Food and Safety FAQs

Can I catch coronavirus from food?

It is very unlikely that you can catch Coronavirus from food. The current advice relating to transmission of the virus in food can be found on Food Standards Agency website: [https://www.food.gov.uk/](https://www.food.gov.uk/)

Can my existing food business serve takeaway food?

In response to restaurants, bars, etc being required to close down, many food businesses are now considering operating as takeaway and delivery businesses in the immediate term, to continue trading.

Provided you have already registered with the local authority as a food business you need only notify us of the change to the way you are operating. If the food business operator remains unchanged you do not need to reregister. You may need to adjust your food safety management system to take into account food safety during deliveries (see below for further advice)

The government has relaxed planning controls for public houses and restaurants providing hot food and drinks takeaway services on a temporary basis during the current exceptional circumstances. Further information on relaxing planning rules can be found at [gov.uk](http://gov.uk)

If you decide to provide a take away service, you will need to notify the local planning authority when the new use begins and ends.

What specific advice is there relating to food safety?

If you are altering your menu and adapting what you’re producing, you will need to consider if any new dishes present additional hazards and ensure effective food safety controls are implemented.

You must detail any new food safety controls you have put in place in your documented food safety management system/Safer Food Better Business pack

All staff need to be suitably trained and instructed on the new work arrangements, especially when you may take on additional staff to assist you with deliveries.

You also need to be mindful of the latest Government guidance on stopping spread of the infection ensuring as far as possible that the following measures are taken

1. Wash your hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds using soap and hot water, particularly after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose, or after being in public areas where other people are doing so.
2. Ensure customers and your staff maintain the social distancing recommendations which is currently maintaining a 2m space between all persons including kitchen staff.
3. To reduce the spread of germs when you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, or your sleeve (not your hands) if you don’t have a tissue, and throw the tissue in a bin immediately. Then wash your hands or use a hand sanitising gel.

4. Clean and disinfect regularly touched objects and surfaces using your sanitiser spray or bleach in the customer areas to reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people.

What are the requirements relating to food deliveries?

You need to consider how the food will be delivered whilst ensuring that you have adequate hygiene controls in place. For example, ensure the delivery vehicle is clean and tidy, ensure you can prevent potential cross-contamination of food (e.g. store food in sealed food-grade containers), maintain temperature control and ensure that any insulated delivery bags and boxes are adequately cleaned and disinfected.

In order to protect your delivery staff and customers you may wish to place items being delivered on the doorstep, knock on the door and step aside to a safe distance while the customer retrieves the delivery.

Similarly, many businesses are no longer dealing with cash. You should consider whether it is possible to only accept electronic payment at the time of the order.

What temperature control requirements do I need to be aware of for food deliveries?

Whether you are going to be selling hot or cold foods, you must ensure maintenance of the hot or cold chain. This is a critical point and you are advised to monitor and record delivery temperatures as part of your food safety management system. This can be a diary log or simple check sheet. Ensure that the staff involved understand the process and the required temperatures, including what to do if these temperatures are not within the required limits.

- Hot food must be hot held at 63°C or above. To ensure this will be maintained, you can use insulated bags or boxes.
- Cold food should ideally be kept at fridge temperatures below 8°C. Again, cool bags and boxes can be used with the addition of ice packs.
- It is also advised to limit the length of delivery times. For example, limit the number of ‘drop-off’s’ in one run.

What about delivery drivers?

Ideally, only those staff who are involved in food preparation should be allowed in the kitchen while food is being prepared. Delivery drivers should be prevented from entering the kitchen in outdoor clothing as this could be a source of contamination and it also restricts the number of people in the workplace to a minimum. Remember social distancing rules still apply to staff.
Can customers queue in my premises?

Government guidance is that everyone should keep a distance of 2 metres between themselves and others. You will need to monitor and regulate the number of people allowed entry to your premises to enable this to be possible. You might consider displaying clear signage on shop facades as a reminder.

Can customers use my toilet facilities?

You should not allow customers to use your toilet facilities except in the case of extreme emergency. This will require you to ensure all surfaces, including taps, flush mechanisms, toilet seats, locks and door handles are thoroughly cleaned and sanitised.

Can I use the area outside my premises for seating?

No, any area adjacent to the premises of the business where seating is made available for customers of the business (whether or not by the business) is to be treated as part of the premises of that business.

Do my staff need to wear masks?

General advice is that no personal protective equipment is required above and beyond normal good hygiene practices. The use of disposable gloves may be desirable provided these are routinely changed between handling different foods.

Staff must practice frequent and thorough handwashing, before and after handling food, for 20 seconds each time with soap and hot water and using hand sanitiser where appropriate. Hand sanitiser should not be used as an alternative to effective hand washing.

Do you have any advice on cleaning down surfaces?

General interventions may include increased cleaning activity to reduce risk of retention of the virus on hard surfaces, and the use of a detergent followed by an alcohol-based cleaning agent. Ensure staff are familiar with any changes to your procedures and adhere to them.

What if a member of my staff gets ill?

As a food business you should already have in place a policy and procedure for dealing with staff sickness and, in particular infectious diseases, including isolation from work. This needs to be adapted to include possible coronavirus of staff and those who have had close contact with a possible case. If a member of your staff shows any of the signs you must not allow them to come into the workplace and they should be advised to follow Government guidelines regarding self-isolation.

The most common symptoms of this new coronavirus (COVID-19) are a new continuous cough and/or high temperature. Some people may also experience muscle aches, tiredness and shortness of breath.
Anyone who **lives alone** and has symptoms of coronavirus, however mild, should stay at home for **7 days** from when your symptoms started.

Anyone who **lives with others** and either they or another member of the household has symptoms, must, along with other members of their household, stay at home for **14 days**. This 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the household became ill.

For staff with non-coronavirus illnesses that can be transmitted through food, anyone who is showing symptoms of diarrhea and/or vomiting, is still required to be off work for at least 48 hours from the last symptom. If you are unsure then please contact the food and Safety Team.

**How do I tell my takeaway customers about allergens?**

However you are selling food to consumers, it is a legal requirement to provide accurate information on the allergens present in the food. If food is sold through distance selling, for example through a telephone or online order for a takeaway/delivery, allergen information should be provided at two stages in the process. This means providing it:

- before the purchase of the food is completed - this could be in writing (for example on a website, catalogue or menu) or orally (for example by phone)
- when the food is delivered - this could be in writing (for example on allergen stickers on food or enclosed hard copy of menu)

The allergen information should be available to a customer in a written form at some point between a customer placing the order and taking delivery of it. Label takeaway meals clearly, so your customers know which dishes are suitable for those with an allergy. Information regarding allergens is available on the Food Standards Agency website: [https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses](https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses)

If you require any further advice, please call **020 8545 3025** and ask to speak to the Food and Safety Team or email us at foodandsafety@merton.gov.uk outlining your enquiry and giving your contact details and the name and address of your business.

**Where can I access help with non-food safety related matters?**

Please see the link below.