



Food Service Workers

Can the virus be passed on through food?

Experience with SARS and MERS suggest that people are not infected with the virus through food. So, it is unlikely the virus is passed on through food and there is no evidence yet of this happening with COVID-19 (coronavirus) to date.

Coronaviruses need a host (animal or human) to grow in and cannot grow in food. Thorough cooking is expected to kill the virus because we know that a heat treatment of at least 30min at 60°C is effective with SARS.

What can food workers do?

It is possible that infected food workers could introduce virus to the food they are working on by coughing and sneezing, or through hand contact, unless they strictly follow good personal hygiene practices.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) advises that standard recommendations to reduce exposure to and transmission of a range of illnesses are maintained. These include:

- proper hand hygiene
- cough/cold hygiene practices
- safe food practices
- avoiding close contact, when possible, with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing

Food workers must wash hands:

- before starting work

- before handling cooked or ready-to-eat food
- after handling or preparing raw food
- after handling waste
- after cleaning duties
- after using the toilet
- after blowing nose, sneezing or coughing
- after eating drinking or smoking
- after handling money

Good hygiene and cleaning are also important to avoid cross contamination between raw or undercooked foods and cooked or ready to eat foods in the kitchen.

As an added precaution, if you work with food and have suspected symptoms of respiratory illness you should also inform you employer and avoid preparing food for other people.

What can food business owners/managers do?

The Irish Government has advised employers that there is no need for employees without symptoms of infection with COVID-19 to stay off work or to remain separate from other people.

However, food business owners (FBOs) have particular responsibilities under food law.

FBOs have an important role to play in preventing foodborne illness. They should:

- ensure that staff are aware of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) situation
- ensure that staff are trained appropriately in food hygiene
- ensure effective supervision of staff to reinforce hygienic practices
- provide the correct facilities e.g. hand washing, toilets, to enable staff to practice good hygiene
- ensure staff and contractors report any physical signs/symptoms, before commencing work or while in the workplace.
- keep vigilant and ensure that staff are not ill and are fit to work

Employers can use this [fitness to work form](#) to assess staff who they believe are ill.

The [WHO has guidance on getting your workplace ready for COVID-19](#)