

## **CONSUMERS**

### **Food safety**

#### **1. Can the COVID-19 virus be transmitted through food?**

Transmission of the virus by ingesting food has been ruled out. In addition, the coronavirus cannot grow on food. However, 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 this is not the primary means of transmission.

Therefore, it is important to always follow the basic rules of hygiene, which include washing your hands thoroughly before eating and cooking, washing food thoroughly before eating, as well as coughing or sneezing into your elbow.

#### **2. Could the government decide to close grocery stores?**

MAPAQ would like to reiterate that grocery stores are considered an essential service and the government will not request that they be closed. In addition, the bio-food supply chain (for example, agricultural and food processing companies, slaughterhouses and vegetable farms) is also regarded as a key service. Also, MAPAQ remains active to ensure the safety and availability of food for consumers.

#### **3. As a consumer, can I do anything to support the agri-food sector?**

Québec consumers are urged to buy local. By doing this, they support local producers, processors and businesses and contribute to economic vitality and ongoing activity in the sector. Together, through their choices, businesses and consumers promote the diversity of Québec's slate of food products.

#### **4. Can I continue to eat food from abroad?**

Imported food does not carry a greater risk of transmission of the virus.

Transmission of the virus by ingesting food has been ruled out. In addition, the coronavirus cannot grow on food. However, 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 this is not the primary means of transmission. Therefore, it is important to always follow the basic rules of hygiene, which include washing your hands thoroughly before eating and cooking, washing food thoroughly before eating, as well as coughing or sneezing into your elbow.

## **5. Should I wash all the packaged food items I buy at the grocery store?**

Although it is possible to contract COVID-19 by touching a surface or object where the virus is found and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes, this is not the primary means of transmission. The virus can survive for around three hours on objects with a dry surface (e.g. tins, cereal boxes, packets of pasta, etc.). You therefore do not need to wash all your purchases. The key is to wash your hands often, especially when you arrive home and once you have put away your groceries. As always, you should also wash your hands before cooking and before eating.

In order to limit the contamination of surfaces, remember that a number of enhanced hygiene practices have been implemented by food establishment operators and that consumers should also be made aware of respiratory etiquette when in public places, including in grocery stores and supermarkets.

## **6. Is it risky to buy unpackaged produce?**

No. However, fruits and vegetables must always be washed before being eaten, as you would normally do. All you need do is wash the produce with water and scrub the surfaces. There is no need for detergent.

In fact, packaging of fruits and vegetables increases the amount of handling by food establishment operators, which is not something we want. Consumers must also be made aware of complying with respiratory etiquette concerning unpackaged food such as fruits and vegetables.

## **7. Are there any special precautions I should take before eating take-out food or food for delivery?**

Remember that, so far, there is no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted through food. The coronavirus is transmitted through respiratory droplets or by touching surfaces or utensils that may be contaminated with droplets. It is possible to contract COVID-19 by touching a surface or object where the virus is found and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes, but this is not the primary means of transmission. Adherence to good food hygiene and safety practices and safe cooking generally minimizes the risk of transmission of any foodborne contamination or illness.

## **8. Homemade cleaning products can be made using bleach. What would you recommend on this topic?**

To clean household surfaces, a solution of 0.1% sodium hypochlorite is recommended. That means 4 teaspoons (20 ml) of domestic bleach in 1 litre of water. It is best to prepare a new diluted solution every day and not to mix bleach with any other cleaning products.

We believe that a 0.1% hypochlorite solution is sufficient to eliminate viruses such as coronavirus, which is less resistant than other pathogenic microorganisms.

This is in line with current scientific literature on coronavirus and complies with recommendations from the [CDC \(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\)](#).

Please note that, in the current context and according to the available scientific data, the proportions usually recommended by MAPAQ (1:200) must be increased to 1:50 (equivalent to a 0.1% solution of sodium hypochlorite) as a precautionary measure.

We are monitoring the scientific data on the subject.

## **ANIMAL OWNERS OR KEEPERS**

### **1. Can my pet(s) get the coronavirus and transmit it to me?**

All indications are that the virus is transmitted from person to person as a result of close contact, and there is no evidence that it circulates in the animal population. In fact, no case of transmission from a human (or other animal) to a domestic animal has been identified. In Québec, there is no evidence to suggest a risk of infection of humans by animals or animal products.

However, animals exposed to the virus can be similar to a contaminated surface that is difficult to disinfect and is generally mobile. The risks of contamination are limited by the following measures:

- Recommendations of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux:  
[Quebec.ca/coronavirus](http://Quebec.ca/coronavirus)
- Biosecurity measures:  
[www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Productions/santeanimale/maladies/soussurveillance/Pages/Biosecuriteferme.aspx](http://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Productions/santeanimale/maladies/soussurveillance/Pages/Biosecuriteferme.aspx).
- Hygiene measures relating to contact with animals:  
[www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/zoonoses](http://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/zoonoses)

Given the limited amount of scientific knowledge available, precautionary principles apply to those infected or suspected of being infected.

## **2. What must I do if I am infected by COVID-19 or think I am?**

During the period of isolation prescribed by public health authorities:

- If possible, avoid contact with animals.
- If you have to take care of an animal nonetheless, comply with the hygiene measures recommended by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. This includes wearing a mask and paying special attention to hand washing before providing care. Comply with the usual hygiene measures for contact with animals. These measures are found in the [Maladies animales transmissibles à l'humain](#) section.
- Avoid contact between your animal and other animals or with people.
- If someone else must take care of your animal, choose a household member if you can. Brief this person on the measures to apply, especially those concerning limited contact with the animal, hand washing before and after care is provided, and disinfecting the environment that must be shared with the animal, where applicable (e.g. for walks, etc.). Also remind the person about the hygiene measures to follow.
- Animal breeders already use good biosecurity and hygiene. They are urged to enhance it if needed.

### **Caring for animals**

Currently, abandoning or euthanizing animals is not justified or supported by any scientific evidence. MAPAQ relies on businesses and partners with animals under their responsibility to ensure the continuity of essential services for the welfare of animals. Pet owners and animal caretakers are also encouraged to have an emergency plan in place to ensure that their animals receive the necessary care in the event that they are unable to care for them. They must also provide the necessary equipment for the health of the animals (e.g. the equivalent of at least two weeks of food and medication, if necessary).

## **AGRI-BUSINESSES AND AGRI-FOOD WORKERS**

### **1. Information for businesses about essential services and priority activities**

Your company's activity is not listed, but you think it is a priority. You can check the essential company designation on the [Quebec.ca](http://Quebec.ca) website.

If you have any questions, you will need to fill out an online form. An information officer from the Government of Québec will then contact you shortly.

## **2. Is there a website for recruiting by agri-food businesses?**

Yes. The [À table! Emplois](#) website came online on March 26. This free Québec portal for specialized agri-food jobs will remain open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It pairs employers seeking temporary workers with workers who want to lend this key sector a hand to ensure a continuous supply of products to grocery stores and Quebecers' tables.

## **3. What can food establishment operators do to minimize risks?**

So far, we have no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted through food. It is therefore unlikely that such a transmission will take place. Adherence to good food hygiene and safety practices and safe cooking generally minimizes the risk of transmission of any foodborne contamination and illness.

Food establishment operators play an important role in preventing foodborne illnesses. In the current context, they should follow public health recommendations and the following guidelines:

- Ensure that staff under their responsibility are aware of issues related to COVID-19;
- Ensure that staff comply with the public health instructions in effect;
- Ensure that food handlers are properly trained in food hygiene practices;
- Ensure effective supervision of food handlers to enhance hygiene practices in the establishment;
- Ensure that the appropriate facilities are available for hand washing;
- Ensure that food handlers are aware that they must report any symptoms of respiratory illness before or during work;
- Ensure that food handlers and other personnel are not ill;
- Ensure that staff with symptoms remain at home until medical advice is received;
- Enhance cleaning and sanitation procedures for items that are exposed to public handling (handles, crates, counters, menus, etc.). Special attention should be paid to fast food or self-service locations where utensils can be handled by several people;
- The use of self-service buffets where people have to wait in line, close to each other and close to food and utensils, is an increased risk and should be avoided;
- Provide for additional or alternative refrigerated or frozen storage capacities to meet the food demand, which is likely subject to change (decreased demand in the hotel, restaurant and institutional sectors, increased demand for food products at retail locations);
- Prepare an action plan in the event of a labour shortage. Do not neglect cleaning and sanitation activities and processing methods that require qualifications. If necessary, prioritize activities that ensure the best means of food availability and abandon other activities.

#### **4. What cleaning and sanitizing methods are effective against coronavirus in food establishments?**

Common cleaning and sanitizing methods used in the food industry should be continued and their frequency of use should be increased where possible. Other pathogenic microorganisms, generally more resistant than coronavirus, should not be overlooked.

Currently, 70% alcohol and sodium hypochlorite are known to be particularly effective against coronavirus.

Confirm with your suppliers how effective their cleaning and sanitizing procedures and products are against coronavirus. In case of doubt, it is best to keep the procedures already in place and always ensure that they are correctly applied, in accordance with manufacturer instructions.

For non-food surfaces that are particularly exposed to the public (handles, crates, counters, etc.), more frequent cleaning using a disinfection method known to be effective against coronavirus is recommended. Health Canada has published a list of disinfectant products that can be used to inactivate SARS-CoV-2 on hard surfaces.

#### **5. Should I ask food handlers to wear gloves?**

No, gloves are not required and provide a false sense of security. Frequent hand washing is more appropriate.

#### **6. As a food handler, which precautions should I take?**

If they believe that they have symptoms of a respiratory illness, it is important that food handlers inform their employer, avoid preparing food for others, and follow public health recommendations.

It is possible that food handlers who are infected may introduce the virus into the food they are in contact with through contaminated hands or by coughing or sneezing. However, this is unlikely to occur if people who come into contact with food in the food industry adhere to good personal hygiene practices that help reduce the risk of transmission of most foodborne illnesses. Such practices include:

- Frequent hand washing and good general hand hygiene;
- Compliance with the good food hygiene and safety practices (see the [Guide des bonnes pratiques d'hygiène et de salubrité alimentaires](#));
- Compliance with respiratory etiquette;

- Avoid contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness, such as coughing and sneezing, to the extent possible;
- Food handlers should wash their hands frequently (even if they have no symptoms of illness). Hand washing is required:
  - before starting work,
  - before handling cooked or ready-to-eat foods,
  - after handling or preparing raw food,
  - after handling waste,
  - after performing cleaning and sanitizing tasks,
  - after going to the toilet,
  - after sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose,
  - after eating, drinking or smoking,
  - after handling money.

### **7. Are there special precautions surrounding the preparation of take-out food or food for delivery?**

Aside from using the enhanced good hygiene practices when preparing food (see the question *What can food establishment operators do?*), additional precautions may be taken to limit the contamination of surfaces and contact with clients:

- Protect packaging (tins, bottles, containers, etc.) or distance packaging from handlers or clients;
- Encourage phone and internet transactions and avoid using cash;
- Delivery people should signal their arrival, then leave packages on doorsteps;
- Clients should handle the packages, then wash their hands before eating.

Masks and gloves are not necessary measures to ensure the protection of delivery people, food handlers or clients. They are for patients who have symptoms or who are thought to be infected, and for the healthcare professionals who treat them.

Remember that, so far, there is no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted through food. Coronavirus is transmitted through respiratory droplets or by touching surfaces or utensils that may be contaminated with droplets. *It is possible to contract COVID-19 by touching a surface or object where the virus is found and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes, but this is not the primary means of transmission.* Adherence to good food hygiene and safety practices and safe cooking generally minimizes the risk of transmission of any foodborne contamination or illness.

### **8. If a customer coughs and has symptoms, should I tell them to leave the grocery store?**

It is the responsibility of the owner of the establishment to take such measures as he/she deems necessary to ensure public health in his/her restaurant or grocery store. However, coughing does not mean that he/she is infected with the virus. We are relying on the civic-mindedness and honesty of citizens to respect public health instructions in case of doubt or contamination.

**9. Should an establishment be closed after a certain number or percentage of employees develop symptoms?**

Food handlers who are sick or develop symptoms of respiratory illness (fever and cough) should inform their employer and remain at home until the symptoms have subsided. In addition, food businesses are encouraged to work on their service continuity plan.

**10. I own a supermarket or grocery store that can accommodate more than 250 people per day. What should I do?**

The 250-person limit does not apply to your establishment. So you have the option to take steps to apply this limit.

The government of Québec is asking restaurant and café owners to close all their dining rooms.

Take-out orders, deliveries and drive-in services remain permitted.

**11. Do grocery stores have to clean the grocery carts?**

Retailers are strongly encouraged to pay even greater attention to the application of best practices for cleaning and sanitizing food and non-food contact surfaces. Documentation on these practices can be found on the MAPAQ website. However, consumers must rely on basic personal hygiene practices for their safety, which include thoroughly washing hands and used utensils before cooking and eating, thoroughly washing food before eating, as well as coughing or sneezing into their elbow. Therefore, there is no need for any denunciations.

For consultation: [Cleaning and sanitizing](#).

**12. I only offer bulk food. Should I close?**

No. However, you should enhance good hygiene practices:

Add additional protections (containers, sneeze guards, nearby hand-washing stations, service by an employee);

Increase the frequency of cleaning and sanitizing in high traffic areas or on exposed surfaces.

### **13. I own a sugar shack. Do I have to close my establishment completely?**

The current prohibition applies to providing food service or accepting visitors at your establishment. Maple syrup production and maple product manufacturing can therefore continue. We invite you to avoid activities associated with pouring maple syrup on snow.

### **14. I have to close the doors of my establishment. What should I do with my surplus food?**

We encourage you to donate any remaining food to food banks or other food aid organizations.

### **15. What is recommended for washing items made of fabric (hand towels, table napkins, work jackets, etc.)?**

In the food sector, items in fabric can be washed following manufacturer instructions. If possible, use hot water and dry the items thoroughly.

If at all possible, clean and sanitize items made of fabric more frequently, as is the case for any other surface.

### **16. I must apply for a new food permit or renew my current permit. How should I proceed?**

If you wish to apply for a food permit, please visit the [Permits](#) section to view the documentation and download the permit application form. You must complete the form and mail it to the address indicated on the form. It must include the required documents, if applicable, as well as the payment (opening fee and cost of the permit).

Due to the ongoing epidemiological crisis (COVID-19), additional processing times for applications and permit renewals are expected. However, no negative consequences will be attributed to clients of the Ministère.

Please note that due to these exceptional circumstances, the phone service for permits is currently unavailable. The Ministère is working to get this fixed as soon as possible.

## **17. Will inspection activities be affected?**

Despite the current crisis (COVID-19), the Ministère's inspectors are continuing to support operators to ensure food safety and animal health and welfare. They are also informing operators of the public health measures to be taken with regards to COVID-19 when preparing and processing food. However, some of the Ministère's services may be affected, such as the issuing of permits. Under these circumstances, no negative consequences will be attributed to clients of the Ministère in this respect.

## **18. Has the MAPAQ implemented special measures to support the industry or to meet companies' needs?**

The Ministère's essential services remain available (e.g. inspections, financial support, laboratory analyses).

Furthermore, MAPAQ is evaluating the situation's impact on sector companies with the aim of implementing, if necessary, support measures in addition to other government interventions.

If you are a company or a stakeholder in the bio-food sector and you are faced with specific issues jeopardizing your activities, you are invited to contact the regional branch of the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation to let us know.

## **Economic issues for businesses**

### **1. I can no longer pay my employees because of the COVID-19 crisis (e.g. layoffs, contracting the virus, etc.). Which programs can I refer them to?**

- [The federal government's main Employment Insurance program](#) provides two kinds of benefits: regular and sickness.
- The federal government's **Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)** combines the Emergency Care Benefit and Emergency Support Benefit. Regular employees, contract workers and self-employed workers who have lost their income are eligible for taxable financial assistance of \$2,000 a month for a maximum of four months. Program details will be posted online shortly.

### **2. If my employees do not qualify for Employment Insurance, what else can I do for them?**

- On March 16, the provincial government announced the [Temporary Aid for Workers Program](#), designed to meet the needs of workers who, because they are in isolation to counter the propagation of the COVID-19 virus, cannot earn all of their work income and are not eligible for another financial assistance program.

### 3. Which measures are available for my business to cope with the financial difficulties it faces?

- Lending banks are available to study your file and find a customized solution for your situation. It is important that you contact them before you reach a critical tipping point.
- [The Protec-pêche program](#) is a measure that enables fishing enterprises to pay the interest on their loans and to be granted a moratorium on repayment of capital on maritime loans, up to a certain maximum. It also provides for payment of marine insurance premiums.
- La Financière agricole du Québec (FADQ) has already [proposed a six-month moratorium on repayment of approved loans](#). The FADQ adapts to the prevailing situation in the various sectors, while respecting program requirements. The specific situations of producers are handled case by case by the service centres. Based on their needs in terms of liquidity, businesses may contact their service centre for support, to negotiate an agreement, or to implement a solution tailored to their situation. For example, financing could be awarded for shoring up a business' working capital.
- For producers insured under FADQ programs, final Farm Income Stabilization Insurance Program payments will be made for the livestock sector, as well as the second advance for cereal and canola compensation.
- Furthermore, **AgriInvest** and **Agri-Québec** program accounts make it possible for participating producers to access short-term liquidity without withdrawal conditions. **AgriStability** offers the option of interim payments for producers facing financial difficulties to receive an advance on a portion of the payment calculated for the year in question.
- The government has announced the **Concerted temporary action program for businesses (PACTE)** and a three-month moratorium on loans contracted through the Fonds locaux d'investissements. PACTE can help businesses with supply problems (raw material or goods and services) or those for which the delivery of product (goods and services) or merchandise is impossible or significantly reduced. A minimum of \$50,000 is granted as either a loan guarantee or a loan.

- [News release: COVID-19 – Economic measures – A proactive government helping Québec business](#)
- [Concerted temporary action program for businesses](#)
- [PACTE Q&A](#)
- The Government of Canada has increased the lending capacity of **Farm Credit Canada (FCC)** by more than \$5 billion for producers' and food processors' liquidity needs. Contact it for further information: <https://www.fcc-fac.ca/fr.html>.
- [Federal COVID-19 programs for businesses](#)

#### **4. I have to repay my Advance Payment Program (APP) loan for April 30. Can I delay payment?**

- The federal government is offering a six-month delay for repaying the loan. Moreover, you may apply for an exemption of the interest on an additional \$100,000 for 2020-2021 provided that your total APP advances do not exceed the \$1 million ceiling.

#### **5. During this period, will the MAPAQ continue issuing approved financial assistance?**

- The Ministère will maintain its essential services, including issuance of financial assistance to businesses.

#### **Useful links**

1. For psychological support for farmers, visit [Ressources d'aide psychologique pour les agriculteurs](#).
2. Latest information from the CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) for consumers on food and animal health and with regard to COVID-19: <https://inspection.gc.ca/covid-19/questions-and-answers/eng/1584648921808/1584648922156>
3. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - Information for industry – Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada: <http://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-information-for-industry/?id=1584732749543>

The MAPAQ is closely monitoring the evolution of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). We will update this Q&A section daily as needed. We will also inform you of any changes that could impact food availability and safety and animal health and welfare.