

## Covid-19 cannot grow in food and thorough cooking kills it

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland says there is no evidence to suggest Covid-19 is passed on through food.

Coronaviruses need a host (animal or human) to grow in, and cannot grow in food, said the FSAI. It also advised that thorough cooking is expected to kill the virus.

The European Food Safety Authority has said there is no evidence that food is a source or a transmission source of Covid-19. The French health and safety agency, ANSES, investigated food contamination by infected persons, and said there is no evidence that eating contaminated food can lead to infection in the gut, but the possibility of respiratory tract infection during chewing could not be completely ruled out.

However, Covid-19 is sensitive to cooking temperature, and the 63 degrees C for four minutes used in mass catering can reduce contamination by a factor of 1,000.

The FSAI issued the following advice.

### ■Is there a risk to consumers from 'open' food?

As usual, it is important to maintain good hygiene practices around open food (such as unpackaged bread, cakes etc). It is possible that infected food workers and/ or consumers could introduce the virus to food, by coughing and sneezing, or hand contact. It is therefore important that they strictly follow good personal hygiene practices. Customers and food businesses are expected to behave in a hygienic manner. and food businesses are obliged to monitor this.

The main risk of transmission is close contact with infected people. Hence the advice to public and staff alike is to wash your hands.

### ■How is Covid-19 passed on?

It is most commonly passed between animals and people, and from person to person. The source is believed to be animals, the exact source is not yet known.

The virus is commonly passed on:

■Directly, by contact with an infected person's body fluids (such as droplets from coughing or sneezing)

■Indirectly, contact with surfaces an infected person coughed or sneezed on. The virus may survive a few hours, or even days, on certain surfaces. Simple household disinfectants can kill it.

### ■What can food workers do?

It is possible infected food workers could introduce virus to food they work on, or onto surfaces in the business, by coughing and sneezing, or hand contact, unless they strictly follow good personal hygiene practices.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) advises that standard recommendations to reduce exposure to and transmission of a range of illnesses are maintained. These include proper hand hygiene, cough/ cold hygiene practices, safe food practices, avoiding close contact, when possible, with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

The HSE advises "social distancing" to help slow the spread of coronavirus.

Food workers must wash hands before starting work; after coughing, sneezing or blowing their nose; before handling cooked or ready-to-eat food; after handling or preparing raw food; after handling waste; after cleaning duties; after using the toilet; after eating, drinking or smoking; after handling money.

Good hygiene and cleaning are also important to

avoid cross-contamination between raw or under-cooked foods and cooked or ready-to-eat foods in the kitchen.

■What can food business owners/managers do?

■ They should ensure staff are aware of the Covid-19 situation and the advice of the HSE in relation to symptoms, social distancing, restricted movement, self-isolation and travel.

Food business owners should remember they have particular responsibilities under food law and must maintain proper hygiene practices at all times.

They should, in general: ■Ensure staff are trained appropriately in food hygiene;

■Ensure effective supervision of staff to reinforce hygienic practices;

■Provide correct hand washing facilities, toilets, to enable good staff hygiene;

■Ensure staff and contractors report any physical signs/symptoms, before commencing work, or while in the workplace;

■Keep vigilant and ensure staff are not ill, and are fit to work.

■What should food business owners/managers do

if they have a supply chain problem caused by Covid-19?

■ Infections of staff with Covid-19 in food businesses around the world may lead to disruption of the food supply chain, where certain ingredients and packaging may be in short supply.

Food businesses may consider leaving out or substituting ingredients in a product, changing packaging, and/or their process.

In these situations, it is important food businesses remember their legal obligations to only place safe food on the market.

Any change requires a full review of the food safety management system, to reassess food safety issues that could result; put in place controls to manage risks; and document changes.

Issues to consider include introduction of allergens, or new microbiological, physical, chemical hazards, when changing ingredients or suppliers; and safe shelf-life if packaging or formulation changes. There may be other issues depending on the business/product involved.

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