

COVID-19

Risk mitigation for food businesses

This guideline provides a summary of actions that businesses should consider implementing to restrict the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace and wider community and assist with business continuity.

Currently there is no evidence of foodborne transmission being a significant pathway for COVID-19 infection. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) provides further [advice](#) about this.

COVID-19 is mainly spread by person-to-person transmission (for example, via coughing, sneezing and close contact with an infected individual) and via surfaces contaminated with the virus. More information can be found on the [Queensland Government COVID-19 website](#).

Requirements introduced for COVID-19 are in addition to existing requirements in the Queensland *Food Act (2006)*. The [Food Standards Code](#) requires good hygiene practices by food businesses during food handling and preparation. These are important to prevent food borne illness and help prevent transmission of COVID-19.

It is important that businesses keep up to date with requirements, which may change regularly. The Chief Health Officer's (CHO) Public Health Directions may be accessed from the [Latest Updates](#) section of the [Queensland Government COVID-19 website](#).

Key points

- COVID-19 is not a foodborne disease, but extra care with hygiene and health may reduce risks.
- Businesses need to review their operation and consider what other measures should be implemented to reduce the impact of COVID-19.
- Businesses with good preparations and procedures in place can minimise the impact on a business of a worker diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Regularly check for new requirements introduced in Queensland to control COVID-19. These may be accessed from the Latest Updates section of [the Queensland Health COVID-19 website](#).

Management responsibilities

- Establish a *Crisis Management Team* to meet daily to discuss COVID-19-related issues. If a national business, establish a *National Crisis Management Team* to oversee entire Australian operation.
- Develop a COVID-19 response plan for each site in the business which includes processes for reporting, cleaning and sanitising, and notification and management of COVID-19 cases in your business.

- Conduct a mock response exercise each week on each site in preparation for the possibility of a positive COVID-19 detection.
- Hold senior management meetings daily by Skype, etc. Operational managers across sites (in a multi-site facility) meet daily to feed down external information (e.g. government (Australian, Queensland and local government) directives/advice and advice from relevant industry peak bodies to share findings.
- Share best practice between companies in the same industry sector e.g. sugar milling.
- Undertake contingency planning regularly to manage staff absences and the overall operation of the business.
- Consider whether a worker who knowingly does not comply with the business's policy for management of COVID-19 should be subject to disciplinary action which may include having their employment terminated.
- Restrict face-to-face meetings as much as possible and keep them short, ensuring social distancing is maintained.
- Identify what roles or areas within a business may be able to work from home or away from other staff.
- Source alternative suppliers for essential services, ingredients, equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Consider labelling implications if alternative ingredients are used.
- If operational capacity is impacted by multiple staff in quarantine, consider contingency plans for the business for disposing of raw materials (especially fresh ingredients), any work in progress, or short shelf-life stock, to ensure food safety is maintained.

Notification and management of illness

- Ensure staff can recognise symptoms of COVID-19 early so that they can seek appropriate medical care and testing and minimise the risk of infecting fellow workers. Common symptoms of COVID-19 include: a fever (high temperature $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$) or history of fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat or other cold/flu-like symptoms.
- Ensure a procedure to allow staff to report illness (e.g. by phone or email) is established so that workers with early stages of COVID-19 can receive reliable information and be quickly excluded from work environments.
- Require staff returning from leave to indicate where they went if they have been interstate, [or to a region in Queensland with high numbers of confirmed cases of COVID-19](#).
- A person who is COVID-19 positive must immediately notify management and will not attend workplace until they have provided evidence that they have completed isolation, which should first be emailed to management.
- Any worker waiting for the outcome of a test for COVID-19 should be excluded from work and follow the advice of their treating practitioner or public health authority in terms of the time they need to remain in isolation.
- Implement a return to work policy for staff who have been infected and recovered from COVID-19. The timing of future return to work of a recovered COVID-19 case will depend on their individual circumstance as outlined in the guideline:

<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdna-song-novel-coronavirus.htm>

- Undertake daily staff checks to review the health status of workers by questioning staff about whether they feel unwell with any flu like symptoms: fever or history of fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat or other cold/flu-like symptoms. Note, fever is only one of the symptoms of COVID-19 and absence of fever alone is not reliable indicator of wellness.
- Ensure detailed shift records of staff which may be required for contact tracing.
- Should a worker become ill with respiratory symptoms whilst at work, the documented procedure, in critical response plan, should be followed:
 - Immediately isolate employee in a designated isolation area, with a closed door and adequate ventilation
 - Phone 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for advice
 - Provide face mask to ill staff member and any other employee needing to interact with them
 - Disinfect all surfaces that the infected employee has come into contact, 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.
- If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 the local Public Health Unit will notify all close contacts of the infected employee so they too can take measures to minimise further risk of spread. Identified contacts will be monitored by the Public Health Unit. The identity of the COVID-19 case shall be kept confidential.

Training

- Update induction documentation to reflect new COVID-19 management procedures and to provide information about COVID-19, e.g. how it spreads; precautions for infection control; hand hygiene; equipment hygiene; social distancing; reporting possible infection; and sources of additional information such as www.health.qld.gov.au.
- Implement toolbox talks to provide up to date information on COVID-19 management procedures adopted for site - when necessary /before each shift/on-line via employee intranet.
- Put up COVID-19 safety posters around site and provide information on noticeboard/in individual information packs. This is important for those people without a computer.
- Inform principal contractors (e.g. cleaning crews) and other essential visitors about the COVID-19 management requirements that have been implemented on-site.

Social distancing (Contact minimisation)

- Implement 1.5 m social distancing in fields (e.g. picking trolleys spaced at 1.5 m intervals), processing areas, offices and during meetings (e.g. toolbox talks).
- Separate work groups to achieve maximum personal space, e.g. provide extra packing tables; stagger workstations on either side of processing lines.

- Do not interchange workforce in multi-site business.
- If possible, employees who live together should work, travel and eat together.
- If it is not possible to implement a minimum 1.5 m social distancing in work areas, engineered controls, such as the use of barriers between workers will need to be considered. The use of PPE (e.g. N95 face masks) may also be considered.
- Separate work areas.
 - If practical, zone the facility to further reduce contact between employees (e.g. limit access to control room to authorised staff only; separate harvest workers from farm gate sales staff.)
 - If an employee, due to the nature of their work, works across the facility (e.g. maintenance), provide them with additional training on social distancing.
- Separate meal breaks to achieve maximum personal space
 - Roster access to meal areas according to work team
 - Move meal/smoko areas outside and/or create additional meal/smoko areas
 - Use floor markings to ensure seating remains at 1.5m apart
 - Consider designated seating plans.
- Increase time between shifts or service periods to minimise staff interaction and allow for increased cleaning and sanitising.
- Transport drivers from interstate or highly infected areas are not allowed on-site. Drivers should use a hand sanitizer before passing delivery documents to food premises staff, if electronic documents cannot be generated.
- Cancel other visitor access to premises if not business-critical (e.g. sales person) and use telephone/teleconferencing instead.
- Compliance checks should be undertaken twice per day by a senior manager (e.g. site manager or safety manager). Any observed non-conformance should be discussed with employee.

Hygiene

Personal hygiene

- Provide liquid soap and running water / hand sanitisers (note, touch-free would be best practice) and paper towels:
 - on picking trolleys, packing tables and portable toilets in field
 - at all entries to/and within production areas, packing areas, lunch rooms and offices
 - in vehicles e.g. delivery vehicles and tractors
- Consider ordering more supplies because of increased usage
- Restock handwash facilities with liquid soap/hand sanitiser and paper towels throughout day and empty bins
- Increase cleaning frequency of handwash facilities
- Display handwashing signage

- If gloves are used by food workers, they must be changed frequently, and hands must be washed between glove changes and when gloves are removed (wearing gloves can allow bacteria to build up on the surface of the hands).

Cleaning and sanitation in workplace

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, food businesses will have in place a cleaning and sanitation procedure, which will be documented, identify sites to be cleaned and the frequency at which they should be cleaned, and records with supervisor sign-off. It is assumed that cleaning and sanitising instructions provides information on what PPE is to be used and will ensure that the correct detergents and sanitisers are used at the correct concentrations to achieve effective results.

Additional measures which should be considered as a result of the pandemic include:

- Increase frequency of cleaning and sanitation: at end of each shift; four times per day.
- Ensure frequent cleaning and sanitation of high touch surfaces (e.g. door handles, light switches, control panels) and high traffic areas, including control rooms, change rooms and meal areas. In particular, clean and sanitise meal areas and remove waste after use by each work group.
- Staff engaged in cleaning and sanitation should wear PPE, such as overalls or uniform, and gloves. Protective clothing (e.g. uniforms, overalls, etc.) should be frequently washed as per the manufacturers' recommendations.
- Roster additional staff to undertake increased cleaning activities.
- Clean and sanitise tools. Maintenance teams mostly have individual tools; shared tools, when essential, are cleaned between users.
- In general, alcohol-based disinfectants (e.g. ethanol, propyl alcohol) have been shown to significantly reduce infectivity of enveloped viruses like SARS-CoV-2 (which causes the COVID-19 disease) in concentrations of 70-80% with one-minute exposure time. Chlorine-based disinfectants (sodium hypochlorite) (0.05%) are effective for surface decontamination, as are disinfectants with active ingredients based on quaternary ammonium compounds (QUATS).

For more information

- Further information about food safety and COVID-19 can be found on the [Food Standards Australia New Zealand website](#).
- Queensland Government [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) website](#).
- 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84).