



COVID-19

Guidance for Industry: What to do when someone tests positive for COVID-19 in a food establishment

A food handler has tested positive for COVID-19.

What next?



For the infected individual (food handler):

Those who have tested positive for COVID-19 are placed in isolation by their doctor. They must follow the public health guidelines available on [Québec.ca](https://quebec.ca) and in the [Self-care Guide](#). Furthermore, they must inform their employer.

La direction de la santé publique (DSP) seeks to identify the individuals (colleagues, family members, clients) who have been in contact with the confirmed case and to evaluate the risk of transmission, then take appropriate next steps.

The MAPAQ works in close collaboration with the DSP, and with the CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) as required, to evaluate the risk within the targeted establishment and in providing support and guidance so that the establishment may reopen as soon as possible.

For co-workers and workforce scheduling and planning:

The DSP informs the work teams about the measures that must be implemented to limit the spread of the virus. The operator must work with the DSP so that they may quickly evaluate the situation.

The DSP informs the employees who had the most direct contact with the infected person that they must go into isolation for at least 14 days.

The operator must prepare a plan in preparation for a workforce shortage. If the closure of an establishment is foreseen, they must first communicate with other operators for secondment or make temporary hires by means of a staffing, HR or recruitment website (e.g., <https://atablemplois.ca>).

All links in the bio-food chain are critical, and all necessary efforts must be made to ensure there are no disruptions in this sector.



For customers:

The DSP and MAPAQ, as well as the CFIA if needed, work in collaboration with the operator or the food chain managers to advise the customers who have visited the establishment, in all transparency, of the situation (e.g., publication of an advisory using social media, sending an email to loyalty program users, etc.). Thus, in the event of one or more cases amongst customers, those impacted may more effectively participate in enquiries, as needed.

For the food:

So far there is no proof that SARS-CoV-2 (the virus responsible for COVID-19) can be transmitted by the ingestion of food.

It is however possible that food handlers who are infected may introduce the virus to the food with which they have contact if their hands are contaminated, or by coughing or sneezing. However, food companies are already familiar with personal hygiene best practices that reduce the risk of transmission of the majority of food-borne illnesses, which by extension will limit the risk of contaminating food with SARS-CoV-2.

It is possible to contract COVID 19 by touching a surface or object where the virus is found and then bringing your hand to your mouth, nose or eyes, but the primary means of transmission is via respiratory droplet.

Thus, in the case where a food handler is diagnosed with COVID 19, the recall or disposal of the food is not required if regular hygiene measures and respiratory etiquette has been respected. In case of doubt, and in order to limit risk where possible, handled food that is still on site can be cooked or reheated (63°C for 4 minutes or 60°C for 30 minutes) before being served. Where possible, food packaging that has been handled by the infected employee must be cleaned.

However, in the case that the food handler worked in an establishment serving exclusively at-risk individuals (e.g., senior citizens), remaining food can neither be cooked nor reheated and must be disposed of as a precautionary measure.



For the establishment:

The operator must proceed **immediately** to cleaning and sanitizing the areas most at risk of being contaminated (see question # 4 of “What cleaning and sanitizing methods are effective against coronavirus in food establishments?” of the [Food Safety FAQ](#) document. Although there is little information in the literature demonstrating that a SARS-CoV-2 infection can happen via aerosol transmission, it is recommended, where possible, to close areas used by infected persons, and to wait for at least three hours after the last infected person has left before starting the cleaning and disinfection process. If possible, open the exterior windows to increase air circulation in the area of concern. This waiting period will also attain a certain level of inactivation of the virus on any surfaces. Consult the [INSPQ guide](#) for more information on the subject.

Further to this, one must follow standard cleaning and sanitization procedures and implement hygiene measures, and even increase these if not already done so (see question # 3 “What can food establishment operators (restaurants, grocery stores, slaughterhouses, butchers, dairy facilities, processing facilities, etc.) do to minimize risks? ” and # 6 “As a food handler, what precautions should I take? ” from the FAQ document). Remember that wearing gloves or a mask is not necessary if other hygiene best practices are followed in the establishment and that public health recommendations are respected.

Articles made of cloth (hand towels, table napkins, work clothes, etc.) can be cleaned by following manufacturer recommendations. Place soiled linen (for example: sheets, napkins, clothes) in a cloth or plastic bag. Take these bags to the washer. Avoid shaking the laundry or its bag/container as you place the laundry into the washer. Avoid all contact between skin or clothing with the contaminated laundry. You must use hot water if possible and dry the articles completely.

The operator must equally follow all COVID-19 prevention measures recommended by the INSPQ ([Public Health Expertise and Reference Centre](#)) while conducting business.

Operators can communicate with the MAPAQ directly
if they need support or more information: **1-800 463-5023**.