

## **FoodDrinkEurope Q&A: Covid-19**

### ***Is food a vector for the coronavirus?***

The protection of human health is the number one priority for the food and drink industry and FoodDrinkEurope continues to monitor the coronavirus outbreak and the scientific evidence related to its spread.

According to the European Food Safety Authority, [food is not a likely source or route of transmission of coronavirus](#). Experience with other similar viruses suggests that people cannot be infected with coronavirus through food as the virus needs a host (animal or human) to grow in. This, together with the relatively low environmental stability of coronavirus, make it unlikely that food products could be a source of infection, according to our best knowledge.

The European food and drink industry will continue to monitor developments regarding Covid-19 in relation to food products and will act in accordance if there are any changes in the risk assessment.

### ***Is food packaging a vector for the virus?***

As noted above, current knowledge is that the most likely transmission method is a 'droplet infection', where coronavirus is emitted by humans into the air via droplets, and then inhaled.

Presently there are no specific research studies on the stability of Covid-19 on packaging under real-world conditions and across the supply chain, however some studies have suggested the virus can remain on plastic and cardboard.

In any case, people handling packaging are advised to follow the guidance of public health authorities regarding good hygiene practices, including regularly washing hands.

As with other known coronaviruses, Covid-19 is sensitive to cooking temperatures, therefore cooking food will also help prevent contamination.

For more information the World Health Organization (WHO) has published [recommendations](#) to follow when handling and preparing food. In addition, [see more information from the European Food Information Council](#).

### ***How is coronavirus impacting the food and drink industry?***

The food and drink industry is the largest manufacturing industry in Europe with 294,000 businesses and a 4.7 million-strong workforce providing over 1.5 billion meals every day. The industry is also an important market for farmers – buying 70 percent of all EU farm produce. Disruptions due to coronavirus will therefore have a serious impact on businesses, workers and the wider agri-food supply chain.

Safety is always our number one concern. Our company members are ensuring their workforces follow appropriate measures by adhering to official advice from their relevant authorities to protect themselves and others from coronavirus.

Members are also trying to maintain business operations, where possible, to ensure food and drink products reach their intended markets. Having said that, many businesses have been impacted in recent weeks. Problems include queues for lorries to cross borders and drivers unable to enter countries for fear of being unable to exit. Given that the agri-food supply chain is complex and multinational, any disruption to the single market and free movement of goods will impact business.

Finally, given that 99 per cent of the 294,000 food and drink companies in Europe are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) it will be critical that all vulnerable business receive the support they need to survive the economic shock created by coronavirus.

### ***How can the industry mitigate any impact?***

To mitigate any disruption, companies are adjusting their supply chains according to their specific circumstances. National food and drink federations are also in contact with their national authorities to explore ways to minimise impact.

FoodDrinkEurope will continue to work with its members to monitor the impact on the industry and will maintain regular contact with the European Commission and other relevant authorities to ensure supply chains are disrupted as little as possible.

### ***How can the European Commission assist food and drink businesses?***

We are asking the commission to protect the single market and discourage the creation of unnecessary national barriers, where it does not compromise human health. Where possible, the free movement of goods within the EU single market must continue to enable food and drink supply chains to function effectively and to ensure the industry can continue to meet food demand across Europe and beyond. [See here the five areas we have urged the commission to respond to with the utmost urgency.](#)

In addition, we are asking the commission to support the food and drink workforce, who are on the front line to ensure shelves are stacked and fridges are stocked. [See here our joint statement with the trade union group EFFAT.](#)

### ***What has the European Commission done so far?***

On March 16, the commission [presented guidelines](#) for border measures to protect health and keep goods and essential services available. It said that the free circulation of goods “is crucial for essential goods such as food supplies”.

On March 23, the commission presented further helpful [practical guidance](#) to ensure continuous flow of goods across EU via green lanes.

On March 25, the commission said it stood ready to support the agri-food sector and highlighted [a number of actions](#) taken since the beginning of the crisis to support farmers.

On March 30, the commission published [practical guidance](#) to ensure the free movement of critical workers.

More information on the commission's activities can be found [here](#). We continue to work with the commission to ease the movement of goods and support our workforce and businesses.

***Where can I find more information on Coronavirus?***

More detailed information (in English) on Covid-19 and food can be found at the following links: [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#); [European Food Safety Authority](#); [European Commission](#); the [World Health Organisation](#); the [German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment](#); and the [UK Government](#).

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