

ADDITIONAL CLEANING AND SANITISING FOR FOOD BUSINESSES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 EXPOSURE

Introduction

A proactive response to a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a food business will help protect your workforce and limit effects on your business continuity. This information sheet will help food businesses prepare for specific cleaning and sanitation processes that need to be undertaken in the event of an on-site detection.

Although the virus is spread mainly through person-to-person contact, such as through droplets exhaled when an infected person coughs or sneezes, it can survive for hours or days on contaminated surfaces. Many food businesses have already initiated additional cleaning and sanitising programs in an effort to minimise potential surface contamination. However, if an employee or other person that has visited your site (e.g. contractors, delivery drivers, visitors etc.) is confirmed as having COVID-19, it is likely that you will be required by your state health authority to undertake a **thorough clean** (sometimes also referred to as deep cleaning).

Definition and scope of deep cleaning

All food businesses have routine cleaning and sanitising procedures in place and the standard combination of cleaning and sanitising is effective in removing the COVID-19 virus. Additional cleaning and sanitising processes will be required in response to COVID-19 exposures. There is a requirement to perform a cleaning and sanitising regime that is more thorough and extensive than current procedures with a focus on surfaces that may have been exposed to the virus.

Cleaning and sanitising in response to a COVID-19 positive staff member or customer, is intended to prevent infection of others. The additional cleaning and sanitising is primarily intended to address the points and locations that an infected person may have made direct and indirect contact with. Non-production areas such as offices, amenities and dining areas are particularly important in this regard. This means that a thorough clean in response to a COVID-19 positive case may differ from the rigorous cleaning and sanitising in response to a positive detection of a microbial pathogen, such as *Listeria monocytogenes*, in the food or processing environment, which may focus on food contact surfaces.

It is up to the business in consultation with the relevant state health authorities to determine if a total clean down of all equipment or the premises is required, or if the additional cleaning and sanitising can be restricted to specific areas.

To determine the scope of a deep clean, consider:

- All the common areas on your site used by the affected person concerned. For example, dining areas, canteens, offices, change areas, toilets, plus any equipment, tools or PPE used. All surfaces in the area should be cleaned and sanitised paying special attention to touch points such as light switches, keyboards, door handles, undersides of tables, chairs etc.
- The processing environment accessed by the affected employee or visitor. Pay particular attention to the movement of your staff and visitors and target those areas that would be associated with their movements. Maintenance staff, in particular, may work across the entire site, and equipment may be removed to the workshop for repair. The extent of a deep clean will depend on circumstances, function and layout of your business. This should also include surfaces that may not be part of a normal cleaning procedure such as control panels or areas sensitive to moisture. For example, some sites may have staff performing various functions across the whole site and handling many items of equipment and may require deep cleaning of the entire premises. Other

sites may only have staff access to limited areas and deep cleaning of the entire premises may not be required.

- A “dry” manufacturing processing area such as powder blending will have other considerations. As it is preferable to minimise moisture in these areas, it is necessary to assess how your plant may be affected by a deep clean. For example, could most contact items be removed and washed and sanitised separate from production?

Being prepared

- In large premises, engage with staff to reinforce the importance of limiting where they need to go on the site and where possible develop a means of recording where they have been.
- Document a procedure to be followed in the case of a COVID-19 detection and nominate one or two people who will be responsible for oversight of the process and record-keeping.
- Decide if the cleaning will be done by in-house staff or a cleaning contractor will be engaged.
- Consider how the resourcing of personnel may be affected if staff are required to self-isolate for a period of time following direct or indirect contact with a confirmed case. Be able to demonstrate how teams have been effectively separated from each other during operations.
- If resources permit, gather a “strike team” together – an internal or external group on standby that is trained in the deep cleaning procedures, familiar with areas likely to need attention.
- Ensure there are adequate supplies of hand sanitizer/liquid soap and warm running water, personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning and disinfection chemicals, disposable paper towel etc on hand.
- The cleaning and sanitising agents used in your usual cleaning regime will be suitable for deep cleaning.

Deep cleaning process

- Document all the actions that you take from the outset (i.e. from when first advised of the case detection) to demonstrate to health authorities that steps taken have been proportionate and appropriate.
- Isolate all the areas that could be contaminated.
- Whether operations need to be suspended will depend on factors such as the size of operations, nature of work performed, number of people, and suspected areas of exposure.
- Use of dry dusting, air pressure guns or high-pressure washers can spread the virus and should be avoided where possible. Touch points should be manually cleaned and sanitised using wet wiping. This does not mean that normal cleaning and sanitising practices in processing areas to control pathogen contamination, which may involve the use of such equipment, should be amended. .
- No personnel, except those involved in the cleaning will be permitted in the affected area until the clean is complete. It is expected that a one-off process will be sufficient, however if further positive cases of employees are detected, then an expansion and repeat of the process may be required.
- Safe Work Australia advises that safety glasses, gloves and surgical masks should be used if cleaning an area impacted by a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case.
- Ensure sanitiser remains on surfaces for the appropriate contact time as specified by the manufacturer.
- Double bag and dispose of waste in the usual manner.

Further information

Further information can also be found at Safe Work Australia

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/how-clean-and-disinfect-your-workplace-covid-19>