

# COVID – 19 in a Food Handling Environment

## Risk Management

COVID-19 will most likely affect every organisation at some stage during the next few weeks and months.

Hygiene within the food industry has always been important – a pre-requisite programme without which other food safety systems cannot be implemented. However, COVID-19 has made everyone more aware of the importance of good hand hygiene and cleanliness.

To prepare for the effect of COVID-19 on food production facilities, the following information has been summarised from a Webinar presented by Food Focus on 24 April 2020.

### Policies and Procedures Required

The following topics should be covered in policies and procedures dealing with COVID-19, as applicable to the organisation:

1. Social distancing
2. PPE
3. Temperature checks, monitoring smell and taste as this can be affected,
4. Testing, continuous monitoring of your employees
5. Isolation and contact tracing
6. Cleaning and sanitation
7. Disinfection of common and high traffic areas
8. Business travel
9. Promote work from home for people who are able to
10. Adhering to the policies and procedures set out in your FSMS
11. Monitoring absenteeism
12. Emergency communication channels with employees
13. Daily toolbox talks and communication
14. Infectious disease preparedness and response plan
15. Visitor access

A COVID-19 policy addressing the why, signed by top management, must be developed.

Applicable COVID-19 procedures should be written – what to do at each area and who is responsible.

## Risk Assessment

A risk assessment must be done, not only on the effect on food safety but also the organizational risk. Where are the risks and what can be done to minimise the risks to employees and the organization.

What do we as a company need to consider and assess:

1. PPE
2. Hand washing facilities and commodities – what if there are no Food Grade sanitiser and cleaning chemicals available
3. Hand hygiene away from the workplace – home hygiene, transportation, sanitation
4. Monitoring
5. Reducing the amount of staff required
6. Footwear – risks associated with footwear
7. Mental health and wellbeing awareness programmes
8. Planned task observations

When conducting the risk analysis: consider the following

1. PPE
  - a. Masks
  - b. Gloves
  - c. Disposal
  - d. Laundry
2. Welfare areas
  - a. Don't over crowd
  - b. Cross contact risks, e.g. cups
3. Extra sanitation
  - a. Cell phones
  - b. Keyboards
  - c. Railings
  - d. Handles
  - e. Tools/Utensils
  - f. Truck cabs
  - g. Other high touch areas (biometric access control, etc)

Where is this risk assessment included in the food safety system?

The risk assessment can be included under employee protection or organisational risk assessment (SWOT analysis)

## RISK ASSESSMENT –EMPLOYEE PROTECTION

LIST OF POTENTIAL CONTACT POINTS				Mitigation
CONTACT POINT	DESCRIPTION OF CONTACT/ TRANSMISSION	MODE OF TRANSMISSION	RISK LEVEL	
Main Gate	Employee - Use of security guards pen to sign register	Droplet Transmission – Touching contaminated surface	Medium Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Security Guard to complete the <u>register</u> for employees to reduce the risk of employee touching the pen</li> <li>✓ Employee vehicles to be clearly identifiable (parking disc, vehicle register at security)</li> <li>✓ Employee- guard contact is mitigated by leaving the window rolled up upon entry</li> </ul>
Main Gate	Employee/ Visitor/ Contractor/ Service Provider – Travelling with a lift club / employee coming in to contact with infected persons outside of facility	Person to Person – Close Physical Contact	High Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Security to test temperature of each persons with an infrared thermometer and <u>record: date, time, temperature, person's name</u></li> <li>✓ Temperature &gt; 37.3°C should be reported immediately to management, person to isolated and a doctor's appointment to be scheduled</li> </ul>

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OR

## OR PUT IT IN THE ORGANISATIONAL RISK ASSESSMENT (FSSC v5)

### ORGANISATIONAL RISKS TABLE (Clauses 4.2 and 6.1)

This table covers links clause 4.2 Context of the organisation with clause 6.1 Planning

4.2 Interested party	4.2 Requirements of interested parties/FSMS		Risks (6.1)	Opportunities (6.1)	How address? [6.1.2 a)]	How evaluate its effective? [6.1.2 b)]	Evidence
	Internal	External					
Customers (retailers)		-Audit requirements -In spec, on time, in full	Loss of Customer	Enhanced sales Loyalty	Customer audits Customer complaint system	Audit targets CC. Targets Marketing survey	Customer meeting minutes Food Safety Objectives
Consumers		_Cost effective -Food Safe -Quality	Loss of consumer	Enhanced sales Loyalty	Customer complaint system	CC. Targets	Food Safety Objectives
Employees contracting COVID 19	-Employees need to be Kept safe -Business continuity. Can shut down	-Cannot supply customers	Demotivated workers Increased Food Safety Mistakes: Increased Food Defence /Sabotage	More Productive Employees	COVID-19 Mitigation Strategy Crisis management plan	Audits Dept labour/covid-19 Positive count	Covid -19 Task team minutes

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To minimise the risk to the organisation you need to consider the following:

1. Consider working shifts where there is no contact between the shifts – if a staff member tests positive then only a portion of the staff will be isolated.
2. What contingency plans will be made if there are no food grade sanitisers available?
3. Contingency production plans if no staff are available.

The risk to food safety is low, but not negligible, as the coronavirus is a respiratory infection and infection is not as a result of ingestion. The main potential for contamination is through packaging contamination. If a consumer touches a contaminated package, they may become infected due to the cross contamination. Worker protection doubles as consumer protection. Any actions put into place for reducing the risk to staff, will automatically reduce the risk to the consumer.

## Plan of Action if Positive Test Results

We need to have a documented plan of action in place for when a worker tests positive, or if a service provider is ill with COVID-19. A contingency plan must be in place, documented, practiced and communicated.

What must be done if a staff member tests positive? You may only disclose the person's name and diagnosis if you have their written permission. Please ensure confidentiality as far as possible when handling the situation.

The following actions must be taken:

1. Isolate/quarantine confirmed employee
2. Address and isolate employees working near an infected co-worker for extended periods
3. Clean and disinfect your workplace – remember the workers rest areas (see next section for more details).
4. Notify employees

## Cleaning practices and principles

Most cleaning practices are designed and tested for efficacy against bacteria and for the removal of allergens, but viruses are not usually considered.

The WHO suggest the use of disinfectants active against enveloped viruses such as the novel Corona virus responsible for COVID-19. These are known to be:

- 70% ethyl alcohol (disinfecting small areas and equipment, e.g. thermometers)
- Sodium Hypochlorite 0.5 % (5 000 ppm) for disinfecting surfaces.

Currently virucidal efficacy testing is not available in South Africa, and sample approval at overseas laboratories takes approximately 8 weeks. The best advice is to use chemicals which have been tested against similar viruses and to follow the WHO guidelines.

Cleaning after a COVID-19 diagnosis will be initiated after approval from the Department of Health or NICD. A plan or protocol must be available for staff to follow. This protocol must be available for the cleaning staff to follow. Appropriate records must also be kept.

The protocol must include the following:

1. List of staff names involved with cleaning – for tracing purposes.
2. Chemical matrix
3. Cleaning and disinfecting process – wet clean or fogging
4. Areas to be cleaned

Records must be kept and have space for the cleaning and sanitation staff to sign as acknowledgement that cleaning was completed. This is important should there be any queries relating to the protocols which were followed.

The most appropriate type of cleaning is dependent on the industry and what can be applied in the various areas.

### **Wet cleaning:**

As with any cleaning programme it is specific to the industry. Chemicals for cleaning and sanitation can be:

- Chlorinated caustic detergent/heavy duty alkaline detergent
- 1% Sodium hypochlorite (for high touch points)
- Peracetic acid (with >0.5% Hydrogen peroxide)
- QAC – broad based spectrum sanitiser following chlorine application

### **Fogging**

Fogging follows dry and wet cleaning and sanitation protocols. There are 2 types of fogging:

1. ULF / Cold fogging – using alcohol sanitiser (office facilities). This has a 1 hour settling time
2. Fogging using QAC or Peracetic Acid sanitiser. This has an 8 hour settling time.

As with fogging for insect control, safety of staff is important. The correct respirator and other safety equipment must be followed, and signage during fogging and settling period must be visible.

Before any fogging is done sensitive equipment must be sanitised and covered.

Please also remember the staff facilities when arranging appropriate cleaning.

## **Advantages and Disadvantages of COVID-19**

COVID-19 has taken up a large amount of resources and time to ensure the safety of staff and visitors to the premises. Ensuring that we maintain the FSMS through this time of crisis is of continued importance. There are some advantages for the food industry. These include:

- More cleaning
- Better PPE
- Improved Security

But there are also disadvantages which can impact food safety:

- Less staff – but workload remains the same or is increased
- Focus is away from foreign materials, pests, maintenance, etc
- Raw material supply can be affected which may increase risks such as food fraud

### **Resources**

ENTECOM COVID 19 SUPPORT PACK – <https://entecom.co.za>

FOOD FOCUS WEBSITE – <https://foodfocus.co.za>

GOVERNMENT WEBSITE – <https://sacoronavirus.co.za>

THANK YOU TO THE PRESENTERS OF THE WEBINAR AND TO FOOD FOCUS FOR THE INFORMATION