COVID-19

Guidance for food business operators and their employees

June 2020
COVID-19 – Guidance for food business operators (FBOs) and their employees

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COVID-19 – Guidance for food business operators (FBOs) and their employees

Introduction

In these challenging times, it is essential for the food sector to prioritise the safety of their staff as a critical resource and to ensure all of their employees are following government guidance on infection prevention and control measures against COVID-19. **There is currently no evidence that food or food packaging is a source or vehicle of transmission for the COVID-19 virus.** However, it is more important than ever for food businesses to implement effective Food Safety Management Systems (FSMSs) including thorough hygiene practice and the application of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP), which are essential in controlling microbiological risks in food production. **At this time, FBOs should also be placing emphasis on health and safety (H&S) procedures and infection prevention and control measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. Physical (social) distancing also plays a critical role in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in food production and handling environments, and both managers and staff should ensure this is adhered to wherever possible in order to prevent the spread of the virus.**

This guidance outlines ways that physical (social) distancing can be applied in food businesses in addition to other mitigation measures that will support adherence to government advice for preventing the spread of COVID-19. It is recognised that food manufacturers, processors and retailers which have been permitted to operate during lockdown restrictions, will have already enhanced their existing hygiene controls and applied additional measures to ensure that they are protecting their staff from COVID-19. Referring to this guidance will assist these FBOs already operating, in identifying, reviewing and maintaining the measures needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 across their operations.

The guidance will also support businesses in the food service and catering sector, including take-aways that have been operating since lockdown and those which are planning to restart operations in accordance with [Scottish Government’s COVID-19 Framework for Decision Making (Scotland's Route Map through and Out of the Crisis)]. **As of the start of Phase 2 of the routemap, these continue to be restricted to The ‘Food to Go’ sector, including take-away and delivery and drive through services.**

A further announcement is expected on plans for re-opening outdoor spaces in pubs and restaurants where it is possible to implement physical distancing and increased hygiene routines. FSS will keep the guidance updated in line with Scottish Government’s on-going review of lockdown restrictions, and the re-opening of other businesses during later phases of the routemap, as well as emerging evidence and changes to public health advice.


**It should be noted that businesses operating in any part of the food industry in Scotland are expected to adhere to the rules and guidance put in place by the Scottish Government and public agencies as well as relevant guidance and rules issued by the UK Government.**
Questionnaire for assessing the need for additional measures at FBOs to prevent the spread of COVID-19

Before using this guidance it is important for all FBOs to assess the extent to which their existing FSMS, H&S procedures and infection prevention and control measures will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in their premises and protect their staff from infection.

The following questionnaire will support managers in assessing where there is a need to strengthen their existing controls, and areas where any of the additional measures outlined in this guidance should be implemented. It should be noted that FBOs who identify any gaps or inadequacies in their current procedures (which they are unable to address by implementing the controls described by this guidance) should carefully consider their ability to operate safely at this time, or whether they will need to cease production until the Government advises that physical (social) distancing requirements can be relaxed.

1. Have you reviewed your existing Food Safety Management System (FSMS) and Health and Safety (H&S) procedures against Government advice on COVID-19 to identify whether you need to implement any additional hygiene, infection prevention and control, and physical (social) distancing measures?

2. Do you have procedures in place for ensuring all staff are aware of the need to control the spread of COVID-19 in their workplace and if so, how are these evidenced?

3. Is your business able to ensure effective hand hygiene measures through the provision of hot water, suitable soap, paper towels and hand sanitiser at every entrance to food production/service and communal areas and at appropriate points within these areas?

4. Are all of your staff adequately trained in effective hand washing technique? Will you be able to monitor this practice at all appropriate points throughout your business?

5. Have you reviewed your existing cleaning and disinfection procedures to ensure they are sufficient for controlling the potential spread of COVID-19? Are you able to implement procedures which ensure additional cleaning and disinfection is undertaken at all workstations, public/communal areas, common touch points and surfaces at an appropriate frequency?

6. Have you reviewed your capability to meet the requirements relating to physical (social) distancing – maintaining a distance of two meters between people – across all areas of your business, including on-site, food production lines, customer service and communal areas? In areas where this cannot be achieved, have you identified alternative effective solutions to achieve physical distancing?

7. Are you able to take measures to increase the distance between employees or segregate them whilst working on the line? E.g. by reducing line speed, introducing shift patterns, or constructing panels between workers?

8. Have you undertaken training which will ensure that all employees understand the requirements for maintaining physical (social) distancing and are you able to put measures in place to monitor adherence by all staff?

9. Have you ensured that all staff who can work from home have been asked to do so, and have you provided them with the necessary support?
10. Have you put procedures in place to ensure staff do not congregate in communal areas such as canteens, arrival and entry areas, staff rooms, wash areas and corridors (e.g. staggered start, finish and break times)?

11. Are you able to take appropriate measures to minimise external visitors to the premises and to ensure any essential visitors (customers, delivery drivers, maintenance crews, cleaning personnel etc.) are screened to ensure they do not present a risk of spreading COVID-19 to staff (e.g. by ensuring your visitor screening questionnaire has been updated to cover COVID-19 symptoms)?

12. Are you able to put measures in place to minimise contact between essential visitors to your site and your employees?

13. Have you expanded your employee policies and procedures to include COVID-19 considerations taking account of the following:
   - The need for managers to ensure that staff are not incentivised to work when they are feeling unwell;
   - The need for staff to be aware of their responsibility to stay at home and follow government advice on self-isolation if they are unwell and they or any of their household are showing symptoms of COVID-19;
   - The need for managers to monitor the health of their staff in relation to COVID-19.

14. Are you able to put measures in place to isolate and remove symptomatic individuals from the workplace and take any follow up action that may be required?

15. Are you staying up to date with the guidance published by Scottish and UK Government including:
   - Food Standards Scotland web-page on coronavirus and food
   - COVID-19 Information and Guidance for non-healthcare settings published by Health Protection Scotland
   - Scottish Government COVID-19 guidance on social distancing for businesses
   - Scottish Government: general guidance on coronavirus
   - Scottish Government Sector Guidance for Easing Lockdown
   - NHS Inform
   - Gov.uk Coronavirus – What you need to know
   - Gov.uk Guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19)
   - Food Standards Agency Guidance on hygiene and food safety requirements for food businesses to reopen and operate safely during COVID-19.
   - Gov.uk (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) Sectoral Guidance on Working Safely during Coronavirus
   - A Q&A on COVID-19 and food safety has also been published by the European Commission.
   - Health and Safety Executive: working safely during the coronavirus outbreak - a short guide
   - Health and Safety Executive: talking with your workers about working safely during the coronavirus outbreak

Other useful references are provided throughout this document.
16. If you are involved in catering and food service businesses which are permitted to re-open, have you taken appropriate steps to ensure physical (social) distancing and effective hygiene can be employed by staff and customers at appropriate points throughout your premises?

17. Are you able to provide evidence that measures for preventing the spread of COVID-19 are being implemented and monitored in addition to your existing FSMS, H&S, and Infection Prevention and Control Procedures?

Given the concerns of staff and unions, positive answers to these questions should provide a level of assurance to your staff on any concerns they have regarding the potential risk of being exposed to COVID-19 in the workplace. You may wish to review these questions with your Union representatives and H&S advisors to ensure the appropriate procedures can be applied across your business and consider how your responses could be used to support communications to staff.

FSS has also produced a risk assessment tool which FBOs can use in conjunction with this guidance to support them in identifying and documenting the actions they need to take to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Reference to these documents will help FBOs to engage with enforcement authorities on control measures that are relevant to their business and to provide evidence that they are implementing appropriate measures to protect their staff and customers from the risks of infection.

It is important to emphasise that FBOs should continue to ensure they are managing existing H&S and food safety risks. The implementation of COVID-19 related measures should not be at the expense of your legal obligations to manage these risks. FBOs should therefore always consider how changes to workflow and physical measures for preventing the spread of COVID-19 could impact on risks to the safety and well-being of staff and the effectiveness of your FSMS.
Steps that need to be taken by all food businesses to prevent the spread of COVID-19

**Raising Awareness**

- It is essential for managers to emphasise the importance of maintaining an effective FSMS and, in particular, the role of thorough and frequent handwashing in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Measures for implementing social distancing should also be effectively communicated across the site. Posters, leaflets and other materials are available online which can be used to reinforce these messages throughout the workplace.

- Managers also need to provide all personnel and visitors with clear instructions of what to do to prevent the spread of COVID-19 – refer to the Scottish Government, NHS Inform and Gov.uk websites for the most up to date information. Food Standards Scotland is also updating its website regularly with new advice on food related issues.

**Promoting Effective Personal Hygiene**

- Ensure you have sufficient provision of handwashing facilities and that they are strategically placed to prevent avoidance by staff and allow supervision.

- Ensure all staff are trained in the effective handwashing technique - to wash hands for the required 20 seconds with soap and water – and that the importance of thorough and effective handwashing is reinforced throughout your premises.

- Provide access to hot water, suitable soap and paper towels at every entrance and exit to food production or work areas. Hand towels are recommended over hand dryers which can cause spray resulting in virus particles spreading from hands to other surfaces.

- Access to hand sanitiser may also be helpful in certain areas e.g. as an additional hygiene measure following effective handwashing prior to entering food production areas, or for use by customers and other visitors where hand washing facilities are not available.

- Ensure that hand washing and hand sanitising stations are routinely checked and replenished as necessary to ensure there are always sufficient supplies.

- **Ensure that all staff undertake effective handwashing every time:**
  - Upon entry to the food production area, and at regular intervals during manufacture/processing/preparation;
  - After using the toilet;
  - Upon exit from communal areas such as staff rooms and canteens;
  - After using computers, phones, door handles and other surfaces across the site;
  - After touching their face, blowing their nose, coughing and/or sneezing.

- Implement measures to monitor handwashing practice at key points and at regular intervals on all production lines and food preparation/handling areas.
Implementing Effective Cleaning And Disinfection

- Increase the frequency of cleaning schedules for workstations, and ensure all public areas are cleaned down regularly, preferably every 2-3 hours for areas which are routinely used. It is particularly important that all surfaces in any communal areas, for example changing areas and clocking in points are cleaned and disinfected between different groups of staff occupying these spaces.

- Identify key touch points (including switches, door handles, grab-rails in corridors, stairwells, keypads, vending machines, etc) and ensure these are being cleaned and disinfected at frequent intervals (based on risk assessment or at least every 2-3 hours). Using a disposable cloth, first clean hard surfaces and then disinfect these surfaces following your usual proven procedures with the products you normally use; considering the need for additional measures where appropriate (see below).

- With regard to food contact surfaces and processing equipment, businesses should continue to apply their existing cleaning and disinfection regimes for controlling microbiological hazards in food (such as those outlined in the FSS Guidance on the Control of E. coli O157 Cross Contamination). However, where appropriate, for areas/surfaces where there is more regular human contact, consideration should be given to the need for additional disinfection measures using methods known to be effective against viruses.

- Although there is a lack of data on the specific effects of disinfectants against the COVID-19 coronavirus, it belongs to a group of viruses called enveloped viruses, which are relatively susceptible to cleaning and disinfection. The evidence shows that similar viruses can be deactivated using many products which are already commonly used in the food sector (including disinfectants based on chlorine, ethanol, hydrogen peroxide or quaternary ammonium compounds). The Society of Food Hygiene and Technology has published a useful guide to cleaning and disinfection regimes in food operations with regard to COVID-19. This provides information on the efficacy of different disinfectants against members of the coronavirus family.

- When purchasing new disinfectant products specifically for decontaminating areas check with your suppliers that these have been certified as effective against enveloped viruses such as coronavirus. Products bearing the EN 14476:2019 standard should have been tested for efficacy against enveloped viruses (although not specifically the virus responsible for COVID-19).

- Always ensure chemicals used for the cleaning and disinfection of work surfaces are food grade. It is also important to check that they are safe to use on the intended surface before including them in your cleaning and disinfection regime.

- Government guidance on COVID-19 decontamination for non-healthcare settings advises the use of chlorine based disinfectants such as household bleach, as these are also known to be effective against similar coronaviruses. Chlorine-based chemicals can be corrosive to certain materials, so are not suitable for use in some food production environments. Chlorine based chemicals can also cause taints so should be treated with care/caution and managed through HACCP with controls in place to prevent cross-contamination.
In circumstances where chlorine based disinfectants can be used safely, the current recommendations are to use either:

- a combined detergent disinfectant solution, (also known as sanitiser), at a dilution of 1,000 parts per million available chlorine (ppm av.cl.)
- a household detergent followed by disinfection (1000 ppm av.cl.).

According to guidance produced by The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 1000 ppm av.cl is equivalent to a 1:50 dilution of household bleach products which usually have an initial concentration of 5% sodium hypochlorite.

Always follow manufacturer’s instructions for dilution, application and contact times for cleaning and disinfectant products. Contact time is the time that the disinfectant/bleach solution must be in contact with the contaminated surface, and is particularly important to ensure effectiveness. The recommended contact time for common disinfectants can range from 30 seconds to 10 minutes. It’s important to follow instructions as wiping them off too soon could prevent effective disinfection.

Bleach and other chemical disinfectants can be damaging to certain materials so are not suitable for use on objects such as phones, keyboards and electronic devices and for use on some food equipment e.g. soft metals, non-metal parts such as rubber seals and plastics, furnishings such as seating and grips on hand rails. In these cases, disinfectant or alcohol (70%) wipes are more suitable.

Make sure bins are provided for disposal of paper towels/tissues used for cleaning, and instruct all staff that these must be used.

Where food businesses already have procedures in place for the cleaning of bodily fluids, these should be reviewed with consideration of COVID-19. In circumstances where you are concerned that an area could have become contaminated by COVID-19 (e.g. through contact with an infected employee), wear disposable gloves and aprons for cleaning. These should then be double bagged and stored securely for at least 72 hours before throwing away in the usual manner. This is advised by HPS because evidence suggests that under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to have decreased significantly by 72 hours.

It is important to remember that making changes to the frequency and/or methods used for cleaning and disinfection for the purposes of COVID-19 control will have an impact on your business and therefore requires careful consideration. It is advisable to discuss with suppliers the appropriate chemicals to use on surfaces, and whether changes made to cleaning and disinfection regimes could cause chemical residues to build up on food contact surfaces and require additional rinsing to prevent the contamination of food.

Guidance on cleaning and disinfection for COVID-19 control in non-healthcare settings has also been published by Public Health England, Health Protection Scotland, and The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. The Society of Food Hygiene and Technology has also produced a Guide to Cleaning And Disinfection Regime With Regard To novel Coronavirus, and additional information on specific cleaning and disinfection measures for COVID-19 can also be found in the 23 March 2020 Edition of Chemical and Engineering News.
The Global Food Safety Initiative has also produced a guide on the optimal usage of cleaning agents, sanitisers and disinfectants to minimise the risk of traces in foods. This provides useful information on the selection, storage and handling of cleaning agents, sanitisers and disinfectants, including how to minimise the build up of chemical residues on food contact surfaces.

Ensuring Physical (Social) Distancing Measures On Site

- Implement home working for office-based staff and promote the use of teleconferencing or videoconferencing for meetings, even between people in the same building.

- Review current arrangements for those staff who need to travel to work and whether additional measures are needed to ensure these staff are able to maintain physical (social) distancing when using public or private transport and are applying effective hand hygiene before and after journeys. Businesses which currently offer staff transport may need to re-schedule trips or offer an enhanced service to facilitate appropriate physical (social) distancing. In light of the requirements, managers should also discuss with staff the need to review other travel arrangements such as car sharing. Further advice on physical (social) distancing in relation to travelling to and from the workplace is covered in the guidance produced by Health Protection Scotland.

- All non-essential movement between sites should cease wherever production and safety allows it. When these restrictions are in place, measures should be put in place to ensure they are adhered to by all staff.

- Wherever possible, workflow should be re-designed to minimise movements between areas. For example consider reducing the number of staff required to move goods between two areas and where there is scope to minimise opportunities for repeated contact with surfaces e.g. by keeping non-firedoors open to reduce the need for hand contact.

- Non-essential visits from external parties should be prohibited wherever possible. Essential visitors including enforcement officials such as Environmental Health Officers, Official Veterinarians and Meat Hygiene Inspectors will be fully trained in COVID-19 requirements and will expect strict site protocols to be in place. Adherence to physical (social distancing) will also need to be considered in circumstances where visits from third party certification auditors are a contractual requirement.

- Make sure that all essential visitors to the site are aware of the Government guidelines on physical (social) distancing and hygiene, and adhere to company protocols. Limit the number of visits by requiring orders to be made on-line or by telephone and restrict access to the premises through the use of posters and markings (e.g. for two metre spacing) and by designating delivery and pick up areas. Minimise contact between essential visitors and staff through the use of screens and encouraging contactless payments.

- Essential visitors such as delivery drivers should also be required to complete a declaration which specifically refers to absence of COVID-19 symptoms (a high temperature (fever), or a new, continuous cough or loss of/change in sense of smell or taste). If possible, this should be provided electronically (e.g. via smart phone), immediately prior to arrival on site.
in order to minimise contact with employees. *If any essential visitors display or report having suffered from these symptoms they must not be allowed on site.*

- Where essential visitors are required to spend time on site, take appropriate measures to separate them from employees wherever possible. Ensure the 2m physical (social) distancing requirements are adhered to during interactions with on-site staff and, where possible, designate separate waiting areas and toilet facilities in order to minimise contact with employees.

- Queuing at site arrival/site entry areas can lead to staff grouping in close proximity. Consider staggering start and stop times to avoid crowding, and the use of markings on the ground to ensure staff maintain a 2m distance from each other. Where possible allow a buffer area to avoid close congregation of personnel.

- Consider the implementation of ‘one way’ traffic flows, e.g. ‘keep left’ flows to minimise contact, confusion and reduce time spent in confined areas.

**Ensuring Physical (Social) Distancing Measures In Food Production, Handling And Service Areas**

- It is essential that FBOs take all possible steps to ensure the clear recommendation of the 2m rule for physical (social) distancing is adhered to in all food production, handling and service areas. Wherever possible, make changes to workflow which enable employees to work 2m apart from each other by rearranging workspaces, running production lines with fewer staff, slower, and for longer, or moving to a shift working pattern. *Reduced staffing levels will have an impact on productivity but this may be necessary to protect staff and maintain output.*

- Additional changes for maintaining 2m physical (social) distancing and/or adequate separation between employees will involve:
  
  - Assigning workstations to single individuals. Where this is not practical, ensure they are shared by the smallest possible number of people.
  - Using ‘one way’ traffic flows to minimise accidental person to person contact.
  - Constructing physical barriers, for example, through the use of cleanable perspex panels between workstations. It is important that the installation of physical barriers is risk assessed to ensure they do not introduce hazards to the food production system, and that they can be cleaned regularly throughout shifts to prevent microbiological cross contamination.
  - Using ‘fixed teams’ or ‘partnering’ systems to enable the same groups of employees to work together on the same production lines, workstations or the same areas of the premises each day (to minimise the number of individuals each person comes into contact with throughout their shift).
  - Minimising access to walk-in fridges, freezers and pantries, for example, with only one person being able to access these areas at one point in time.
  - Ensuring that at the end of shifts, or when lines stop during production there are measures for preventing staff from congregating in groups.
  - Marking 2m physical distancing spaces at workstations and on production and kitchen floors so they are clearly identifiable.
Moving certain tasks where more space is needed to other larger locations where this is practical.

Staggering break times for staff to reduce congestion in communal areas (see below).

- **Careful consideration should be given to the need to continue any activity which cannot be undertaken in a way that ensures physical (social) distancing/separation can be maintained at all times.** Health Protection Scotland advises that all tasks should be adapted to ensure physical (social) distancing is adhered to as far as possible. Where there are particular activities that are deemed essential, but cannot be undertaken in a way that ensures physical (social) distancing is maintained, any time spent at less than 2m should be kept to an absolute minimum, with the maximum possible distance between people. Where it is practical and safe to do so, such activities should also be undertaken with individuals working back-to-back or side-to-side rather than face-to-face. Additional precautionary measures such as the use of facemasks and/or other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) may also be appropriate for such occasional circumstances where specific essential tasks present particular challenges with regard to physical (social) distancing (see below).

### Ensuring Physical (Social) Distancing Measures In Staff Communal Areas

- Physical (social) distancing applies to all parts of a business, not just the place where people spend most of their time, but also entrances and exits, meeting rooms, break/staff rooms, canteens and similar settings. These are often the most challenging areas to maintain the 2m physical (social) distancing rule.

- Communal areas such as staff rooms, changing areas, and smoking areas provide a key opportunity for personnel to congregate and invade physical space. FBOs must therefore make changes that will allow for additional space in these areas to allow employees to spread out more.

- Think carefully about the need for staff meetings, and use remote tools wherever possible to minimise person to person gatherings. Where it is absolutely necessary to meet in person, consider meeting outdoors or in well ventilated spaces, and the need for floor signage to ensure the 2m distancing rule is maintained. Avoid sharing stationary and ensure hand washing facilities are available.

- Wash areas and toilets can present particular issues, particularly at the end of break times where there is more risk of congestion and air moisture content is higher than normal. Maintain 2m distancing in these areas through the use of signage to restrict the number of people that are able to enter at any one time.

- If it is not possible to provide additional communal space for break times, develop a rota system for staggering breaks to control the number of people using communal spaces and corridors at any one time. Also consider extending workers break times in order to give them more time to reach their break area to avoid crowding in corridors and walkways.

- **Scottish Government guidance on Business and Social Distancing** has identified workplace canteens as non-essential businesses which should remain closed unless there are no practical alternatives for providing food to staff and/or providing sufficient space for breaks. Where on-site canteens remain open, catering teams should be encouraged to move to a
take away system. These areas should be organised so that physical (social) distancing is possible, and measures taken to minimise the number of people in the canteen at any one given time, for example by using a rota. If staff are bringing their own food to work, consideration will need to be given to facilities that allow the storage, chilling and re-heating of food, and ensuring allergen controls. Appropriate space should be used for taking breaks which enable 2m physical (social) distancing to be observed, for example outdoor areas, parked vehicles and offices which are not in use.

- Any on-site retail establishment should put controls in place that ensure all staff adhere to social distancing requirements i.e. are kept 2m apart.

Ensuring Physical (Social) Distancing In Customer Areas: Take-Away/Food To Go Businesses

- Ask customers to order online, on apps or over the telephone to reduce queues and stagger pick-up times.

- Ensure customers are made aware of physical (social) distancing and hygiene requirements on arrival, for example, using signage/posters in prominent positions on the premises, or informing them in advance by phone, on your website or by email.

- Limit the number of customers who enter the premises to collect food to ensure that the 2m physical (social) distancing can be adhered to. This can be achieved with the use of floor markers or partitions. If possible, designate a customer waiting area where a 2m distance from other people can be maintained. If it is not possible to maintain 2m distancing within the customer area of the premises, customers should enter the premises one at a time and only when their order is ready to be made or collected.

- Collection times should be staggered to discourage crowding outside the premises. Where queuing is taking place, you should use queue management systems to maintain a 2m distance between people.

- Take steps to minimise opportunities for kitchen staff to come into contact with front of house serving staff and delivery drivers for instance by designating points for serving and collecting food items.

- During food collection and payment, ensure there is adequate separation between front of house serving staff and customers. Create a physical barrier such as a screen, and encourage contactless payments wherever possible.

- FSS has produced additional guidance for smaller businesses offering, or preparing to offer a take-away food service, which can be found here.
Ensuring Appropriate Use Of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Standard Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must continue to be worn as required, issued by the FBO in line with their existing H&S, FSMS and first aid requirements. In circumstances where PPE is standard issue in a FBO, areas (e.g. lockers and wall hooks) for storing protective clothing such as overalls, aprons, hats, and footwear should be provided. Staff should not remove these items from the premises. Businesses should ensure there are disposal facilities available which allow single use items such as hairnets and gloves to be disposed of safely, with handwashing facilities provided at these areas. Wherever possible, the necessary laundering services should be provided to ensure re-usable items are washed in accordance with HPS guidelines.

- HPS and Public Health England advise that the use of additional PPE specifically for COVID-19 should only be required in settings where there is a higher level of contamination risk through respiratory secretions from potentially infected individuals (i.e. healthcare). In light of existing Fitness to Work measures and current restrictions this is unlikely to be a scenario that will routinely be encountered by food businesses as all symptomatic individuals should be self-isolating in accordance with Government guidance. Based on current evidence and advice, it should not be necessary for businesses to implement additional PPE as a standard requirement for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

- It has been recognised in guidance published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) that PPE such as masks and gloves can have a role to play in reducing the spread of infection in the food industry, but only if they are used properly and in appropriate situations. Robust hygiene measures, coupled with physical (social) distancing, continue to be the most important measures for FBOs to apply for preventing the spread of COVID-19. It is acknowledged that there may be specific defined tasks within a food business where physical (social) distancing presents a particular challenge, and it may be deemed appropriate to take additional precautions. These may include the use of facemasks, gloves or other PPE such as is used in high care/risk food manufacture. However, widespread use of additional PPE should never be considered as an acceptable alternative to physical (social) distancing and personal hygiene such as handwashing.

- Food businesses will need to carry out a H&S risk assessment to determine the need for additional PPE in specific circumstances, against potential negative impacts of its inappropriate application. Consideration also needs to be given to any additional training requirements to ensure it is used safely.

Face Masks And Face Coverings

- It is recognised that the use of face masks already forms part of standard H&S and FSMS procedures in certain high care food manufacturing environments. However, outwith these specific circumstances, widespread use of facemasks is not recommended for the food industry at the present time for the following reasons:
  - Health Protection Scotland and UK Government advises that face masks should not be required outside of clinical and care settings, as the evidence for their effectiveness against the spread of COVID-19 in non healthcare workplaces is not proven.
Face masks carry their own training, usage and disposal requirements to minimise the risk of them becoming a source of contamination. Staff who are not accustomed to wearing face masks may be less likely to:

- Ensure they are fitted and worn properly;
- Change them at regular intervals;
- Handle and dispose of them hygienically;
- Apply effective risk reduction measures such as handwashing.

Ill-fitting face masks and the build-up of condensation can cause the wearer discomfort, increasing the likelihood that they will touch their face, or alter the mask increasing the potential for spreading infection. Condensation is likely to be a particular risk in cold working environments.

- It is important that FBOs do not confuse the surgical/medical grade face masks that are sometimes used in certain high care food production settings with face coverings which UK and Scottish Government have suggested as a precautionary measure for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the general population. **Face coverings are not classed as PPE.** Unlike surgical/medical grade and respiratory masks used to manage workplace risks such as dust and spray, face coverings are not manufactured to a recognised standard. The evidence suggests that a face covering will not protect the wearer from COVID-19, but may protect others if the wearer is infected and has not developed symptoms. Face coverings can also present a hygiene risk in many food handling environments.

- **Based on currently inconclusive evidence, the use of any type of face covering is considered to be of limited value for protecting staff in food business environments.** Inappropriate use and handling of face masks and face coverings could present a risk to food hygiene and safety. Therefore, if a FBO is considering allowing staff to wear face coverings, it is strongly recommended that a risk assessment is undertaken to determine if this is appropriate to the task and the food business setting.

Further guidance on the use of face masks and coverings in the workplace can be found on the HSE website.

**Acting Quickly When A Member Of Staff Dispays Symptoms Of Covid-19**

- All staff should know that anyone experiencing symptoms in the workplace should be sent home immediately to self-isolate. If they need clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 or call 111 if they don't have internet access. In an emergency, they should call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. They should not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

- If anyone is made aware of anyone displaying symptoms of COVID-19 in the workplace (a new, continuous cough or a high temperature or a loss of or change in sense of smell or taste), immediate action should be taken to remove them to a pre-arranged isolation room, until they can be sent home. Where possible they should minimise contact with others, and use a private vehicle to travel home. If it is not possible to use private transport, then they should be advised to return home quickly and directly. They should be advised to follow the stay at home guidance.
• If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature or a loss of or change in sense of smell or taste, 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.

• Consideration should also be given to the need for additional cleaning and disinfection of areas used by individuals displaying symptoms of COVID-19. Guidance on appropriate environmental decontamination (cleaning and disinfection) after a possible case has left the workplace can be found in HPS’s Guidance on COVID-19 for non-healthcare settings.

Ensuring Staff Understand What They Need To Do If They Develop Symptoms

• Staff should be fit for work at all times. They must not be suffering from, or carrying, any illness or disease that could cause a problem with food safety. FBOs must ensure that all staff understand the business’ Fitness to Work policy. During the current COVID-19 situation this will need to take full account of government advice on the need for individuals to self-isolate and stay at home when they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. It is therefore important to ensure staff are able to recognise these symptoms, which include a new continuous cough and/or a fever or loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste (anosmia). There is a helpful “symptom checker” available on the NHS Inform website which guides individuals through potential symptoms and provides advice on the steps that need to be taken if they have any concerns.

• FBOs must ensure that all staff are aware that they must stay at home and self-isolate if they or a household member develop symptoms of COVID-19 and managers should support them in doing this. Public health advice on self-isolation and staying at home should be communicated to all staff, checked and verified as part of every food business’s return to work procedures.

• Staff who have experienced symptoms of COVID-19, however mild, must stay at home and self-isolate for 7 days from when their symptoms started and until they no longer have a fever. NHS Inform advises that it should be possible to return to work and usual activities on the 8th day providing individuals are feeling better and no longer have a high temperature. However, managers should be aware that employees may be required to self-isolate for longer periods depending on medical advice based on the severity of their symptoms. All staff should be encouraged to contact their line manager and HR/Occupational Health Advisors before returning to work in order to ensure that their fitness to work can be assessed and an appropriate timetable agreed for resuming their normal duties.

• Individuals who live in a household with anyone showing symptoms, must self-isolate for 14 days, even if they don’t have symptoms themselves. The 14 day period starts from the day illness began in the first person to become ill. If they develop symptoms within the 14 days, they need to stay at home for 7 days from the day their symptoms began. They should do this even if it takes them over the 14-day isolation period.

• FBOs may wish to consider whether the testing of employees can be used to support their return to work policy. Scottish Government has produced guidance on COVID-19 testing.
and the eligibility of key workers for such testing, which includes those in the food industry, to support them returning to work where it is safe to do so.

- It is also important for FBOs to understand Scottish Government’s Test and Protect Advice for Employers, which outlines how to support employees who are required to self-isolate as part of Scotland’s Test, Trace, Isolate and Support Strategy.

Staying Informed

- This is a dynamic situation and the official guidance from Scottish Government, Health Protection Scotland, NHS Inform, Gov.uk and the Food Standards Scotland website changes frequently. The Institute of Food Science and Technology has also developed a COVID-19 knowledge hub which aims to consolidate advice, practical guidance and links to resources to support food businesses. Make sure you keep yourself and staff on site up to date by regularly referring to all of the resources referenced throughout this document.

- Your Local Authority Environmental Health Department can also provide you with practical advice on infection prevention and control and food safety management which is appropriate to your circumstances.
## Version History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>version</th>
<th>date</th>
<th>summary of changes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>02/04/2020</td>
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| 1.1     | 09/04/2020 | Clarification of questions  
Clarification of cleaning and disinfection procedures  
Clarification on the use of PPE to reflect current government advice that facemasks not recommended outwith healthcare settings |
| 1.2     | 29/05/2020 | Links to the Scottish Government Route Map (Phase 1) and sectoral guidance for easing lockdown.  
Extension of scope to cover food business re-start  
Clarification of cleaning and disinfection procedures  
Updating of social distancing procedures to align with government advice  
Clarification on the use of facemasks and face coverings in light of government advice  
Clarification on how self-isolation and staying at home guidance translates to return to work policy.  
Updated links to external guidance documents.  
Reference to Test and Protect Strategy |
| 1.3     | 19/06/2020 | Further clarification on the use of PPE, face masks and face coverings and fitness to work policy.                                                  |