



Briefing 20-23

March 2020

COVID-19: Guidance for food businesses

To: England

For info: Contacts from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This briefing will be of particular interest to officers with responsibility for catering.

Key Issues

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the government have issued guidance on the 25 March 2020 for food business which is also of relevance to catering services providing school meals.

1. Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the government have issued guidance for food businesses.

This short briefing outlines a summary of the key points that relate specifically to catering for school meals. The full guidance can be found via the following link:-

[COVID-19 - Guidance for food businesses](#)

2. What you need to know about coronavirus and food

The guidance provides details of some key facts with regards to the virus and food which are outlined below:-

- It is very unlikely that you can catch coronavirus from food.
- COVID-19 is a respiratory illness. It is not known to be transmitted by exposure to food or food packaging.
- Any food handler who is unwell should not be at work. If they have symptoms, they should follow government advice and [stay at home](#).
- Although it is very unlikely that coronavirus is transmitted through food, as a matter of good hygiene practice anyone handling food should wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This should be done as a matter of routine, before and after handling food, and especially after being in a public place, blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Food business operators should continue to follow the Food Standard Agency's [guidance on good hygiene practices](#) in food preparation and their Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) processes.

The government also state that they support measures to allow safe privileged access to supermarkets and food businesses for the elderly and essential workers such as NHS staff.

3. Food hygiene guidance

The guidance advises that a Food Safety Management System (FSMS) which includes [existing food hygiene guidance](#) and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) processes should be followed.

Employers should stress the importance of more frequent handwashing and maintaining good hygiene practices in food preparation and handling areas. Employees should wash their hands for 20 seconds, especially after being in a public place, blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing.

Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products. Food businesses can refer to the Food Standards Agency's [safer food, better business \(SFBB\)](#) guidance for further guidance on expected food hygiene standards.

Businesses can help reduce the spread of coronavirus by reminding everyone of the government's public health advice. [Posters, leaflets and other materials](#) are available online.

4. Food packaging

It is reported in the guidance that 'The World Health Organisation' advises that the likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low. The risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, travelled, and exposed to different conditions and temperature is also very low.

While food packaging is not known to present a specific risk, efforts should be made to ensure it is cleaned and handled in line with usual food safety practices.

Cleaning should be in line with food hygiene practice and the environmental controls set out in the business' HACCP. Staff should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of working. No additional precautions need to be taken.

5. Cleaning and waste disposal

The government has provided guidance separate guidance on [cleaning and waste disposal](#) to help businesses reduce the spread of coronavirus.

6. Managing employee sickness

The guidance states that if anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the [stay at home guidance](#). It also advise that if you or an employee are experiencing symptoms, visit NHS 111 online or call 111 if there is no internet access. In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured, or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home, unless government policy changes. You should keep monitoring the [government response to coronavirus](#) for further updates. The Food Standards Agency's [fitness for work](#) guidance for staff who handle food products provides advice on managing sickness in a food business. Understanding this guidance and applying it on both a personal and business level can help to prevent the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

7. Social distancing

The guidance states that the advice on social distancing measures applies to everyone. There is a need to minimise opportunities for the virus to spread by maintaining a distance of 2 metres between individuals. This advice applies to both inside the food business and in the external public areas where customers may need to queue. People should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds and more frequently than normal.

It is commented in the guidance that the practical implementation of this advice will depend on the local circumstances. This may be best evaluated by the store manager, however a few general indicators may be relevant to the majority of retail outlets:

- use additional signage to ask customers not to enter the shop if they have symptoms
- regulate entry so that the premises do not become overcrowded
- use floor markings inside the commercial spaces to facilitate compliance with the social distancing advice of 2 metres, particularly in the most crowded areas, such as serving counters and tills
- use vertical signage to direct customers into lanes if feasible to facilitate movement within the premises while maintaining 2 metre distance
- make regular announcements to remind customers to follow social distancing advice and clean their hands regularly
- place plexiglass barriers at tills and counters if feasible, as an additional element of protection for workers and customers
- encourage the use of contactless payments where possible, without disadvantaging older or vulnerable customers
- provide additional pop-up handwashing stations or facilities if possible, providing soap, water and hand sanitiser

Further information on [social distancing and adults who are at increased risk of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) can be found on GOV.UK.

8. Maintaining social distancing in specific food business settings

The guidance details specific advice for a range of settings including, Food processing plants, Supermarkets and Outdoor food markets / farmers markets. The full details of these can be found in the full guidance. However, the following specifically relate to school caterers:-

Staff canteens and rest areas

The guidance reports that It is very unlikely that coronavirus is transmitted through food. Workplace canteens may remain open where there are no practical alternatives for staff to obtain food.

- as far as reasonably possible, a distance of 2 metres should be maintained between users
- staff can continue to use rest areas if they apply the same social distancing
- notices promoting hand hygiene and social distancing should be placed visibly in these areas
- if possible, increase the number of hand washing stations available

Takeaways and restaurants offering a pick-up service

For these services the guidance includes the following advice:

- no orders should be taken in person on the premises - this should be communicated to customers by appropriate means such as signage
- businesses should therefore only take orders online or by telephone
- customers could have staggered collection times - customers should be discouraged from entering the premises until their order is ready
- customers arriving without having already placed an order should be encouraged to leave the premises to place their order by telephone or online, and to return at a designated time for collection
- customers whose orders are ready should enter one at a time to collect orders and make payments
- businesses should discourage crowding outside the premises. Where possible, use queue management systems to maintain the 2 metres separation

APSE COMMENT

APSE has set up a COVID-19 Information Hub to deal with frontline service issues as they arise; ensuring greater resilience and learning between each other during this difficult time.

Details can be accessed via the following link:-

[COVID-19- APSE information hub](#)

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