after any activity that might soil their hands such as using the restroom, cleaning, or handling garbage. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer while interacting with customers or when hands are not visibly soiled (Appendix 1).

- **Gloves** should be worn to prevent transmission of many bacteria and viruses. Gloves should be changed frequently and are not a substitute for handwashing. Gloves should be removed when changing from non-food handling activities to food handling activities. Additionally, gloves can become contaminated and should be removed properly to avoid contamination from the gloves (Appendix 2).

- **Practice good cough and sneeze etiquette**: Cover every cough and sneeze with a tissue or if not available into a bent elbow. The tissue should be discarded immediately and then practice good hand hygiene (Appendix 3).

- **Masks** can help prevent the spread of disease when worn properly and changed frequently. Staff should continue to wear masks as normally required by the law in your country.  

Food Preparation

While food is not known to spread the COVID-19 virus, the food and its packaging could be a surface upon which the virus could land and survive for some time. Therefore, precautions must be taken to prevent the spread of the virus.

- Limit the number of staff in a food preparation area at any one time.
- Space out workstations to keep workers at least 2 metres (6 feet) apart. Workers should practice social distancing while working as much as possible. This may require reduction in the speed of production lines.
- Workstations should be cleaned and sanitized at the beginning of the shift and regularly though out the day and after any event that causes the station to be soiled or presents the opportunity for viruses or bacteria to be transferred to the working surfaces.
- All employees should wash hands properly before handling any food or equipment used in food preparation. Hand washing should be done at the beginning of the shift, after restroom or eating breaks, after cleaning activities, and any time the hands become soiled.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be worn as normal during food preparation and cleaning activities. Gloves, hairnets, and masks should be changed frequently and any time they become soiled. No special PPE is recommended at this time.
- Cook all foods, especially meats thoroughly

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• Do not serve raw or undercooked foods
• Wash fruits, vegetables and ingredients for salads under running water followed by sanitizing before use
• Specific measures for the food and beverage industry

**Structural and Administrative Controls**

All staff and customers should be encouraged to follow the standard social distancing of 2 metres (6 feet). Additionally, measures should be taken to ensure everyone adheres to social distancing. The following measures will help to create a safe environment:

• Limit the number of customers in the building. Encourage customers to use take out services rather than dine-in. Consider the use of phone or internet-based ordering and curb-side delivery when possible.
• Instruct patrons that feel sick or appear sick that they should not enter the building. If possible, have the food brought out to them rather than entering the store.
• Install handwashing stations at all entrances and ensure that each person entering the building use it properly. If a handwashing station cannot be installed, provide alcohol-based hand sanitiser and encourage people to wash hands in the restrooms as needed.
• Place posters in all areas explaining social distancing and how to practice good hand hygiene and sneeze and cough etiquette (see Appendix B)
• Install Sneeze guards and physical barriers to keep customers separated from staff and from each other.
• In areas where customers form lines, place marks on the floor so they can visualize a safe distance.
• Provide constant reminders to customers and staff on the need to keep a safe distance with signs and voice instructions.
• Organise staff into working groups or teams to facilitate reduced interaction between groups.
• Encourage workers to stay home if they are sick or have been exposed to a person with a confirmed case of COVID-19.

**Cleaning and Sanitation in Food Service**

Current research shows in laboratory conditions the COVID-19 virus could last for 24 hours on cardboard, 2 days on wood and cloth, 4 days on banknotes and glass, and up to 7 days on stainless steel and plastic. While the virus may be stable for some time on different surfaces, it is easily killed and cleaned away by normal cleaning and sanitization practices.

• Frequently clean high-touch surfaces with water and detergent and by applying commonly used disinfectants (such as properly diluted bleach).

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7 Chin, Alex, Chan, Michael et al. Stability of SARS-CoV-2 in different environmental conditions. The Lancet Microbe. April 2020. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2666-5247(20)30003-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2666-5247(20)30003-3)
• Staff do not need to wear eye protection or a protective gown while cleaning. Gloves provide sufficient protection unless the cleaning agent recommends more protective equipment.
• Equipment, laundry, food service utensils, and waste should be managed in accordance with normal, safe routine procedures.
• Should a customer or staff member be identified as a suspect case, staff should feel safe to clean the environment as basic cleaning agents will sufficiently kill the virus.

What if staff members become ill?

Staff members may become ill from exposures at work or in the home. Any staff member who exhibits symptoms while at home, should stay home. Working while sick could expose other staff members and other visitors. Call the facility to find out if they can receive potential COVID-19 patients or if they are referring these patients to another facility.

Staff that start to experience symptoms while at work should seek medical attention at an appropriate health facility. All surfaces that the infected employee has come into contact with should be cleaned, including all surfaces and objects visibly contaminated with body fluids/respiratory secretions, and all potentially contaminated high-contact areas such as toilets, door handles, and telephones. All staff should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and water after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 it will be necessary to notify all close contacts of the infected employee so they too can take measures to minimise further risk of spread. Examples of contacts in the food industry could include any employee who was in face-to-face or physical (i.e. touching) contact; any employee who was within 2 metres with the confirmed case; anyone who has cleaned up any body fluids without adequate PPE; employees in the same working team or work group as the confirmed case, and any employee living in the same household as a confirmed case.

The WHO recommends that contacts be quarantined for 14 days from the last point of exposure to the confirmed case. Staff who have had close contact with the infected employee should be asked to stay at home for 14 days from the last time they had contact with the confirmed case. If they become unwell at any time within their 14-day quarantine period and they test positive for COVID-19, they will become a confirmed case, and should be managed as such. Staff who have not had close contact with the original confirmed case should continue taking the usual precautions and attend work as usual.

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Appendix 1

Hand Hygiene Technique Posters

This infographic shows how to correctly wash hands with soap and water.

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease

How to hand wash with soap and water

1. Wet hands with water
2. Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces
3. Rub hands palm to palm

4. Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa
5. Palm to palm with fingers interlaced
6. Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked
7. Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa
8. Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa
9. Rinse with water
10. Dry thoroughly with single use towel
11. Use towel to take off faucet

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This infographic shows how to correctly cleanse hands with alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
How to hand rub with alcohol-based sanitiser

1. Apply a palmful of the product in a cupped hand and cover all surfaces
2. Rub hands palm to palm
3. Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa
4. Palm to palm with fingers interlaced
5. Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked
6. Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa
7. Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa
8. Once dry, your hands are safe.

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Appendix 2
Proper Glove Donning and Doffing Procedures

How to properly put on and take off a mask and gloves.
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.
Appendix 3
Hygiene Infographics

The following infographics from CARPHA and the WHO illustrate some important messages.