



COVID 19
A PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR FOOD
INDUSTRIES

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SCOPE OF THE GUIDE

This guide is an initiative of the Hellenic Food Authority (EFET) in collaboration with the Federation of Hellenic Food Industries (SEVT), with the main aim to provide simple and practical instructions to Food Industry operators, in the context of conditions generated through the COVID-19 disease. The present guidelines are based on the risk profile analysis of the SAES-CoV-2 virus in the food sector and on best practices as presented in international and national recommendations.

THE COVID-19 DISEASE

COVID-19 disease, which is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, is a highly contagious infectious disease. Most patients present mild symptoms and complete recovery, while a minority of patients (mostly people with compromised health conditions and / or older than 70 years), need treatment and have a poor prognosis (in cases of acute respiratory failure, septic shock or multi-organ failure syndrome).

SYMPTOMS

Most common symptoms include fever, cough (usually dry), breathing difficulties and fatigue. Less common symptoms are muscle aches, sore throat, runny nose, loss of smell and taste, headache and diarrhea. Symptoms appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus.

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WAYS OF TRANSMISSION

1. From person to person, mainly through respiratory droplets produced by the infected person when sneezing, coughing or exhaling.
2. With physical contact such as hugs, kisses, handshakes.
3. Through contact of hands with infected objects or surfaces and transferring of the virus to mouth, eyes or nose.



FOOD AND SARS-CoV-2

Viruses, such as SARS-CoV-2, are not living cells and need a host to reproduce. For this reason, they **do not multiply** in food and water if these become infected.

According to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), there is no evidence that food poses a risk to public health in relation to COVID-19 disease.

Food industries have developed and implement Food Safety Management Systems. These systems are based on the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) principles and provide all the basic requirements and activities necessary to maintain a healthy work and food processing environment. They are supported by prerequisite programs, that include: good hygiene, cleaning and disinfection practices, zoning of processing areas, suppliers control, storage, distribution and transport processes control, staff hygiene.

This guide focuses on additional measures solely to prevent infection from and spread of SARS-CoV-2



Guidelines

FOR BUSINESS MANAGERS

Procedures and workplaces where SARS-CoV-2 virus exposure may occur in various areas and circumstances as follows:

- ⇒ Supply and receipt
- ⇒ Storage of raw and packaging materials
- ⇒ Transfer to the processing area
- ⇒ Food processing
- ⇒ Packaging
- ⇒ Storage of final products
- ⇒ Distribution services
- ⇒ Sales
- ⇒ Staff attendance and leaving from work
- ⇒ Arrival and staying of external maintenance crews/ visitors
- ⇒ Attendance control systems
- ⇒ Offices (use of shareable utensils, dealing with visitors, external collaborators, suppliers, customers)
- ⇒ Elevators
- ⇒ Analytical laboratories
- ⇒ Toilets / WC
- ⇒ Canteen / break areas
- ⇒ Waste management

Organizational measures:

A. Avoiding crowding / Maintaining the «social distancing» recommendations

- Reorganize the workflow (e.g. strengthening automation of food processing) and rearrange the workplace to ensure, as far as possible, the distance of 1.5 - 2 meters between employees. Limit Unnecessary movements between areas of the industry, maintain a given rate of employees per square meter. When the production line does not allow such an intervention, additional measures that can be taken to this direction are the use of plexiglass protective partitions, marking the required distance on the floor of the workplace, as well as the use of personal protective equipment (PPMs) (gloves, double-layer cloth masks or disposable ones).
- Apply fixed group / shift practice (it will help for tracking down suspect case's contacts).

B. Work remotely:

- by teleworking where possible.
- by holding events and conferences with alternative means (e.g. teleconferences).
- by holding teleconferences even among people who work in the same building in order to avoid congestion. When this is not technically feasible, meetings should be held with the smallest possible number of people, in a well-ventilated area and for the shortest possible time.

C. Arrange for a gradual working hours schedule for the employees. It is recommended to organize working groups so that there is limited interaction among them. It is also recommended that Management encourages employees to report to the business manager any symptoms they may have and / or symptoms present in their close contacts and to abstain from work. In order to promote a diligent behavior, the business should implement a flexible leave policy due to sickness. Alternatively, it can apply other measures such as temperature measurement upon arrival.

D. Arrange for a controlled access program for business employees in public areas such as break areas, rest rooms, locker rooms, WC, toilets, etc., in order to avoid crowding.

E. Encourage employees and customers to use the stairs and avoid elevators as much as possible.

F. Post information-reminders on personal hygiene and preventive measures in all areas. Messages must employees and visitors to:

- wear gloves.
- use masks (for those required).
- wash and disinfect hands.
- maintain distance.



- G. Adjust third parties arrival** (e.g. business associates, external collaborators, etc.). Limit them to strictly necessary for operation, set admission rules to the workplace, in order to avoid crowding. Ensure social distancing and the use of PPM (e.g. masks).
- H. Inform drivers, suppliers, external partners, customers, visitors,** by any appropriate means (posters, brochures, etc.), posted in the selected areas that they are about to visit, about the instructions of the national competent authorities.
- I. Ensure adequate ventilation** (with an emphasis on natural ventilation) of all areas and avoid crowding in closed areas without adequate air renewal. Regular maintenance of ventilation - air conditioning systems is required.
- J. External services crews should enter their workplaces using protective clothing** (disposable plastic apron, masks, gloves).
- K. Organize an appropriate waste management program** (see "*Staff in cleaning of public areas - waste management of potentially contaminated material*")



Health and hygiene measures for employees, working areas and equipment

⇒ Ensuring of adequate number of basins for hand washing. Faucets without hand contact are recommended (foot or photocell operated, etc.).

⇒ Provision and supply, in the washing facilities, of:

- hand washing soaps.
- hand drying materials (e.g. disposable hand towels, hand dryers).
- antiseptic solutions (suitable for personal hygiene use) at the entrances / exits and in the public areas of the company particularly in areas where employees come in contact with the general public or public surfaces and hand washing is not possible.



⇒ Provision to employees of clothing and appropriate PPM such as gloves and masks, in accordance with the special instructions of the national competent authorities. Training of employees on the clothing proper and safe use and storage. It is strongly recommended that clothing is used exclusively within the premises.

⇒ Appointment of a person in charge of supervising the correct use of the protection measures.

⇒ Installation of covered foot-operated trash bins, where disposable PPMs will be placed immediately after use, as well as handkerchiefs, hand towels or other means used to disinfect work surfaces, as well as personal hygiene items.

⇒ Care for frequent washing of work clothes (uniforms, aprons, etc.) and non-disposable PPMs provided. Washing temperature should be at a minimum of 60°C followed by ironing.



⇒ Care for strictly personal use of PPMs

⇒ Provision of the appropriate detergents-disinfectants against the virus.

⇒ Surfaces and objects that are frequently touched such as, switches, door handles, keyboards, handrails on stairs and corridors, cabinets, pantries, lockers, should be thoroughly and frequently cleaned and disinfected.

⇒ Use of disinfectants with minor residual action in areas where there is food.

⇒ Designing of a comprehensive and effective cleaning and disinfection program as well as personal hygiene waste management

Preventive measures - Suspect case management:

Staff training (incl. written instructions) about:

- personal hygiene, hand washing, proper use of gloves and mask, avoidance of congestion.
- the symptoms of COVID-19 disease, so that the employees are able to recognize symptoms early and seek appropriate medical attention and examinations.
- reporting illness and rules about returning to work when they recover from illness.
- ways to prevent spreading of COVID-19 disease to other employees working in the establishment, in case of a new case.



To business manager

If an employee develops symptoms compatible with COVID-19 disease, then:

- Securely isolate the individual.
- Call the competent public health authority immediately for instructions on the next steps.
- Inform other employees about the possible exposure, respecting the personal data of the case, and ask them to follow the instructions distributed to them.
- Disinfect all surfaces with emphasis on the working area of the suspected case.

FOR EMPLOYEES



If you feel sick at home:

- ⇒ If you have any of the symptoms of the disease, **STAY AT HOME.**
- ⇒ Inform the business manager immediately to take the necessary actions.
- ⇒ Inform your physician.
- ⇒ Follow the instructions of the competent authority.

If you feel sick at work:

- ⇒ Stop working and inform immediately the business manager, who should directly call the national competent authority for instructions.
- ⇒ Self-isolate in a place where there are no other employees or customers.
- ⇒ Do not return to work before at least 14 days have elapsed and your doctor allows you to do so.



Basic self-protection measures

Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds:

- Before and after work.
- Before putting on and taking off disposable gloves when preparing food.
- Every time you put on a new pair of gloves.
- After wearing, touching or removing the mask.

- ⇒ Before, during and after food preparation.
- ⇒ Before eating.
- ⇒ Before and after your break.
- ⇒ After using the toilet.
- ⇒ After blowing your nose and after coughing or sneezing.
- ⇒ After touching money or items handled by customers.

- ⇒ If there is no soap, use an alcohol-based antiseptic (at least 60% in alcohol) and rub your hands until the antiseptic dries (about 30 seconds).
- ⇒ In areas where there is no remote control faucet, use a disposable towel or similar means to close the faucet after washing your hands.
- ⇒ Disinfect work surfaces and controls before starting your shift. Organize your work so that one operator per shift comes in contact with a control panel, tool, keyboard, desk. Alternatively, cover the machine controls with a film that changes each time an operator. If not possible change gloves every time you move to another working post or manage different foods; after contact with objects that are considered potentially infected (cell phone, computer, clothes, knobs, etc.) or when torn. Discard them in the bins used for PPMs.
- ⇒ Use a mask (recommendation) even in cases where it is not required by law.



- ⇒ Do not touch the front of the mask.
- ⇒ Do not touch with your hands your eyes, nose and mouth.
- ⇒ Remove dirty material after coughing, sneezing, after contact with nose / ears, mouth, hair.
- ⇒ Consume any kind of food only during the break.

Special measures per job

Staff in storage facilities:

- Avoid shaking hands and limit contact with suppliers' drivers.
- Use mask and gloves when supplies are delivered.
- Disinfect the handles from wheeled carts, manual pallet truck or forklifts. Alternatively, cover the machine controls with a film that is replaced every time the operator changes.
- Manage stocks and orders so that deliveries are scheduled with the lowest possible frequency and at different times per supplier.
- Receive and deliver documents (e.g. invoices - receipts) without contact at a specified area on a bench or table that you will disinfect each time. Electronic document exchange is recommended, where possible and permitted by applicable law.
- Sign with your own, exclusive use, pen and don't share it with others.

Staff in cleaning equipment or washing utensils:

- Use appropriate detergents / disinfectants to wash utensils by hand.
- Handle clean utensils with gloves after washing (e.g. dishes, glasses, cutlery, containers, etc.).
- Store and protect clean tools - utensils in closed cabinets.

Staff in cleaning of public areas - waste management of potentially contaminated material:

- Be sure to use disposable PPMs for waste management such as gloves, masks, special clothing (e.g. disposable plastic apron).
- Collect gloves, masks, disposable wipes and other potentially contaminated materials in garbage bags, close them firmly.
- Throw these bags in the special bins (GREEN or GRAY) and then close the lid of the bin well.
- Do not leave bags outside the bins.



FOR CLEANING - DISINFECTING

Since surfaces can serve as sources of virus transmission, workstation cleaning programs need to be reinforced. Above all, it must be ensured that all surfaces and shared areas are frequently cleaned, ideally every 2 hours where possible



Cleaning – disinfecting points:

⇒ Frequently used / touched objects (switches, door handles, keyboards, handrails on stairs and corridors, cupboards, lockers etc.) ensuring that they are cleaned and disinfected frequently. Use of disposable wipes is recommended and in case of rigid working surfaces, cleaning with warm soap water should be first applied

followed by disinfection.

- ⇒ In customers and staff toilets attention should be given on: handles, switches, basins, sinks, taps, dryers and door knobs. Frequent disinfection of toilet areas by spraying.
- ⇒ In relation to food contact surfaces, as well as food processing equipment, the correct application of the existing cleaning and disinfection protocols is expected to be sufficient. However, when and where (areas or/and surfaces where more frequent human contact takes place) necessary, the need for additional disinfection measures (with methodologies / means of proven efficacy against viruses) should be taken into account.

Suitable disinfectants - detergents:

- ⇒ Products based on quaternary ammonium compounds, which are widely used in the food industry. Follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding dilution, application and contact time.
- ⇒ Household chlorine and other powerful oxidizing agents are also known to be effective (up to 24 hours) against similar viruses. The current recommendation and instruction for the use of chlorine (either in combination with a cleaning-disinfectant or individually as a disinfectant whose application follows the cleaning) is in final dilution of 1000 ppm of available chlorine (which is equivalent to 1:50 dilution of household chlorine products with standard 5% concentration in sodium hypochlorite or 4 tbs chlorine in 1 liter of water)
- ⇒ In surfaces where the above disinfectants might prove damaging and therefore unsuitable (e.g. phones, keyboards and electronic devices), the use of antiseptic wipes or alcohol-based disinfectants is advised.
- ⇒ In general, alcohol-based disinfectants (containing ethanol, propane-2-ol, propane-1-ol) have been shown to reduce significantly the infectivity of encapsulated viruses (such as SARS-CoV-2) at concentrations of 70-80% and can be applied to small surfaces.
- ⇒ For more information, you should consult your specialized partner.



Carefully follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding dilution, application and contact time for any cleaning and disinfectant products used.

Don't miss to stay informed and comply with any changes in the relevant legislation and to adapt to the instructions provided by the national competent authorities.

Information included in this guide was current until the date of its issue. EFET will update the guide whenever necessary in order to include the latest data.

Useful links:

1. Official Coronavirus Updates: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIq9yrtr_P6QIVBbDtCh2THgX4EAAYASAAEgIcwvD_BwE;
2. List of disinfectants against SARS-CoV-2: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
3. EU Commission Covid-19 and food safety: https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/biosafety_crisis_covid19_gandas_en.pdf

EVALUATE THE RISK – ADJUST MEASURES IN YOUR COMPANY

In order to facilitate implementation and monitoring of the above mentioned measures, companies can evaluate the specific risks in their facilities using the attached Check List.

☞ **Supply and receipt of raw and packaging materials**

-  Vehicle entrance
-  Drivers' contact with staff
-  Load check
-  Unloading
-  Exchange of accompanying documents
-  Connecting to Tank/ Silo
-  Transfer of goods to Warehouse
-  Placing at storage location
-  Filling of accompanying documents (PC/classer)

☞ **Transfer to the processing area**

-  Transfer of material / Use of pallet trucks/forklifts
-  Use of elevator (probable)

👉 Processing

-  Unpacking & feeding materials
-  Usage of equipment by one operator per shift (control panel)
-  Usage of equipment by more operators per shift
-  Manual processes (e.g. shorting, grouping of product items) from one operator per post
-  Manual processes (e.g. shorting, grouping of product items by group of operators per post
-  Garbage/waste handling

👉 Packaging

-  Transfer of material/products
-  Transfer through pipe line
-  Χειρισμός εξοπλισμού από έναν χειριστή ανά βάρδια (control panel)
-  Usage of equipment by one operator per shift α (control panel)
-  Shorting out /casing by group of operators
-  Palletizing

👉 Storage

-  Transfer of pallet to Warehouse
-  Placing of pallet to storage location

Distribution services

-  Load preparation / movement of load by operators and/or forklifts)
-  Preparation of accompanying documents
-  Docking of Vehicle
-  Drivers' contact with staff
-  Control of vehicle
-  Loading
-  Exchange of accompanying document

Sales (see offices +)

-  Movement of sales staff to customer by Private car
-  Movement of sales staff to customer by public transport
-  Trip outside working location
-  Communication with customer

Staff arrival and departure from work

-  Crowding during staff attendance
-  Employees health conditions monitoring
-  Use of change rooms
-  Use of attendance control devise

Suspect case among the employees

-  Preventive measures against disease spread
-  Corrective measures following COVID 19 incident

Receiving and using external maintenance crews/ visitors

-  In process areas on critical for unit's operation
-  In process areas critical for unit's operation
-  In the offices
-  In processing and storage areas

Offices

-  For one employee
-  For more employees
-  With transaction with public
-  For internal operations only

Toilets

-  Use of toilette
-  Hand washing station in working area

☞ **Canteen / break areas**



Preset brake for group of employees



Individual brake



Launch-brake with served launch including self service



Lunch-brake without serving

Photos:

1. cheese-21824_1920-pixabay
2. depot-1406937_1920-pixabay
3. corona-5017617_1920-pixabay
4. adli-wahid-MC124FE4Qj4-unsplash
5. christine-sandu-LThqAPBpqtI-unsplash
6. hands-2238235_1920-pixabay
7. thermometer-833085_1920-pixabay
8. nathan-dumlao-x7Lyx8Yyvug-unsplash
9. tedward-quinn-w5qiX5rc6Jg-unsplash
10. cleanliness-2799459_1920-pixabay
11. health-5009994_1920-pixabay
12. engin-akyurt-X_bKSpZJHzw-unsplash
13. virus-4958150_1920-pixabay
14. united-nations-covid-19-response-LiPIUvzwekw-unsplash
15. iStock_000008159592Small
16. melissa-jeanty-8cGmLVFJaLg-unsplash



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