



10 THINGS

food safety authorities should know about food safety and COVID-19

FAO food safety experts explain what is known so far about **COVID-19 and food**, offering hygiene advice for safety authorities

1 The safety and integrity of the food supply chain must be maintained



Competent authorities should continue to deliver services critical to ensuring the safety and integrity of the nation's food supply and support trade. A risk-based approach should be used to safeguard the health of staff, focus on higher risk activities, and temporarily suspend lower risk activities that do not directly impact food safety or trade.

2 The COVID-19 pandemic is evolving

Authorities should continue to monitor the evolving COVID-19 pandemic and maintain regular communication with staff, food businesses, national and international partners (WHO, FAO and INFOSAN), and stakeholders. Collaboration with all sectors of the food industry and public health partners has never been more critical.

3 General food hygiene principles are essential

The Codex Alimentarius Commission has adopted several practical guidelines on how to apply and implement best practices to ensure food hygiene (*Codex General Principles of Food Hygiene*, CXC 1-1969), handle meats (*Codex Code of Hygienic Practice for Meat*, CXC 58-2005), and control viruses in foods (*Guidelines for the Application of General Principles of Food Hygiene to the Control of Viruses in Food*, CXG 79-2012).



4 Inspection and verification activities



For the duration of the pandemic, food inspections at high-risk food premises, such as abattoirs and manufacturers of cooked or ready-to-eat foods, will need to continue. The interrupted food supply and the need to expand production capabilities due to industry closures may also demand increase oversight to ensure that temporary measures do not compromise food safety.

5 Food labelling

Temporary adjustments to food labelling requirements should also be considered as long as food safety is not compromised and labels are not misleading to consumers. Flexibility on labelling requirements will allow food labelled for the service sector (i.e. restaurants) to be redirected and food waste avoided. Unauthorized health claims or undeclared allergens cannot be tolerated.



6 Food Laboratories

Food laboratories may be reallocated to testing COVID-19 in clinical samples. Food testing should be limited to high priority (i.e.: outbreak investigation) samples only. Sampling food or water for COVID-19 virus testing is not recommended as neither have been implicated in the transmission of infection.



7 Protecting inspection staff

The health of the food inspector must be protected. Staff should be trained to reduce the transmission of the virus e.g. physical distancing, frequent hand washing, personal hygiene and the appropriate use of personal protective equipment.

8 Illness in the workplace

All staff must report COVID-19 symptoms or confirmed illness immediately and should not go to work. If symptoms develop at work, staff must be isolated until medical advice is available. Any people who have been in close contact with ill staff must be notified and appropriate sanitation measures taken.



9 Food animals are not at risk from COVID-19

Current evidence suggests that food-producing animals are not susceptible to COVID-19 and will not become infected through close contact with positive human cases.

10 Food and live animals imported from countries with high prevalence of COVID-19 pose no increased risk

There is no current evidence that food and food packaging material are sources or routes of transmission. Food animals have not been implicated in the transmission of COVID-19, so imported food or food animals should be subjected to the same import controls as before the pandemic.