

Precautionary measures against the spread of COVID-19 for Food Businesses Managers

The Public Health Services of the Ministry of Health, within the framework of a set of guidelines addressed to health professionals for their protection against COVID-19, urge the food businesses managers to apply the following protective measures to their businesses. It is noted that for the purposes of these guidelines, the term “food workers” shall include food handlers, individuals that directly touch food as part of their work. It also includes staff that may touch food contact surfaces or other surfaces in areas where food is handled. This term could therefore apply to managers, cleaning staff, maintenance staff, delivery staff, as well as food inspectors.

1. Application of preventive actions for all food premises:

- Written guidelines and training regarding how COVID-19 spreads should be available to the staff working in food areas so that they are familiar with COVID-19 symptoms and able to recognise them timely. The aim is for the staff to be able to seek medical treatment and laboratory tests and minimise infection risk for the customers and other employees.
- Prevention of many individuals being present at the business at the same time (1 person per 8 m² of clear internal space, so that overcrowding is avoided).
- Installation of a bottle of alcoholic sanitizer (alcohol content 70%) (with an injection pump and a base) at a visible position at the entrances and exits of all premises, to be used by the customers.
- Distribution of the staff into work groups so that there is limited interaction between the groups.
- Equipment of restrooms with liquid soap, single use paper towels (which shall be disposed of in foot-operated disposal bins, placed close to the sinks) and alcoholic sanitizer (alcohol content 70%).
- Before starting work, the temperature of the working staff should be checked and in case any individual has fever, they should leave the workplace with directions to call their personal doctor immediately.
- Generally, there should be compliance with the relevant Orders issued by the Minister of Health.

2. Guidelines for cleaning and disinfection regarding the cleaning staff

- Thorough and regular cleaning of common use items.
- Special care should be taken regarding the systematic, sufficient and consistent natural ventilation of all areas.
- All surfaces, floors, counters, cash points, restrooms (floors, sinks, etc.) should be kept clean and disinfected regularly during the day.
- Over and above the regular cleaning routines, regular cleaning is required of smooth surfaces used regularly (e.g. knobs, handles, staircase railing, elevators, switches, taps, etc.) with common cleaning products, that is liquid soap and water, or chlorine solution 10% (1 part chlorine diluted in 10 parts water) or alcoholic disinfectant (alcohol content 70%). It is noted that the cleaning procedure should be done using gloves and a uniform.

- Particular attention must be paid to cleaning the items and the surfaces which were touched by an individual who developed viral infection symptoms.
- The plastic bin bags, once full, should be tied tightly and removed immediately. After their use, gloves should be disposed of immediately in the plastic bags of the disposal bins and not attempt to clean them, e.g. wash single use gloves and reuse them.

3. Personal hygiene guidelines for the workers:

- Avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth with the hands to reduce the infection risk by the virus.
- Avoid talking, coughing or breathing in/breathing out when handling food.
- In case of coughing or sneezing, cover the nose and mouth with the crook of the elbow or with a tissue. The used tissue should be disposed of immediately after its use in the disposal bins.
- Regular handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Careful drying of hands with single use paper towels which will then be disposed of in the disposal bins. Hands must be washed necessarily after contact with respiratory secretions and after using the toilet. It is underlined that gloves do not substitute handwashing.
- Individuals with respiratory infections symptoms should not report to work until the symptoms have disappeared.
- The staff must wear masks, following the guidelines hereunder:
 - i. The mask must be of the appropriate type (surgical mask),
 - ii. Must be fitted properly to the face so that it covers both the mouth and nose,
 - iii. Must be changed regularly so that, with time, it does not become a breeding ground for bacteria (staphylococcus, etc.).
- The staff should wear gloves, following the guidelines hereunder:
 - i. Before wearing the gloves, always wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds and dry them.
 - ii. Wear the correct size.
 - iii. Change gloves, as you would wash your hands in case you were not wearing gloves, at least every 4 hours.
 - iv. Gloves should be removed each time you use the restroom or eat or handle garbage or clean surfaces.
 - v. You must not touch your face while wearing gloves.
 - vi. The glove of the hand that shall be used for monetary interaction must be replaced.
 - vii. Replace damaged or teared gloves immediately.
 - viii. Do not reuse gloves already worn. Each time you change gloves, you should dispose of the used ones.
 - ix. Remove each glove separately catching it by the cuff.
 - x. Wash your hands even if you are wearing gloves, since the gloves while being removed can still transmit the virus on your hands.

4. Special guidelines for public serving areas in retail food stores:

- Regarding big supermarkets, it is recommended that an employee of the business regularly conducts checks for the compliance with the precautionary measures of the staff, business partners and the customers, and for their guidance.
- Placing signs at entrance points to request customers not to enter the store if they are feeling unwell or have COVID-19 symptoms.
- In case the cash points do not have a protective barrier between the customer and the cashier, the customer should keep the greatest distance possible.
- Employees working at the supply chain should wear gloves and a protective mask during opening and handling of goods.
- Floor markings inside the retail store to facilitate compliance with the physical distancing between customers, particularly in the most crowded areas of the store, such as serving counters and cash points.
- Making regular announcements to remind customers to follow physical distancing advice and clean their hands regularly.
- Employees serving the public should limit as much as possible conversations with customers.
- In specific areas within food stores, such as the cheese cutting area, etc., the 2-metre physical distancing between customers should be followed.
- The employee behind the cutting area should leave the product for sale on the partition, where possible.
- While waiting at the cash points, the 2-metre physical distancing between customers should be followed.
- All products/food, such as bread, etc. should be displayed packaged and not in open display.
- The areas and products should be arranged in such a way so that customers complete their shopping as soon as possible.
- Avoid any promotions that may prolong the public's stay and require the presence of extra individuals.
- Reduction as much as possible of payments in cash and encouragement of contactless payments.

5. Special guidelines for the organisation of food processing areas:

- Arrangement of serving counters at a greater distance between them.
- Arrangement of serving counters alternately so the employees do not face each other.
- Personal protective equipment should be provided for staff, such as face masks, hair nets, single use gloves, clean overalls.

6. Special guidelines for food delivery:

- Drivers should be supplied with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (alcohol content 70%), a disinfectant and paper tissues.
- Drivers should use a hand sanitizer before delivering any documents to food stores' employees. Disposable containers and packaging should be used to avoid the need for cleaning of any returns.
- In case of reusable containers, such as the tail box of a motorcycle or insulating containers, appropriate hygiene and sanitation procedures should be implemented.
- Reduction as much as possible of payments in cash and encouragement of contactless payments.