



COVID-19 – Food Business Advice – FAQs

As a result of the current COVID-19 issues, we understand that businesses have had to adapt their business models in the current situation in order to maintain business at this time. We hope that this document will answer any questions you may have in relation to this, together with other frequently asked questions that we have been receiving from local business owners.

Q1. Can COVID-19 (coronavirus) be passed on through food?

There is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 is passed on through food. Coronaviruses need a host (animal or human) to grow in and cannot grow in food. Thorough cooking is expected to kill the virus.

Read more information on COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and food from the European Food Safety Authority
<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/coronavirus-no-evidence-food-source-or-transmission-route>

Q2. Is there a risk to consumers from 'open' food?

As usual, it is important to maintain good hygiene practices around open food (e.g. unpackaged bread, cakes etc.).

However, it is possible that infected food workers and/or consumers could introduce the virus to food, by coughing and sneezing, or through hand contact. It is therefore important that they strictly follow good personal hygiene practices. Customers and food businesses are expected to behave in a hygienic manner and food business are obliged to monitor such displays.

Even if people aren't displaying symptoms, they can be carrying the virus for up to 14 days before they display symptoms, so it is important that everyone maintains good hygiene practices and hand washing.

Food is not directly involved in the transmission of COVID-19. The main risk of transmission is from close contact with infected people. Hence the advice to public and staff alike is to wash your hands.

Q3. Can I operate as a takeaway?

If your business is already registered as a food business with a local authority, you are permitted under your current food hygiene registration to operate as a food takeaway. However, you will need to consider the additional food hygiene hazards that may be presented by operating as a takeaway and put in place any additional controls required.

You must ensure that foods that you are delivering to customers are protected from contamination. This means making sure that they are adequately covered to prevent contamination in transit. Vehicles and bags used to store foods must be cleaned and disinfected so that they're fit for purpose.

Make sure that hot food is kept very hot until it is collected by the delivery driver or customer. You also need to make sure that food is kept hot until it arrives at the customer's home. It is a good idea to use an insulated bag or box to transport food. If food is not kept hot, harmful bacteria can grow in it. Using an insulated bag or box to transport food will help keep it hot.

Food that needs refrigerating must be kept cool whilst it is transported. You could use an insulated box with ice packs.

It is recommended to keep delivery distances short and time limited to delivery within 30 minutes.

Where possible, delivery staff should have minimal contact with customers. Use contactless payments or pre-payments wherever possible and arrange for orders to be left on doorsteps to avoid physical contact with the customers. If contact with customers is necessary, reinforce the need to sanitise hands as soon as possible afterwards.

If you have specific questions in relation to your own business, please email us at EHealth@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk or speak to a Food Safety Officer on 02892447300

Q4. Should I close my front doors for business?

The government has issued an instruction that cafes, restaurants and pubs should now close to prevent the spread of the virus.

If you are continuing to operate a delivery only service, there are still important protection measures that you must continue to implement to keep staff and customers you are delivering to safe:

- Use appropriate cleaning chemicals correctly (refer to label for contact times and dilution rates) to disinfect surfaces throughout your premises. Please refer to the related FAQ about cleaning/disinfection.
- Encourage customers to pay with contactless/card payments rather than via cash where possible to minimise the handling of money which could act as a vehicle for the spread of the virus.
- Remember the two-metre rule between staff and customers. Arrange for staff to deliver items without coming into contact with any surfaces and instruct them not to enter anyone's house.
- Monitor your employee's health and remind them to let you know if they develop symptoms without delay.
- Consider a delivery only operation (refer to question about operating as a takeaway above).
- Reinforce the importance of hand washing with all staff. This should include cleaning hands regularly. Alcohol gels are not a suitable substitute for regular and thorough hand washing.

Q5. What can I do to keep on top of food safety at this time?

- Be prepared by planning ahead.
- Stay on top of hygiene and cleaning in your premises.
- Make sure that you have good supplies of hand soap, hand drying materials and the right cleaning chemicals.
- Make sure that staff are using cleaning chemicals in accordance with instructions and that your product is effective against viruses.
- Review your Safe Catering (HACCP) if there are any changes to your processes e.g. if you start to offer delivery, make sure you've thought about how you will make sure that the food will get to the customer in the same condition it left the premises, is kept hot or cold and is clearly labelled for the customer.
- Don't forget the basic rules of producing safe foods and your normal everyday checks!

Q6. What should food business owners/managers do if they have a supply chain problem caused by COVID-19?

Infections of staff with COVID-19 (coronavirus) in food businesses around the world may lead to disruption of the food supply chain where certain ingredients and packaging may be in short supply.

Food businesses may be considering some of the following:

- Reducing/simplifying your menu
- Leaving out or substituting ingredients in a product, and/or
- Changing their packaging, and/or
- Changing their process

In these situations, it is important that food businesses remember their legal obligations to only place safe food on the market (including consideration of allergen information given to customers).

Any change to product, packaging or processing requires a full review of the business' food safety management system (e.g. HACCP, SFBB pack).

This will allow them to:

- risk assess any food safety issues that could result from the proposed changes
- put in place controls to manage any risks identified
- document the changes

Q7. Are there any additional checks I can do on incoming goods?

When receiving incoming goods ensure particular attention is given to shelf life and quality.

Q8. What if a member of staff in my business becomes ill?

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace with a new, continuous cough or high temperature, you must send them home and advise them to follow government advice to stay at home. This is very important to reduce the spread of coronavirus to others.

Please refer to the gov.uk website for changing advice:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

You should disinfect any equipment and areas where they have been working including all hand contact points throughout the premises. You should also discard any ready to eat foods (that will not undergo any further cooking) that they have been handled/prepared by them.

Q9. Cleaning and disinfection advice for businesses

Make sure that you use the right chemicals – to disinfect surfaces you must make sure that the chemical you are using is effective against viruses as well as bacteria.

Refer to the label for instructions for use paying particular attention to any contact time needed.

Use single use cloths e.g. blue roll or kitchen towel.

Disinfectants only work effectively once grease or visible dirt has been removed from a surface. A detergent can be used first to remove grease and dirt, followed by a second clean with a disinfectant. It is important that you leave the cleaning product on the surface for the time specified in the instructions.

A sanitiser can be used to both clean and disinfect as part of a two-stage approach. Firstly, use the product to remove any dirt then reapply to the visibly clean surface and leave it for the required time to disinfect the surface.

Q10. What if I run out of soap for washing hands?

If you are struggling to obtain supplies of soap, as a last resort then as an alternative you can use household detergent or washing up liquid. The important thing to remember when cleaning hands is that it is the physical motion of hand washing and lathering which is the most effective method of removing dirt and germs from the surface of hands.

You could also ask neighbouring businesses if they have a supply or contact your cleaning chemical supplier to request that they reserve stock for you if possible once their own supplies are replenished.

Q11. What if I run out of disinfectant?

- Think ahead and don't leave it until the last minute to reorder supplies.
- If you do run out of cleaning supplies, think about alternative disinfectant chemicals that you can access if you run out of your usual products such chlorine based disinfectants or baby equipment sterilising fluid.
- Ask neighbouring businesses if they have supplies that they can give you access to.
- Contact chemical suppliers to request that they reserve stock for you if possible once their own supplies are replenished.

- Use heat as a means to disinfect surfaces and areas e.g. a steam cleaner or very hot water, where this is practical.
- Where possible, use a dishwasher for disinfecting equipment and utensils.

Q12. How can I protect my employees at work?

- Continue to follow the general hygiene precautions that you're taking.
- Clean high traffic hand contact areas and change to contactless payments.
- Think about restricting staff members to segregated areas
- Restrict how much contact times staff have with each other by restricting them to the same shifts.

Q13. Can we donate food to help the community?

If you want to prepare and cook food items for donation from your registered kitchen, you must follow your food safety methods and follow hygienic practices as you would in your own business to produce food that is safe.

Particular consideration should be given to temperature control, allergen information and shelf life. For further advice on these topics please contact our Food Safety Officers on 02892447300 or email to Ehealth@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk

Q14. How can I reduce wastage?

There are a few practical steps that you could take to help reduce food wastage in your business:

- Reduce your menu
- Make smaller batches of food
- Ask for pre-orders in advance from customers to avoid unnecessary preparation
- Freeze down foods where possible. If you freeze foods then you must ensure that they are frozen before their use by date. Label foods with the date that they are frozen. Refer to packaging to check that food is suitable for freezing
- Consider freezing foods in portions that can be defrosted as required rather than all at once.

Q15. If I need extra training for staff, where can I get it? Can I complete it at home?

There is plenty of online training available. Some of the courses that are available are: Level 2 Food Safety, Allergen Awareness, Coronavirus.

Q16. I was hoping to have an advice visit from the Council before my next inspection.

Unfortunately, due to the current situation, the food team will not be undertaking advice visits or training courses. The team will only be conducting critical and essential visits where there is the greatest risk to public health.

Q17. Can I still serve food from a mobile vehicle?

There is potentially more risk of transfer in these situations due to the direct handover of foods involved and face-to-face service so you should consider whether you can adequately control the risks involved.

If you continue to operate a takeaway food service from a mobile vehicle e.g. burger van, then you must apply necessary precautions to prevent the spread of the virus. These include:

- Avoid hand contact with customers
- Wash your hands thoroughly every time you've come into contact with a customer during service of foods or money.
- Encourage contactless payments where possible rather than handling cash
- Gloves are not the answer because they will become contaminated in the same way that hands will

- Be mindful that any surface that customers are touching could carry the virus (e.g. cone stands or counters) and will require disinfection.
- Ask customers to keep their distance and well back
- Manage any queues that form to ensure the 2m distance rule can be followed
- Display signage to encourage customers to follow the rules

Q18 Allergens

When taking phone orders you must ensure that the customer is asked about allergens in their order. You may wish to state “**Do you require information on the allergens present in your order**”

There is advice for businesses on allergen management on the FSA website at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses>

Further advice on Covid-19 can be found on the Public Health Agency website at <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

Further food safety guidance can be found on the Food Standards Agency website at www.food.gov.uk

During this difficult time we will continue to support and provide guidance to all businesses providing food. Should you wish to discuss any matter with a member of the Food Team, please do not hesitate to contact us on 02892447300 or email Ehealth@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk.