

COVID-19 Fact Sheet

Preventing the spread of Coronavirus



Current scientific advice from the European Food Safety Authority suggests that: ‘There is currently no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the [COVID-19] virus’. However, there is evidence to suggest that the virus can last anywhere between several hours to several days in the air and on surfaces, depending on its composition. Surfaces may include anything from food packaging to card machines, shopping baskets to door handles, telephones to weighing scales, and everything in between. Therefore, it is essential that effective hygiene measures are put in place, both within the workplace and at home, in order to prevent the spread of the disease.

How does the virus transfer from the air - or surfaces - to a person and infect them?

- When an infected person coughs or sneezes, tiny droplets which carry the virus are dispersed into the air at a distance of up to 10 metres.
- These droplets may remain airborne for a couple of hours, or land on surfaces, clothing or skin where they remain active for some time.
- As human skin is ‘organic’, it provides an ideal surface for a virus to survive. When another individual touches an infected surface and then touches their face - particularly the eyes, nose or mouth, which are lined with mucus membranes - they too can become infected as the virus enters the body.

Why does the use of soap and disinfectant kill the virus?

- Sars-CoV-2 (Coronavirus), like many other viruses, is a nanoparticle coated in a lipid (fatty) bilayer.
- By using soap – which also contains very similar lipids to those found within the virus – the soap molecules interfere with this fat membrane in the virus, dissolving them so that the virus falls apart.
- Alcohol-based products react with the fat membrane in a very similar way, splitting down the virus particles so that they no longer function as a unit. It is recommended to use products with a high alcohol percentage – those between 60-80% ethanol are most effective.
- It is not entirely necessary for harsh chemicals to be used to split the particles apart, which is why hand washing with soap is being promoted as an effective method of destroying the virus. By washing hands for a minimum of 20 seconds and covering every area of the hand and fingers with soap, you are more likely to disrupt the virus than by using a drop of hand sanitiser. However, sanitiser should still be used wherever hand washing is not possible.
- In short, products which can disrupt this fatty layer on the virus particles will disassemble the virus, causing it to become inactive. This is the reason that soap, alcohol, sanitisers and disinfectant work to stop the spread of the virus.

Information for this factsheet has been taken from various scientific sources, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Harvard Health Publishing and an article supported by Pall Thordarson, Professor of Chemistry at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. For further information on how viruses such as the novel Coronavirus are spread and how they can be managed in your business, consult government recommended platforms, the World Health Organisation, or the NHS website.