

08 April 2020

Advice for food businesses: COVID-19 Pandemic

<https://www.cgcsa.co.za/covid-19/>

Key messages

- Ensure that the regulatory requirements laid out by Regulations Governing General Hygiene Requirements for Food Premises, the Transport of Food and Related Matters (Regulation No R.638 of 2018) are met as a minimum requirement.
- Everyone should practice good hygiene when preparing and handling food.
- Practice good hand hygiene – wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Good manufacturing practices to always be followed, including frequent cleaning and sanitising food preparation surfaces.
- There is currently no medical or scientific evidence that COVID-19 is spread through food.
- Normal cleaning and sanitation measures will minimise the risk in a food service.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: Can it be spread by foodborne transmission?

A: There is currently no medical or scientific evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus.

EFSA's chief scientist, Marta Hugas said: "Experiences from previous outbreaks of related coronaviruses, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) and Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), show that transmission through food consumption did not occur. At the moment, there is no evidence to suggest that coronavirus is any different in this respect."

Q: How long does COVID-19 last on surfaces?

A: According to the World Health Organization, it is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

If you think a surface may be contaminated, always apply caution and clean surfaces with a common household disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others. Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

The following link outlines some preliminary research which includes survival time frames for different materials as follows:

- Plastic and stainless steel: 2-3 days
- Metals (e.g. aluminium and copper): 4 hour
- Wood materials (e.g. cardboard and paper): 24 hours
- Aerosols: 3 hours

Source: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.09.20033217v2>

Q: Do you recommend additional packaging wipe down and sanitation procedures for transportation of product?

A: There is currently no recommendation to include additional packaging wipe down and additional sanitation procedures for transportation of product. Care should be exercised to ensure that packaging is not contaminated in any way. In general, human coronaviruses are not particularly stable on dry surfaces. Inactivation in dry conditions generally occurs within a period from a few hours to a couple of days. Due to the low environmental stability of coronaviruses, a transmission of the pathogen via this method seems unlikely in most cases. The drivers and handlers are therefore requested to practice good hand hygiene regularly.

Q: Should food businesses use disposables instead?

A: There is currently no evidence to suggest there is any benefit in switching to disposables. It is important that the measures we take to minimise transmission are effective. The most effective measures you can take are practising good hand hygiene and cleaning, with particular focus on shared frequently touched surfaces.

Q: Can coronavirus survive on crockery and cutlery?

A: While we are still finding out about the characteristics of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), we do know quite a bit about other related coronaviruses, which are likely to be similar in terms of susceptibility to inactivation.

Coronaviruses are enveloped viruses. The envelope surrounds the entire virus and without an intact envelope, the virus loses its infectivity (ability to infect a cell).

The envelope is a relatively delicate structure and makes the virus more susceptible to degradation in the environment. Due to the delicate nature of the viral envelope, coronaviruses are relatively sensitive to both heat and detergents (including soap).

For this reason, normal washing of dishes in hot water (or better still, a dishwasher) using detergent is likely to completely inactivate any coronavirus present.

Q: What should a food business do to protect against coronavirus?

A: All business as usual information about food safety is relevant and protective.

Food businesses should continue to practice good food handling hygiene. A food handler should frequently wash their hands, especially:

- before starting work
- before handling cooked or ready-to-eat food
- after handling or preparing raw food
- after handling waste
- after cleaning duties
- after using the toilet
- after blowing nose, sneezing or coughing
- after eating drinking or smoking
- after handling money

Avoid touching areas and surfaces that have been in direct contact with the customer or food. Be aware of how used dishes are collected from a table. Minimising the risk of cross contamination by avoiding touching surfaces that may have been contaminated.

Frequent cleaning of shared surfaces, this could include door handles (front door, fridge/freezers, toilets/bathrooms), tables and chairs (arm rests or areas used to pull out the chair) salt and pepper shakers, sugar bowls, communal cutlery containers, access keypads, cellphone.

Q: Do tables need to be 1 meter apart in cafes and restaurants?

A: The current advice is to practice social distancing. That means, just as it sounds, to create more space between each other in social situations. Placing tables at least one meter apart will help customers feel comfortable and achieve the social distancing currently advised. Some food businesses won't need to do anything as they already meet the distances, others might need to rearrange tables and chairs. (regulations must be complied with)

Q: What is regarded as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

A: PPE is specialized clothing or equipment worn by workers for their protection and is used to minimise health and safety risks faced by workers. PPE includes, but is not limited to, safety shoes, gloves, gowns/aprons, goggles or face shields, facemasks and respirators.

The type of PPE used depends on the particular health and safety risk that individuals encounter whilst performing their duties.

Q: What is the purpose of PPE?

A: PPE assists in managing risks.

The type of PPE worn must be appropriate to the anticipated potential risk, in the context of the individual's role and their environment e.g. Safety shoes protect toes against heavy objects, but only to a point.

Q: Does PPE provide protection against COVID-19?

A: COVID-19 is transferred via droplets, person to person.

Individuals with confirmed COVID-19 infection must remain at home in isolation, to protect others from potential exposure.

According to the World Health Organisation and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, individuals who have confirmed COVID-19 infection should wear masks to protect others.

PPE does not guarantee total protection. PPE is only effective when used in combination with precautionary measures, such as proper hand hygiene.

PPE used improperly (such as when taking off PPE) can provide a false sense of protection and could potentially lead to self-contamination.

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

Q: Which sectors need to be using PPE to help protect against COVID-19 infection?

A: The use of PPE is crucial for healthcare workers such as doctors, nurses and emergency medical technicians that perform direct patient care in healthcare settings and routinely have prolonged, close direct contact with patients with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection or their bodily fluids.

People caring for individuals with confirmed COVID-19 may also require appropriate PPE.

First aid kits and bodily fluid clean up kits should include the appropriate PPE to assist sick individuals.

Q: When should non-medical personnel use PPE to help protect against COVID-19 infection?

A: If you are healthy, you only need PPE if:

- You have prolonged contact while taking care of a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection.

- People caring for individuals with confirmed COVID-19 may also require appropriate PPE.
- First aid kits and bodily fluid clean up kits should include the appropriate PPE to assist sick individuals.

Q: When should masks be worn?

- If you are healthy, you only need to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person with suspected COVID-19.
- Wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing. Individuals who are ill should stay at home.
- Masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.

Q: When should gloves be worn?

- Gloves are not a substitute of proper hand washing.
- Wearing gloves requires knowledge of proper hygienic procedures.
- Wearing the same pair of gloves for extended periods, could lead to bacterial contamination or cross contamination.
- Gloves should only be worn to serve or produce food only when individuals have cuts or sores on their hands.

Q: Should masks and gloves be used in retail or food manufacturing space?

A: Usage of masks and gloves is not advised for use in the retail or food manufacturing space. What is essential is frequent hand washing with soap and water.

Where employees in retail operations are not able to wash hands frequently such as till operators, a sanitiser may be provided for each till for regular sanitising.

Staff involved in some operations, for example handling cleaning chemicals and certain ingredients, may need to wear appropriate PPE, as specified in the MSDS of the chemicals and materials used.

Q: Should retailer provide sanitizers at the store entrance?

A: We advise that sanitiser or wipes be provided at each retail store entrance to consumers as best hygiene practice and that areas that employees and consumers come into contact with are cleaned regularly.

Q: How do I ensure safety of employee when they are using public transportation or transport that I have arranged as an employer?

A: Ensure that all transport occupants use sanitizer on embarkment and dis-embarkment of the transport. Ensure that there is social distancing within the public transport, meaning that the normal 4-4 in one seat is not advisable. The public transportation should be sanitised or deep cleaned after each load.

Q: How do I know that the sanitiser or mask I purchased meets the required quality standards?

A: Disinfectants and masks are subject to safety regulations administered by the NRCS to ensure that they do not present unnecessary risk to consumers. The NRCS urges consumers to only purchase chemical disinfectants and particle filtering half masks that have being approved by the NRCS.

Each chemical disinfectant product that is placed on the South African market must comply with the minimum safety requirements and must also be registered by the NRCS. Such a product shall also display the NRCS registration number on its label and can be one of the following:

- Act29GNR529/XXXXXX/XXX/XXXX
- Act5GNR529/XXXXXX/XXX/XXXX
- NRCS/8054/XXXXXX/XXX

As per Minister Patel statement during media briefing the NRCS is currently developing sanitizer standards. **For technical queries relating to this question, please contact Mr. Thomas Madzivhe on 012 482 8770**

Q: Who can we contact for more information on COVID-19 relating to the food sector?

A: At this stage, there is no specific contact point for the food sector. There are two public hotline numbers that can be used for this purpose for the time being i.e. **0800 029 999 and 0800 111 132.**

Q: Assuming an employee in a retail/food manufacturing facility is diagnosed with COVID-19, is a facility closure required? If so, what is the protocol around this?

A: For now, neither the DoH nor NICD require the closure of a food manufacturing facility if an employee in the facility is found to have COVID-19. We have requested that the NICD develop guidelines specific to the food sector. For now, we have been referred to the general information available on the NICD and WHO's websites. The employees are requested to stay home if they feel unwell and follow the directions of their local health authority. According to a recent NEDLAC statement, employers and trade unions agreed to work together to manage issues like short time, shift work, changing working hours and lunch breaks to reduce too many workers congregating in one place.

We developed the following guidelines in alignment with the Occupational Health and Safety regulations and guidelines of the Department of Labour the following process must be followed. **In the event of an employee testing positive:**

- Members are encouraged to adhere to the Department of Employment and Labour guidelines in dealing with COVID 19 in the workplace.
- Develop protocols for confirmed COVID-19 case in the workplace.

ANNEXURE A: PROTOCOL – EMPLOYEE TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

1. Best Practice for Employers:

- a. Implement screening of employees daily before every shift

2. Employee, Worker and Consumer Management: Positive Case Management

- a. Identify the employee, worker or consumer that has been confirmed positive with COVID-19 virus.
- b. Isolate the individual
- c. Close the store or facility immediately after confirmation of the case.
- d. All individuals who are in the facility, provide all identified individuals in store or workplace with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for immediate use.
- e. Inform the Department of Health (DOH/Local EHP) and National Institute in Communicable Diseases (NICD) of the incident immediately.
- f. If possible, screening and or testing should be initiated whilst the individuals are in the facility (Local EHP may provide this if capacity available)
- g. Arrange for transportation for the affected individuals.
- h. Advise the family of the affected individuals (employees, workers and consumers)
- i. If screening and testing was not conducted in the facility, home testing should be arranged for the individuals. (Local EHP may provide if capacity available, they will also need to monitor compliance to self-quarantine and test contacts).

3. Facility Management:

- a. After all affected personnel has been removed from the facility, management must arrange for deep cleaning and decontamination of the facility.
- b. Follow the Department of Employment and Labour Occupational Health, and Safety Act and Hazardous Biological Agents Regulations and Department of Health and NICD guidelines
- c. Conduct workplace Risk Assessment by the employer of the affected workplace and document accordingly.

- d. Once Risk Assessment is concluded, facility decontaminated and continuous improvement measures in place, **the store may be opened** (Share Risk Assessment with the authorities once finalised).
- e. Risk Assessment process:
 - i. Every employer, after consulting with relevant health and safety representative or committee conduct a risk assessment, thereafter at an interval not exceeding two years to determine if any person may be exposed to hazardous biological agents (HBA).
 - ii. Employer must inform the health and safety representative or committee in writing of the arrangements made of the contemplated risk assessment. Give them reasonable time to comment.
 - iii. Employer must ensure that the results of the assessment are made available to the health and safety representative or committee for comment
 - iv. Employer must keep records of the assessment and take into account the following:
 - The nature of dose of the HBA the employee or worker may be expose or suspected rout of exposure where the HBA may be present and in what physical form it is likely to be.
 - What effects may the HBA have on the affected employee or worker and
 - Period of exposure.
 - v. Employer shall conduct the risk assessment on the basis of all available information as far as reasonably practical, including
 - Classification of the HBA into relevant risk groups and level of risk of infection
 - Recommendations from a competent person regarding the control measures in order to protect the health of employee or worker against such agents as a result of their work.
 - Information on diseases that may be contracted as a result of the activities at the workplace.
 - Potential allergenic or toxic effects that may result from the activities at the workplace and
 - Knowledge of diseases from which the employee or worker may be suffering, and which may be aggravated by conditions at the workplace.
- f. According to health official's implementation during recent similar cases, all employees in the facility will have to self-quarantine for 14 days and be monitored by local health officials. Basis of whole facility closure informed by definition of "close contact" as per NICD <https://www.nicd.ac.za/what-to-do-if-i-am-a-close-contact-of-a-person-with-confirmed-disease-and-am-asked-to-home-quarantine/> (Members urged to liaise with local CDC's or EHP instituting the closure of store and be guided by their legal advice as most Provinces apply protocols differently)

g. **New team** or Employees allowed to work by the authorities upon screening and/or testing can continue with the production or servicing customers

4. After Care Management:

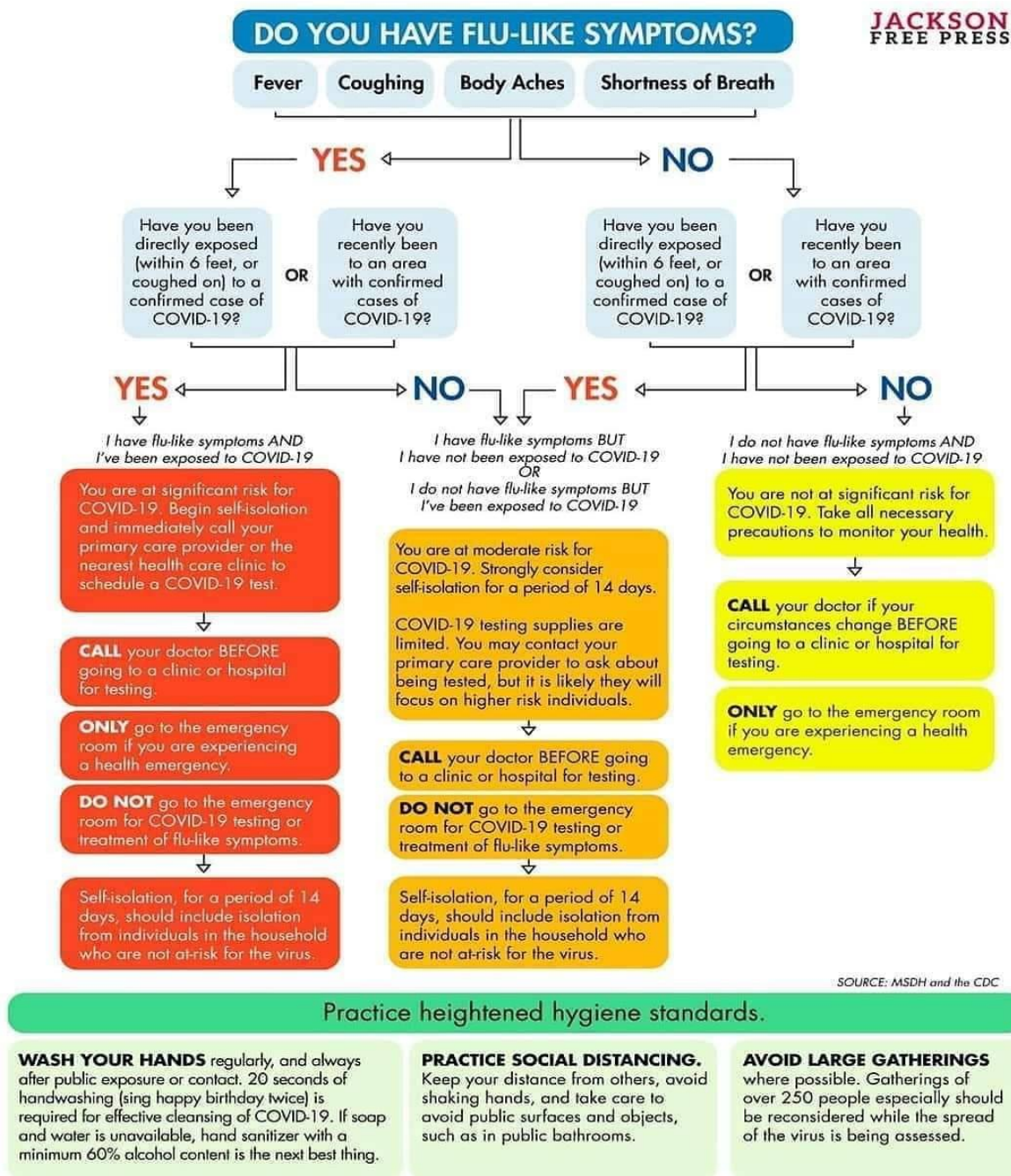
- a. Follow Department of Employment and Labour on the COIDA processes – claiming for injury on duty.
- b. DOH and NICD will implement their processes on track and trace of the affected employee, worker and consumer.

<http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/>

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

ANNEXURE B: DECISION TREE

The following decision-tree can be adapted for use in businesses.



ANNEXURE C: BEST PRACTICES FROM WASHINGTON STATE

Specific food worker and establishment guidance (issued by the Washington State Department of Health)

Review Employee Health Policies and Procedures

- Employee health policies should prohibit food workers from working in food establishments while sick.
- Review your sick leave policies and expand upon paid leave options for your workers, if possible. Offering paid sick leave will help mitigate the economic impacts of missed work for your employees, while simultaneously keeping the rest of your employees and customers well.
- Talk with your workers about employee health requirements and expectations. Now is the good time to retrain your employees as needed to make sure everyone is on the same page.
- Workers that are possibly sick with symptoms matching or like those of a person infected with COVID-19 should stay home. If possible, employees with family members/caregivers with symptoms matching COVID-19 should also stay home.
- Food workers and managers with coughing, shortness of breath, fever, or other symptoms of illness should not return to work until they are symptom-free. Current guidance is to stay home until at least 72 hours after symptoms have gone away. This may be altered by medical diagnosis, local health direction, changing community conditions, or other factors.
- Per United States Centres of Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, employers are encouraged not to require employees to provide a doctor's note to return to work, because doing so will burden the medical system.

Increase Hand Hygiene

- Ensure all employees wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Make sure each handwashing station is always stocked with soap, paper towels, and warm, running water.
- Even with proper handwashing, it is required that food workers use a barrier such as tongs, gloves, or other utensil to prevent direct hand contact with food. The virus is likely to be inactivated by proper cooking temperatures; it is important to use gloves or other barriers to prevent touching foods that will not be fully cooked.
- Recommend all employees cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. If a tissue is not available, employees can sneeze into their shirt sleeve, but NOT into their hands. Discard tissues into a lined garbage bin and wash hands immediately with soap and water after each cough or sneeze.
- Remind employees to avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth to help slow the spread of germs. The current food safety rule requires workers wash their hands whenever they touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.
- To help customers keep their germs to themselves, provide tissues, no-touch waste bins, and alcohol-based hand antiseptic rubs (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol as the active ingredient) in customer areas.

Clean and Sanitize

- It is expected that the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is, like other coronaviruses, also susceptible to United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered sanitizers and disinfectants. As of now there is no recommended change to currently approved sanitizers.
- Only use sanitizers registered with EPA as a sanitizer. Read the sanitizer label and follow usage directions. Be sure to measure the concentration of the sanitizer with test strips to make sure the active ingredient is available. The EPA has a list of registered sanitizers labelled for use against the novel coronavirus. Note: There may be additional disinfectants that meet the criteria and EPA will update the list as needed.
- When disinfecting for coronavirus, EPA recommends following the product label use directions for enveloped viruses, as indicated by the approved emerging viral pathogen claim on the master label. If the directions for use for viruses/viricidal activity list different contact times or dilutions, use the longest contact time or most concentrated solution.
- Note: These disinfection concentrations may exceed the allowable levels allowed for use on food contact surfaces such as dishes and utensils. Be sure to follow the label directions for

FOOD CONTACT SURFACES WHEN USING THE CHEMICAL NEAR OR ON UTENSILS AND FOOD CONTACT SURFACES.

- If you have questions about your particular sanitizer, please carefully read the package label or reach out to your chemical provider for more information.
- Be sure to wash and rinse equipment of visible dirt or debris before sanitizing. Sanitizers work better on clean surfaces.
- All food contact surfaces such as utensils, cutting boards, and serving ware must be washed, rinsed, and sanitized often throughout the day. Be sure dishes are properly washed and sanitized with chemicals or a high-heat dishwasher after each customer's use.
- All non-food contact surfaces, such as equipment, counters, menus, tables, chairs, bathrooms, and doors should be cleaned of spills as needed and sanitized often. Wash, rinse, and sanitize non-food contact surfaces that employee and customers touch throughout the day.
- To help protect your workers and customers, increase the frequency of cleaning and sanitizing customer-access areas. Use a separate wiping cloth and sanitizing solution when sanitizing the front of house/customer-access areas.
- Consider removing decorative objects, papers, and other non-essential materials from counters to allow for thorough sanitization of unobstructed surfaces.
- Sanitize outside of condiment containers and other items frequently handled such as doorknobs, backs of chairs, faucet handles, tabletops, and menus at least daily.
- At this time, there are no state-wide restrictions on customer self-service such as beverage dispensers, bulk food containers, or salad bars. To help customers reduce illness wash, rinse, and sanitize tongs and other utensils in self-service areas often throughout the day and provide alcohol-based hand antiseptic rubs at the entrance to the facility.

ANNEXURE D: PROVINCIAL COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL DIRECTORATE AND PORT HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CONTACTS

Provincial Communicable Disease Control Directorate			
Eastern Cape	Thomas Dlamini Nosimphiwo Mgobo	thomas.dlamini@echealth.gov.za Nosimphiwo.Mgobo@echealth.gov.za	083 378 0189 060 579 9027
Free State	Dikeledi Baleni Babsy Nyokong	balenid@fshealth.gov.za nyokongb@fshealth.gov.za	083 757 8217 082 463 7499
Gauteng	Chika Asomugha Caroline Kesebilwe	Chika.Asomugha@gauteng.gov.za Caroline.kesebilwe@gauteng.gov.za	082 330 1490 083 490 8165
KwaZulu-Natal	Premi Govender	premi.govender@kznhealth.gov.za	071 609 2505
Limpopo	Marlene Freda Ngobeni Mashudu P. Mudau	Marlene.Ngobeni@dhsd.limpopo.gov.za Prudence.Mudau@dhsd.limpopo.gov.za	079 491 1909 071 678 3864
Mpumalanga	Mandla Zwane Hluphi Mpangane	MandlaZw@mpuhealth.gov.za hluphim@mpuhealth.gov.za	082 229 8893 076 522 8511 / 013 766 3411
North West	Chriseldah Lebeko	clebeko@nwpg.gov.za	082 421 7985
Northern Cape	Gloria Hottie	hottieg@webmail.co.za	072 391 3345 / 053 830 0529
Western Cape	Charlene Jacobs	Charlene.Jacobs@westerncape.gov.za	072 356 5146 / 021 483 9964
Port Health and Environmental Health			
Central Region (Gauteng, Free State, Northern Cape)	Funeka Bongweni	Funeka.Bongweni@health.gov.za	012 395 9728 060 993 0107
Northern Region (Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West)	Ockert Jacobs	Ockert.Jacobs@health.gov.za	012 395 9417 082 372 0556
Coastal Region (KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, Western Cape)	Antoinette Hargreaves	Antoinette.Hargreaves@health.gov.za	031 301 0381 083 460 0935

REFERENCES

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/food-safety/food-businesses/covid-19-and-food-business>

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020/FoodWorkers>

<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.09.20033217v2>

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