



The Dairy Standard Agency (NPC) is an independent, expert and objective body funded by Milk SA and related non-statutory income. The vision of the Dairy Standard Agency is to promote the maintenance and improvement of the quality and safety of dairy products in the interest of the dairy industry and the consumer

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Dear industry member

SAFE DAIRY PROCESSING AND THE COVID-19 VIRUS

In view of the current COVID-19 virus outbreak herewith for your information guidelines regarding food safety during the handling and processing of milk and other dairy products.

Key messages

- Everyone should practice good hygiene when preparing and handling food.
- Practice good hand hygiene – wash your hands frequently with soap and water for twenty seconds.
- Good manufacturing practices – clean and sanitize food preparation surfaces.
- There is currently no evidence that COVID-19 is spread through food.
- Normal cleaning and sanitation measures will minimize the risk in a food service.

How is COVID-19 spread?

Human coronaviruses are spread from someone infected with COVID-19 virus to other close contacts with that person through contaminated droplets spread by coughing or sneezing, or by contact with contaminated hands, surfaces or objects.

How can it be prevented?

- Clean your hands frequently by washing with soap and water for twenty seconds, rinse well, dry off - apply an alcohol-based hand rub and rubbing in thoroughly.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with tissue or a flexed elbow. Use tissue only once and discard in a safe manner.
- Avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms.

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- Practice cough etiquette (keep away from other people, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and clean your hands).
- Ensure the implementation of a robust food safety programme to maintain a hygienic and safe food operating environment for your staff as well. Trained and knowledgeable food safety supervisors should ensure that the food safety programme is being followed - keeping the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak low, and employees healthy.

Can COVID-19 be spread by foodborne transmission?

Reports from the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) concluded that there is currently “no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission” of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

Amidst growing concern over the spread of the virus, EFSA issued a statement on their website on Monday (9 March) saying the disease is unlikely to be spread via food and added they are closely monitoring the situation as any new information about the outbreak comes to light.

EFSA also stated that “previous outbreaks of related coronaviruses, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) and Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), show that transmission through food consumption did not occur”.

“At the moment, there is no evidence to suggest that coronavirus is any different in this respect.” Although researchers are still learning the specifics of how COVID-19 is transmitted, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has confirmed that the virus is spreading from person to person mainly via respiratory droplets that people sneeze, cough, or exhale.

How long does COVID-19 last on surfaces?

According to the World Health Organization, it is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

If you think a surface may be contaminated, clean it with an appropriate food grade disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others. Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

Should dairy processors use disposables instead?

There is currently no evidence to suggest there is any benefit in switching to disposable protective clothing. It is important that the measures normally taken through a well-designed food safety program to minimise transmission are effective. The most effective measures you can take are practising good hand hygiene and cleaning, with particular focus on shared frequently touched surfaces.

Can coronavirus survive on equipment including crockery and cutlery?

According to EFSA while they are still finding out about the characteristics of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), they do know quite a bit about other related coronaviruses, which are likely to be similar in terms of susceptibility to inactivation.

Coronaviruses are enveloped viruses. The envelope surrounds the entire virus and without an intact envelope, the virus loses its infectivity (ability to infect a cell). The envelope is a relatively delicate structure and makes the virus more susceptible to degradation in the environment. Due to the delicate nature of the viral envelope, coronaviruses are relatively sensitive to both heat and detergents (including soap).

For this reason, cleaning according to effective standard operating procedures and use of correct detergents are likely to completely inactivate any coronavirus present.

What should a dairy processors do to protect against coronavirus?

The normal information about food safety as per a well-developed food safety programme is relevant and protective. You can find more information about basic food safety and food handling on the Dairy Standard Agency website at www.dairystandard.co.za – guideline documentation – Codes of Practise for Milk Producers and the Secondary Industry.

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