

**Northern Ireland Food & Drink Industry Guidance:  
Good Manufacturing Practice Covid-19**

**Issued 27/03/2020**

**Version 01**



The following guidance aims to provide support and consistency for the Food Manufacturers of Northern Ireland. It takes the advice from Public Health England and practical experience from local food manufacturers to identify practical ways in which mitigations may be employed in order to keep our employees safe whilst continuing to 'Feed the Nation'. It should be used in a manner appropriate for the nature and scale of each food manufacturing business.

This guidance is provided by NIFDA.

With thanks to the following organisations for their contribution:

ABP

Allied Bakery

Dale Farm Ltd

Devenish Nutrition Ltd

Irwins Bakery

Karro Food Group

Lakeland Dairies

Mash Direct

Moy Park Ltd

***The following guidance reflects good manufacturing practice only, which is based on and remains subject to changes from time to time to the UK government's response to COVID-19 and guidance published by Public Health England. Each manufacturer is singly responsible for remaining fully informed about current best practice and for always exercising judgment in its workers' interests and welfare before adopting any guidance in its own business.***

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## Communications

Our teams need clear communication at this time, and reassurance that they are working in one of the industries where standard practices already afford them significant protection against this virus. Our regular routines of handwashing, sanitising and regular cleaning align perfectly with keeping the virus at bay... but we need to be reinforcing this.

Provide all personnel with clear instructions of what to do in relation to [Covid-19](#) – refer to PHE/PHA websites for the most up to date guidance.

- If you, someone in your household, or someone you have been in close contact with, has Covid-19 symptoms, a new, continuous cough, or high temperature (fever), or has been tested positive, do not come to work ([stay at home guidance](#)). Contact the employer using the designated, remote method.
- If you develop symptoms whilst at work, or become aware that someone in your household, or with whom you have close contact, has developed symptoms, alert your manager immediately (see Appendix 1 for details).

Clear communication of any changes in practice is required to support the efforts to minimise the risk of transfer. It is important that people understand the reasons for the changes, as, when they buy into the reasoning, they are more likely to change their behaviour. Understanding and compliance should be checked and confirmed.

The clocking in area is a good opportunity for a manager to remind all that if they have a new, continuous cough or high temperature they should say so. This may be done using posters, or personally, or both.

## Personnel Movement On and Between Sites

All non-essential movement between sites should cease ... if business will continue without the movement, then ensure there is no movement. Temporary personnel must be dedicated to one site.

Minimise movements between areas: Consider how movement around a site and between different production areas could be reduced. Consider a slightly different workflow to avoid the need to move something from A to B to C, which could in turn reduce opportunities for virus transfer.

Could one person carry out all the movements of goods between two areas rather than several people all doing this?

If there are doors which do not need to be closed (not fire doors), perhaps they could be wedged open to reduce touch-points.

## External Parties

Non-essential external visits should be prohibited ... if business will continue safely without the external party being on site the visit is prohibited. Official Control Officers are considered essential visitors and will follow the strict site protocols as necessary.

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Visitors to site, including delivery drivers, should be screened. A simple check for the two key symptoms, high temperature (fever) and new, continuous cough, will indicate whether they should be allowed to meet with site staff to hand over goods etc.

Establish pre-defined routes for delivery drivers such that contact with staff is minimised.

Note: certification bodies are currently identifying alternative routes to maintain certification (Refer to BRC GS).

### **Social Distancing**

The policy around Social Distancing is continually being reviewed based on new information that becomes available, please refer to government advice for the most up to date information. (Government advice for [Food producing establishments](#))

Where possible and practical, personnel should be asked to work from home – particularly relevant for office workers. This has the added benefit of reducing the number of personnel, and hence risk, to those remaining on site.

Clocking in areas can lead to personnel in close proximity. Consider start/finish times being staggered to avoid a mass rush. Consider markings on the ground to encourage appropriate levels of distancing - this should be 2m. Where possible allow a buffer area to avoid close congregation of personnel.

All employers are expected to follow social distancing guidance as far as reasonably possible. Where the production environment makes it difficult to do so, employers should consider what measures can be put in place to protect employees - this should be reviewed and necessary mitigation steps introduced where possible. Consider time segregation, running line slower for longer, or physical segregation, eg Perspex panels to segregate workstations (remember, they need to be cleanable).

Factory canteens are a key opportunity for personnel to congregate and invade social distancing. Consider staggering breaks, providing additional space to allow personnel to spread out more or taking breaks in personal cars (important to remind colleagues to sanitise their cars regularly).

Changing areas can also lead to clustering of people; consider PPE being laid out for people to provide quicker, easier access, or consider locker blocks being reorganised.

Review smoking areas - staggered breaks or extend the smoke areas to allow appropriate distancing, use spacings on the ground to direct personnel.

Corridor areas – consider use of ‘one way’ traffic flows, or ‘keep left’ flows to minimise contact, confusion and reduce time spent in confined areas.

### **Hygiene/Sanitisation**

Ensure you have cleaning and sanitising chemicals which are certified as effective against enveloped viruses. EN 14476 is the standard for Chemical disinfectants and antiseptics effective against viruses. If your chemical does not have this certification, ask for validation for effectiveness against viruses.

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Ensure personnel are trained to wash their hands for the required 20 seconds with soap and water; this is more effective than relying on sanitiser alone. Good hygiene practices will be in place, and monitored in the food processing areas, with handwashing taking place on entry and exit, and regular frequent washing during processing; outside the production area, follow Government advice and wash hands regularly for 20 seconds, and after being in a public place, blowing their nose, coughing, and/or sneezing.

Monitor to ensure this is happening. It should be socially unacceptable not to carry out this task sufficiently.

Identify key touch points (door handles, keypads, vending machines, etc) and ensure these are being cleaned and sanitised at an agreed frequency – minimum every 2 hours.

Identify 'common areas' where there might be a high level of cross over, for example canteen areas; these areas should be cleaned with a viricidal cleaner between different groups of personnel.

Ensure your First Aid protocol is suitable for today's environment. Ensure PPE is worn as appropriate by the First Aider, and, if possible, avoid physical contact with the patient; if not, ensure you wash your hands for 20 seconds minimum after being in contact. If the patient is thought to potentially have Covid-19, all surfaces in the area must be cleaned using a viricidal cleaning solution in accordance with manufacturers' instructions.

### **Product Complexity**

Reduction of product complexity may help to reduce man hours required and hence allow for more social distancing. Less complex products might require less people on-line, or even less lines running, whilst still supplying the same overall volumes. Your customers are likely to want to work with you in these trying times to agree the best outcome... talk to them.

### **Personnel Training & Deployment**

Consider where there is a limited number of personnel with specific skills; if possible, these should be segregated into two groups such that if one group becomes ill, there is a back-up group with the relevant skills to take over.

Consider where it would be beneficial to have multiskilling to cover for future absences. Ensure people are competent in roles they might need to cover.

A quick but sound induction into food hygiene is required to facilitate an increase in recruitment from non-food areas to backfill gaps left by illness or self-isolation.

This is a good opportunity to consider what process control checks are done that are no longer necessary or add little value. Reduction of checks might make it easier to back fill a role.

Consider what tasks you would choose not to do tomorrow if your manning level was, for example, 20% down. Choosing today will avoid the panic tomorrow.

## **Administration**

Several personnel will need to report if they have symptoms and are not sure whether they should attend work. A remote form of communication (e.g. a telephone line) should be made available so that they are not inclined to report to work and instead remain at home, confirm they are unfit for work and receive guidance to self-isolate.

Consider where items, particularly sheets of paper, might be passed from one person to another (Drivers should remain in vehicles). Delivery notes/goods received notes are typical example. Perhaps this process could be done electronically to avoid the need for contact.

Consider that where the receipt of paperwork is unavoidable, those people wear gloves.

## **Response to Suspect Case**

If becoming unwell whilst at work, with a new, dry, continuous cough or high temperature the colleague must be sent home and follow the advice to self-isolate at home (Refer to details in Appendix 1).

Employees should be reminded to wash their hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds.

If a colleague is contacted whilst at work and advised they are a primary contact of a confirmed case, they should be sent home.

On identifying a 'presumed positive' case of Covid-19, on site consideration must be given to the risk to others and the risk of contamination of the environment. Refer to Appendix 1, '*Response to Suspect Covid-19 Case on Site*' guidance for more detail.

If someone helps the ill person to leave site, there is no need for them too to be sent home, but they must wash their hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds after touching the affected individual or their belongings and then sanitise their hands.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home, unless government policy changes.

## **Revision History**

## APPENDIX 1: Response to Suspect Covid-19 Case on Site

### ***When to follow this protocol:***

- A colleague develops one or more symptoms of Covid–19 whilst at work; symptoms are high temperature and / or new continuous cough.
- A colleague is notified, whilst at work, that they have been identified as a primary contact.

*Note: if a colleague is ill at home, they should advise their employer and then follow existing government guidance and self-isolate.*

### ***Who to consider:***

- The affected colleague

The person should be sent home immediately to self-isolate following government guidelines. If they require further guidance, they should phone NHS 111.

In progressing out of the production area, someone should be designated to walk in front of them to open doors, to avoid the affected person needing to touch doors.

On exit from the factory they should be provided with a bin bag for disposable PPE; after disposing of PPE, tie the neck of the bag and drop it into another waste bag, so that nobody else will need to touch the outer of the first bag.

They should also be provided with an alginate (soluble) bag for laundry; this should be deposited into a clean plastic bag for submission, with prior notice, to the laundry. If an alginate bag is not available an ordinary plastic bag may be used, as agreed with the laundry.

They should collect all their belongings from their locker, leaving locker open for sanitisation. Other personnel should be kept clear whilst the person changes out of PPE and uses their locker.

Again, doors should be opened for the person to help them leave the building.

If possible, employee should avoid using public transport to get home. If they do, they should keep a minimum of 2m away from others, cough /sneeze into a tissue and dispose of this and avoid touching all surfaces.

Ensure employee is aware of what they need to do next:

- Self isolation in accordance with Government rules
- Do not go to doctor/pharmacy/A&E
- If concerned, Contact NHS 111
- Keep in touch with employer to advise status

Best practice: provide a guidance leaflet to be clear on their next steps.

- Close workers, typically those working on the same process/area of a processing line as the affected colleague, that are:
  - Stationed within 2m of the affected individual
  - Regularly within 2m of the affected individual
  - Handling same equipment, potentially passing equipment from one to the other or using the same control panel(s)

Close workers should be briefed, so they understand that their co-worker may not have been well. Their normal social distancing should have kept them safe. They should now leave the processing area, remove their protective clothing, wash and sanitise their hands and put on new/clean protective clothing.

### ***Where to clean***

Identify all surfaces which could realistically, potentially have become contaminated from the affected individual

- particularly horizontal surfaces below face level
- touch points – control panels, tool handles, keyboards, pens, clipboards, ingredient containers, etc

Wipe all surfaces thoroughly using a viricidal cleaning product diluted as advised by the manufacturer. (Note: apply usual controls to avoid contaminating food product/packaging during this process.) A number of non-rinse viricidal products are available. Once the contact time has been achieved personnel may return to the processing area and continue with daily tasks.

Facilities – consider which doors/facilities, including their own locker, the affected person may have touched. These must also be cleaned with a viricidal cleaning product.

### **Note:**

Above assumes the guidance given in Northern Ireland's Good Manufacturing Practice Covid-19 document has been implemented.