

# COVID-19: Guidance for food retailers

A message from Lake Macquarie City Council's Food Surveillance Team

Should you require any additional information, please contact us on **4921 0581**.

COVID-19 or coronavirus presents a potential risk to workers, customers and businesses operating in the retail food sector. This newsletter outlines some facts about the virus and measures that food retailers should undertake. These measures will help limit the potential transmission of the virus, protect staff from risk of infection, and bolster confidence amongst patrons to help maintain business continuity. The guidance aims to strengthen the routine risk controls that should currently be in place.

Under the Food Act 2003 the retail food business sector is required to abide by strict measures. These measures relate to cleaning and sanitising, food handler health and hygiene, and food handler skills and knowledge. While person-to-person transmission in the general community in Australia has been limited at this stage, as public gathering places the retail food business sector should implement a proactive and effective response to risk.

## Facts about the virus:

- Coronavirus is a family of viruses that cause respiratory illness. They include viruses that cause the common cold. COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus not previously found in humans.
- Symptoms include fever, flu-like symptoms (sore throat, sneeze, cough) and respiratory distress.
- Particularly vulnerable community groups include the elderly and those with existing health conditions that make them at risk of respiratory disease.
- Main viral transmission routes include:
  - close contact with an infectious person
  - contact with droplets from an infectious person's cough or sneeze
  - and touching surfaces like tables, counters, plates and cutlery contaminated with infected droplets and then touching the mouth or face.
- Traces of the virus can remain on surfaces between two hours and nine days.
- Effective viral kill is achieved using common disinfectants and sanitisers (sodium hypochlorite 0.5%, quaternary ammonia-based products, sanitising dishwashers).

### Can the virus be transmitted through food?

Transmission through food is unlikely and there is no evidence to date that this is occurring. However droplet transmission from an infected food handler to ready-to-eat food (or cutlery and crockery) could create a transmission route.



## The role of the business owner and the Food Safety Supervisor

- Undertake and document a risk review of business activity to identify pathways of potential transmission and effective control measures from the perspective of the business as a food service provider and from the public as customers, patrons, audiences and visitors.
- Create and support a culture within the business where staff are engaged in the understanding and identification of risk, supported in building skills and knowledge, undertake their duties to a high standard, have access to the necessary resources to do so and are encouraged to self-report illness or exposure without prejudice.
- Build skills and knowledge within staff so they are clear about their roles and responsibilities within the business or team and can effectively carry out that role.
- Maintain the capacity of the business (sanitisers, disinfectants, gloves, cleaning equipment, hand wash facilities, effective operation of equipment etc) to sustain controls particularly around cleaning, sanitising and hygiene.
- Monitor and evaluate performance and operations to ensure effective controls are maintained.
- Monitor and respond to developments with the COVID-19 outbreak in Australia that are relevant to your business.



## Cleaning and Sanitising

- Cleaning and sanitising are key controls in preventing the spread of virus and bacteria in a food business. The Food Standards Code requires:
  - food contact equipment, such as benches, knives, chopping boards, pots as well as eating and drinking utensils, to be in a clean and sanitary condition.

## Food Handler Hygiene

- A food handler is anyone who works in a food business and handles food, or surfaces that are likely to come in contact with food (e.g. cutlery and plates).
- Under the Food Standards Code, a food handler must take all reasonable measures not to handle food or food surfaces in a way that is likely to compromise the safety and suitability of food.
- Food handlers have specific responsibilities relating to health and hygiene including:
  - reporting that they are ill or showing symptoms of their illness
  - washing their hands whenever they are likely to be a source of contamination
  - maintaining acceptable hygiene practices

## Some practical measures

- As part of the risk assessment consider extending the sanitising and disinfecting process to customer areas including points of hand and potential droplet contact such as chairs, table surfaces, door and cabinet handles, counter tops, menus, spice and condiment containers, childrens toys, gaming equipment, self-service equipment, key pads etc.
- Wear gloves during table clearing and washup processes.
- Prioritise table cleaning and sanitising immediately after customers vacate.
- Provide effective hand sanitisers in customer areas.
- Limit customer self-service to cutlery, crockery, complimentary water glasses and straws etc. where possible.
- Ensure effective sneeze guards are in place where self-service is provided.
- Ensure you have an effective sanitiser/disinfectant agent. Implement a system that guarantees required dilution rates are achieved at all times.

### Available Resources

The NSW Food Authority website [foodauthority.nsw.gov.au](http://foodauthority.nsw.gov.au) contains relevant factsheets, guidelines and educational material that can be easily accessed.

“I’m Alert” is a free online food handler training program that is available at [lakemac.com.au/food-safety](http://lakemac.com.au/food-safety). The training programs contain a number of training modules that will assist in building skills and knowledge.

Current information on COVID-19 can be obtained from the NSW Department of Health website, [health.nsw.gov.au](http://health.nsw.gov.au)