

Regulatory compliance post-Corona virus pandemic - FSSAI guidance

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Every part of the world is suffering due to the pandemic called Covid-19 after the outbreak came to light in December 2019 when China informed the World Health Organization (WHO) of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of an unknown cause in Wuhan City. Subsequently the disease spread to more Provinces in China.

This virus has been named as SARS-CoV-2. Till date it has not been proved the transmission of the virus through food; however there is a chance of contamination through the packaging materials.

Regulatory guidelines by FSSAI regarding Corona virus

Under the present circumstances due to Covid-19 pandemic, there is an urgent requirement for food industry to ensure compliance with measures to protect foodhandlers from contacting Covid-19, to prevent exposure to or transmission of the virus and to strengthen the food hygiene and sanitation practices.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has laid out comprehensive guidelines for food businesses, employees/foodhandlers working in food establishments to prevent spread of Covid-19.

These practices are required to be adopted in conjunction with Schedule 4 requirements.

Responsibility of Food business owner /manager

Responsibility of FBO is defined and includes:

Training of the foodhandlers: Along with Good Hygiene Practices and Good Manufacturing Practices cited in Schedule 4 of FSS (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulations, 2011, foodhandlers / workers need to be made aware about Covid-19 symptoms (high fever, shortness in breath, diarrhoea, headache, skin rashes and so on) so that they are able to recognise the symptoms early and that they can seek appropriate medical care and testing, and to minimise the risk of infecting fellow workers. A screening process should be in place to check temperature of all the persons entering the unit, temperature more than 37.5°C (99°F) are need to report immediately and advised to stay isolated from others.

Self-declaration is encouraged from employees /food handlers/ visitors and inform about any signs of respiratory illness before or during work/visit to the premises.

In situations like, infected people are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic and may not display any signs or symptoms of disease or may present with mild symptoms that can be easily

overlooked, the employers therefore should ensure the availability of masks and protective gears to all foodhandlers.

In case any foodhandler is Covid-19 infected or is identified as the contact of the Covid-19 infected person, he/she restricted to enter the premises and instructed to stay in home quarantine for the specified time period and should not return to work until they are free from the infection.

Regular monitoring of the employees/foodhandlers is essential for prevention of Covid-19 spread within the food establishment with self-monitoring and reporting any symptoms to the employer.

Wearing mask and protective gears at all times should be ensured. Employers must provide and issue these protective gears to their employees. The employees should practice social distancing in the workplace by maintaining a distance of 1 metre from others.

The local emergency response team should be formed & Covid-19 Coordinator shall be nominated. This team should prepare protocols/guidelines on the steps to be taken when handling suspected Covid-19 cases and as a means of general preparedness, the following should be ensured:

List of local authorised hospitals for Covid-19 testing and treatment is frequently updated.

Contact details of the professional disinfection company are kept handy;

Adequate disinfectant for emergency use are available;

Dedicated masks, gloves, safety glasses, protection suits for emergency use (PPE) are procured and used as per government advisories, from time to time;

Isolation rooms (one for suspected cases, one for close contacts) are prepared with special waste bins;

Establish record keeping for smooth monitoring of attendance, health status of employees, visitor details. Verification of the process along with any actions taken by the employer also needs to be recorded.

Personal hygiene of foodhandlers

FBO shall ensure that high hygiene standards in line with established Food Safety Management System (FSMS) and these practices include:

Proper hand hygiene washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (follow WHO advice) followed with sanitisation with alcohol-based sanitiser. Good respiratory hygiene (covers mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing; dispose of tissues and wash hands) should be practiced. Frequent cleaning/disinfection of work surfaces and touch points such as door handles.

Avoiding close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

Employees/ foodhandlers shall wear face mask and clean protective clothing like full sleeves clothes/aprons, head gears, caps, gloves at all times while in the production area. In case of shortage of face masks the employees/ foodhandlers should preferably use clean cloth-based face covering or face mask to cover nose and mouth.

Employees shall preferably not use personal jewellery, watches and so on. Instruments like mobiles should be discouraged while at work place or should be frequently sanitised.

Use of common contact points and sharing of others tools like pen, stationeries and mobiles should be discouraged.

Use of gloves at the time of preparing ready-to-eat food items should be followed, and while wearing gloves they should not touch any other non-food surfaces. Training on proper method of wearing of gloves should be given to and it must be communicated that gloves are not a substitute for hand washing.

The food premises, toilets, counters and equipment that come in contact with the infected person should be thoroughly cleaned with hot water and detergent and disinfected (with 0.1% hypochlorite sol. or an equivalent).

Social distancing

Organisation should train all employees on social distancing by reducing the number of employee on work floor, maintaining a minimum distance of 1 metre and maintaining gaps between shift hours.

Takeaways and food deliveries should be encouraged instead of dine-in options in restaurants.

Face-to-face meetings should be restricted as much as possible. The management should identify the employees that may be able to work from home or away from other staff. Avoid staff gathering in parking areas or other common areas after their shift.

Cleaning and sanitation

Cleaning and sanitation requirements mentioned in Schedule 4 shall be strictly followed.

Various areas of food establishment (such as food preparation/ production area, stores, packaging area, service area, waste disposal area and so on), office space, transport vehicle shall be cleaned with soap and water, followed by disinfection (using freshly prepared one per cent hypochlorite solution or any other disinfectant found to be effective against Corona virus).

Equipment, containers, utensils, cutlery and so on should be cleaned thoroughly with soap and water. Preferably use hot water (above 60 °C) for washing and sanitising.

High touch points like hand rails, elevator buttons, handles and call buttons should be sanitised with help of 1% sodium hypochlorite solution in frequently during the working hours.

For metallic surfaces like door handles, security locks, handles of baskets/carts, display racks 70% alcohol-based sanitiser shall be used to wipe the surfaces.

Hand sanitising stations should be installed in food establishments (especially at the entry) and near high contact surface.

Toilets and washrooms shall be cleaned after every shift using water and detergent. This shall be followed with disinfection using 1% hypochlorite solution or an equivalent. Metallic surfaces and surfaces where use of bleach is not recommended use 70% alcohol based sanitiser.

All cleaning equipment, cloth, mops, reusable protective gear such as boots and gloves shall be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after use and prior to use in other areas.

Special instructions for different food sectors

The food services should follow the established protocols and hygiene practices for retailing, along with the following important Covid-19 recommendations:

Food Service /Delivery/Takeaways:

Cleaning and disinfection of all surfaces after each meal preparation, continuous sanitation of hands by the foodhandlers and the high touch points by customers should be practiced. Hand wash facility for staffs should be made available at entrance.

Even with proper hand washing, food workers should use a barrier such as tongs, gloves, or other utensil to prevent direct hand contact with food. The virus is likely to be inactivated by proper cooking temperatures; it is important to use gloves or other barriers to prevent touching foods that will not be fully cooked.

Ready-to-eat food items shall not be left open and should be kept covered or in glass displays.

Employees shall wear clean uniform, mask, face cover, gloves and head covers at all times. Pre-screening of the workers for Covid-19 symptoms should be followed. Individuals showcasing Covid-19 symptoms should be sent to the health facility for further evaluation and encouraged to stay isolated.

All food items shall be thoroughly washed. Fruits and vegetables (to be consumed raw) shall be washed in 50 ppm chlorine (or equivalent solution) and clean with potable water before storage.

Help customers to maintain social distancing by way of encouraging spacing between the customers while in line for service or check out in accordance to the social distancing norms (minimum 1 metre gap). Establish designated pick-up zones for customers to help maintain social distancing.

Food Transportation or Distribution

All the drivers, loaders, support staffs are trained for the contamination from the Corona virus, how to reduce the chances of getting infected, use of PPEs and sanitisers in a proper way. The person showing any symptoms should inform immediately and stay isolated.

vehicles should be cleaned and disinfected on regular basis and sanitiser bottle should be provided in drivers cabin.

Drivers, loaders and other support staff should refrain from using public toilets as much as possible.

and other staff delivering to food premises should not leave their vehicles during delivery (if possible), and shall refrain from stopping in between for tea breaks and so on.

If a vehicle enters an area marked as a Covid-19 hotspot, then the vehicle shall be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before use.

Food Packaging

The survival of the Covid-19 virus on different surfaces and reported that the virus can remain viable for up to 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel, up to four hours on copper, and up to 24 hours on cardboard. Food businesses shall ensure that foodhandlers involved in food packaging should maintain a high level of personal hygiene, social distancing. All measures shall be adopted to ensure that food packaging is kept clean and away from sources of contamination.

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