**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. **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.

3. **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 is just as important and MAPAQ will continue to ensure consumer food safety and availability.

4. **If a customer coughs and has symptoms, should I tell them to leave the restaurant or 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.
5. 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.

6. 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 limit the number of customers to 50% capacity, or one in two tables. However, buffet-style restaurants and dining rooms in sugar shacks will have to close temporarily.

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

7. In shopping centres and other restaurants, utensils, napkins, straws and stir sticks are often not protected from contamination from the public. Should this practice be prohibited?

Coronavirus is transmitted through respiratory droplets or through 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 bringing your hand to your mouth, nose or eyes, but this is not the primary means of transmission.

Therefore, it remains necessary to pay close attention to self-service locations where utensils can be handled by several people, and it is also necessary to:

- Minimize self-service foods (avoid olive bars, stop serving bread and candies);
- Minimize self-service areas or accessories (utensils, straws, etc.);
- Do not serve buffet food (e.g. brunch);
- 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. Could the government decide to close restaurants?

Due to the rapidly evolving nature of the situation, we invite you to follow the latest updated guidelines available at the following link: Quebec.ca/coronavirus.

12. What can food handlers do?

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.

13. What can food establishment operators (restaurants, supermarkets, slaughterhouses, butchers, dairy plants, etc.) 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;
- Enquire with staff members about travel abroad or contact with persons who have travelled abroad and ask them to remain in voluntary isolation for 14 days;
- 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.

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. Should I take any precautions with regards to take-out orders and deliveries?
Aside from using the enhanced good hygiene practices when preparing food (link to 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.

17. **Should fruit and vegetables be packaged?**

No. However, fresh fruit and vegetables should always be washed before eating, as usual.

In actual fact, packaging fruit and vegetables would increase food operators’ handling of the product, something that should be avoided. Consumers should also be made aware of respiratory etiquette around unpackaged foods such as fruit and vegetables.

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.

19. **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.

**20. I need to close. What should I do with my surplus food?**

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

**21. 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.

**22. 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): https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html.
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 health and welfare

Can my dog or pet catch the coronavirus and give 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
- Biosecurity measures: 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

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

Recommendations for people who are infected or suspected of being infected

- If possible, avoid contact with animals.
- If you have to take care of an animal nevertheless, follow the hygiene practices recommended by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux. In particular, wear a mask and pay special attention to hand washing before taking care of it. Follow the usual hygiene practices associated with animal contact; they are published in the section on animal diseases transmissible to humans (Maladies animales transmissibles à l’humain).
- Avoid contact between your pet and other animals or people.
- If another person needs to take care of your pet, give preference to a member of your household and remind them of the hygiene practices to be followed.
- Animal breeders already apply good biosecurity and hygiene practices. They are encouraged to enhance them as needed.
Other

1. For psychological support for farmers, visit [Ressources d’aide psychologique pour les agriculteurs](#).

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).

MAPAQ is closely monitoring the spread of the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19). We will update these questions and answers as necessary and will keep you informed of any changes that may have an impact on food availability, food safety and animal health and welfare.