

COVID-19 MANUAL FOR THE FOOD INDUSTRY

REINFORCED HYGIENE MEASURES IN THE PRODUCTION PROCESS



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1. INTRODUCTION

Given the current health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the food industry is facing a major challenge due to the numerous complications brought on by this outbreak. Stemming from our extensive work experience in food safety, this manual is intended to provide the tools to adopt measures with the following three objectives:

1. Ensure the supply of food to our customers and thus to the population, in a complex working environment, defined by unusual and demanding conditions.
2. Ensure the food safety of our products. Maintain food safety standards at least the same level as usual, and avoid COVID19 contact with food, even if there is no evidence that food is being a transmission vehicle. Let us remember that it is the operator's responsibility to ensure the food security of products made available to the consumer.
3. Safeguard the health of the company's workers. In this sense, workers who are not in processing plants apply the same as those in other sectors (generally services), so we will emphasize in this manual what is about plant staff or who might have access to it.

To do this we will start by reviewing the most relevant information about this infectious agent, and then we will address the different parts of the food safety management system, which are affected by the current situation, or on which we must take some kind of action.

The approach we make is general for the whole food industry, without addressing the special characteristics of the different subsectors, nor for each industry.

It therefore aims to serve food safety managers or other policy makers within the company, as a basic guide to action, and must adapt the measures contained herein to the specific characteristics of the facilities and complement them with other measures of interest.

THIS MANUAL DOES NOT REPLACE CURRENT PROCEDURES OR OTHER DOCUMENTS THAT ARE BEING USED TO DATE (GUIDES, MANUALS, ETC.), BUT IS A COMPLEMENTARY GUIDE MATERIAL TO THEM.

Other guides or manuals have been consulted for its elaboration, both to normal situations and to this particular situation. In the references section we mention them, as well as others that may be of interest.

2. COVID_19 IS NOT CLASSIFIED AS A FOODBORNE DISEASE

EFSA is closely monitoring the information generated in the area of this crisis and has reported that there is no evidence that food is a COVID-19 transmission vehicle. The same opinion has been expressed by the FDA and WHO. Therefore, to this day COVID-19 is not considered foodborne disease.

3. WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COVID-19

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that normally affect only animals, although they can sometimes be transmitted to people. SARS-CoV-2 is a new type of coronavirus, first detected in December 2019, that can affect people and causes COVID-19 disease.

Transmission occurs through close contact with respiratory secretions that occur with a sick person's cough or sneeze. These secretions could infect another person if it comes into contact with their nose, eyes or mouth. Air transmission at distances greater than one or two meters is unlikely.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- Fever
- Cough
- Respiratory difficulties

The average period of incubation is 5 to 6 days, with a wider range of 0 to 24 days.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus remains viable on copper, cardboard, stainless-steel or plastic surfaces for 4, 24, 48 and 72 hours respectively, when kept at 21-23°C and 40% relative humidity. According to WHO, its effective inactivation, on surfaces, can be achieved in 1 minute. Currently, it recommends using:

- 70% ethyl alcohol, to disinfect small areas between uses, such as reusable equipment (e.g. thermometers)
- 0.5% sodium hypochlorite (equivalent to 5000 ppm) to disinfect surfaces

4. MEASURES TO BE TAKEN BY THE FOOD INDUSTRY

Next, we will address the most important measures or practices of action in the face of this crisis. It must be borne in mind, as we have stated above, that this manual has been developed, in general, for the whole of the food industry, so that in each case the measures must be adapted to the specific characteristics of the company or the specific subsector. Much of these practices do not differ from those usually performed, but we have included them here because they are, at this time, particularly relevant and should be monitored and strengthened as far as possible.

4.1. - PERMANENT STAFF GUIDELINES: ACTIONS

I - Review hygiene and personal hygiene practice procedures and ensure compliance

Ensure that these procedures reflect the practices that are necessary in this situation, which we will review below. In particular:

- Always maintain the minimum distance of 1.5 or 2m between operators, especially in the workplaces. If necessary, rearrange the work positions according to this minimum distance criterion. In chain jobs, consider modifying the chain speed if necessary.
- Wash hands properly, at the beginning of the working day or when returning to the job after an absence, in particular:

- before work begins
 - After using the WC
 - After handling raw foods and before handling ready-to-eat foods
 - After coughing, sneezing, touching our mouths, noses, smoking or eating
 - After handling cartons, dirty containers or packaging, or having handled waste, rubbish, etc.
 - After touching objects such as money, phones, cash registers, etc.
 - Before and After Eating, Drinking or Smoking
 - After cleaning
- Ensure that hand washing follows the correct protocol, lasting between 40 and 60 seconds.
Correct handwashing infographic is included (see model documents and infographics at the end of this guide)
 - Food handlers should not smoke, chew gum, eat at work, sneeze or cough on food, nor engage in any other activity that may cause food contamination
 - Ensure effective monitoring of staff during the working day, to strengthen hygiene practices.
 - Check that you have the right facilities, so that the staff can practice good hygiene (changing rooms, sinks, toilets, etc.), and make sure that these are in perfect condition.

II - Operator entry control

Through the control of access, we must avoid the entry of any operator who has symptoms (fever, cough, or difficulty breathing) or who has been in contact with a patient. If you become aware that any operator is in one of these situations, access to the plant should be prevented, the doctor should be consulted and, in any case, maintain a 14-day quarantine.

The measures we recommend taking are:

- Adjust shift schedules so that there is no crowding in changing rooms or access area. To do this, you can avoid the overlap of

shifts or stagger the entry and exit in smaller groups.

- Establish a body temperature control, for all employees
- Fill out a daily health questionnaire by all operators, asking about the possible occurrence of symptoms and possible contact with patients or suspected cases of COVID-19. *A questionnaire model, specific to COVID-19, is included and must be filled in daily by staff, own and external, before accessing the job. In the event of any positive response, access to the production plant will be prevented, medical services will be consulted. (see model documents and infographics at the end of this guide)*
- Conduct access surveillance by a manager who oversees the entry process and can detect any symptoms
- Proceed to an additional disinfection of the access area, making sure to use effective products for this purpose. (consult with cleaning and disinfection product suppliers)
- Limit to the maximum access of the staff, of the company itself, which is not essential for the proper functioning of operations. In addition to the production staff the own and where possible, only supervisory or inspection personnel will be present at the plant. In any case, all personnel who enter the plant will follow the same access protocol.

III - Protective equipment and uniforms for facility personnel:

At this time, it is recommended to:

- Use of protective mask, for all operators and plant personnel. *Instructions on how to put on, use, remove and dispose of the protective mask are included in this guide. (see model documents and infographics at the end)*
- Wearing gloves by all staff. The gloves shall be in a suitable condition of hygiene and cleaning, not exempting the manipulator from washing their hands with the gloves, as many times as necessary or replacing them. In particular, hands should be washed before and after putting on gloves. Remember that the latex glove is not suitable for food practice because of the risk of allergic reactions in consumers

- Uniforms should be washed daily and be under control. Washing should be done at 90oC, for a minimum of 30 minutes and with disinfectant detergent
- Work clothes will be stored in separate lockers or in separate compartments of street clothing lockers. You will not go with your work clothes from home. You will not go outside, nor areas nearby (access steps, etc.), with work clothes. Nor to other areas of the industry itself, other than the production site itself to which it is allocated. The uniform is exclusive to the workplace.

IV - Training

We need to make sure that staff are properly trained in food hygiene procedures.

It is a good time to do a training action, to update hygienic practices. We can take advantage of this action to introduce those practices that we have been able to establish in a specific way.

Emphasize on the hand washing procedure, as it is of great importance to avoid possible contagion.

4.2. - ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN UPON GUIDED VISITS OR TOURS

- In general, we will avoid any type of plant visit, especially external staff. We should postpone any visit, until the end of the crisis, as a precautionary measure and whenever possible. We must remember that we cannot restrict access to inspectors from the competent health authority.
- If it is essential to allow access to persons outside the plant, they must follow the same access protocols as plant staff, and in particular:
 - Controlling body temperature
 - Filling out the health questionnaire. (see model documents and infographics at the end of the manual)
 - Make sure that they are given instructions for proper hand washing and that it is done correctly.

- Wear mask and gloves. Proceed to wash your hands before and after the gloves are placed. (see model documents and infographics)
- Use single-use protective equipment and dispose of all protective elements after the visit and not reuse these items under any circumstances
- Audits shall be deferred whenever possible. As we are in a changing situation, we understand that it is not advisable to review the positions of GFSI, BRC or IFS in this regard. To consult your position, we recommend contacting your certification entity or go directly to the sources on the BRC or IFS website:

<https://www.brcgs.com/>

<https://www.ifs-certification.com/index.php/es/>

GFSI is communicating all updated positions at:

https://mygfsi.com/news_updates/update-on-temporary-audit-measures-during-covid-19-pandemic

- In relation to DDD operations, pests must be controlled, in any case. One option for this is for your own staff to do the visual inspection of baits and traps. If an increase in the population, or of the baits that have been eaten, is detected, then contact the pest control provider. If the company does not have trained personnel, or adequate resources, access to the staff of the company subcontracted for this service should be allowed, with the same controls and measures prescribed for the plant staff. In any case, it would be advisable for each company to contact its service provider and between the two, agree what to do depending on the situation
- Send a communication to suppliers, with all measures that affect them, and make sure they know them before performing any of their tasks in our facilities.

4.3. - CLEANING AND DISINFECTION OPERATIONS

All current cleaning and disinfection procedures must be reviewed, especially:

- Cleaning intervals. When necessary, the frequency will be increased, and some workstations or utensils may be

implemented for intermediate cleanings with suitable disinfectant agents.

- Inspection of areas included in the cleaning and disinfection processes. In general, special emphasis should be observed on surfaces in contact with food. We must exercise extreme caution in the access areas of any type of material from outside, such as packaging materials accompanying raw materials or other products. These areas should be included as risk zones.
- Review the verification of cleaning operations. Increase the controls, where appropriate, and review the sampling points. As a general indicator of hygiene, total aerobics seems to be the most suitable. While, of course, it does not give any specific information about viruses, it is the most generic indicator of the level of hygiene and allows to verify that cleaning and disinfection operations have been effective
- It is advisable to directly monitor cleaning and disinfection processes, even if they are performed by external personnel.
- Cleaning and disinfection of the areas around the facility should be carried out periodically
- Contact the suppliers of cleaning and disinfection products, to make sure that we are using the most suitable products in each case
- Avoid overlapping cleaning and general disinfection operations, with others such as maintenance operations

4.4. - ACTIONS PREVENTING CROSS-CONTAMINATION

To identify cross-contamination points, we should review:

- Staff movements, especially contact between staff of different shifts, which we should avoid
- Movements of packaging material, ingredients, work utensils, cleaning, transport or waste
- Cleaning and disinfection procedures of internal and external vehicles

- Returnable containers (barrels, etc.). We must make sure that they are cleaned and disinfected before entering the plant
- Avoid products with debris from entering the plant as much as possible
- Maintenance and repair operations, especially construction works, will be reduced, to the minimum essential and reviewed, to prevent the entry of any contamination. If the area cannot be fully and safely isolated, any handling and processing near it will be avoided. Intense cleaning and disinfection of the area should be carried out, before and after these tasks are carried out
- The receipt of materials (e.g. in repairing premises) will be carried out without direct contact between company and external staff. The materials will be deposited by the supplier in an area designated for this purpose and the packing slip in a mailbox or tray. Subsequently, the staff will carry out the review of the material, so that the packing slip is signed and delivered, without the need for the carrier to access the company's facilities
- In the case of service providers, packing slips or supporting documents shall be managed electronically
- Whenever possible, attention to external staff will be done through a counter or window. In these positions, a methacrylate screen or similar shall be present, and the safety distance to be respected marked, with tape, with an adhesive mark on the floor or by other means. If this is not possible, the safety distances will be kept, and masks will be used.

4.5. - ACTION FOR THE MONITORING PLAN

Although the analysis plan cannot yet directly include this pathogen (there is still no analytical supply in food and is not considered a food pathogen), control measures should be extreme, at a time when any food security breach could have particularly serious effects

The established control plan must, of course, be maintained and ensure that it is robust, especially in hygiene-related controls. In each case we must:

- Those checks that we perform internally, we should have no problem in keeping them and increasing them if necessary
- The provision of external checks is guaranteed, as food laboratories are considered essential infrastructure
- If you want to avoid the entry of external personnel, to carry out the sampling, these must be taken with their own personnel. To do this, we must ask the laboratory to provide instructions for proper sampling. The necessary material for this purpose can be purchased directly or provided by the external laboratory

4.6. - POSSIBLE PRODUCT CHANGES

It could happen that, forced by the lack of supply of any given ingredient, we had to replace it with another or just do without it. In that case we should:

- Assess the food safety risk of the "new product" and modify the necessary controls, if required. It should be borne in mind that the modification of the formulation or packaging system could influence the shelf life of the product, as well as the emergence of new risks, of any kind (biological, physical, chemical, including new allergens in the product)
- Review the modifications in the production process, which the change in formulation may imply, to avoid the appearance of any new dangers
- Review the labelling and adapt it to the new formulation

Given the changing situation, we will update this manual, if it is understood that further measures are required. It has been carried out under 'home-working' conditions, to help contain the pandemic. We hope that this document will help the food industry and also will help bring this situation to an end soon.

5. SAMPLE DOCUMENTS AND INFOGRAPHICS

HOW TO PUT ON, USE, REMOVE AND DISPOSE OF THE MASK

1. Before you put on the mask, wash your hands with an alcohol-based disinfectant or with soap and water
2. Cover your mouth and nose with the mask and make sure that there is no space between your face and the mask
3. Avoid touching the mask while you are wearing it. If you do touch it, wash your hands with an alcohol-based disinfectant or with soap and water
4. If your mask becomes wet at any time, you must change it. Do not reuse disposable masks
5. In order to take off your mask: take it off from behind (do not touch the front part of the mask); dispose of it immediately in a closed container; and wash your hands with an alcohol-based disinfectant or with soap and water)

COVID-19 SPECIFIC HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE

Do you currently have any of the following symptoms (unusual)	
Fever	YES/NO
Dry cough	YES/NO
Productive cough	YES/NO
Difficulty in breathing	YES/NO
Sore throat	YES/NO
Headache (unusual)	YES/NO
Muscle aches or pains (unusual)	YES/NO
Loss of sense of smell	YES/NO
Have you been in contact with anyone who has been affected by COVID-19? In the same area, either by talking or by physical contact?	YES/NO
Have you been in contact with anyone who is currently in quarantine?	YES/NO
Countries visited in the last 6 weeks:	

HOW SHOULD I WASH MY HANDS?



www.mscbs.gob.es

#TogetherWeStopThisVirus

We stop it if you stay at home

We stop it if you accept that it is not going to be easy

We stop it every time that you wash your hands

We stop it if you help and pay attention to our professionals

We stop it if you trust that we will make it through

Source: www.mscbs.gob.es

