

Guidance for food businesses undertaking a rapid shut-down in response to coronavirus (COVID-19)

Guidance for restaurants and food manufacturers on rapid shut-down procedures in response to a COVID-19 outbreak in the workplace.

This guidance has been produced to assist Food Business Operators when a coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in the workplace results in a requirement to cease operations. It complements existing [food hygiene guidance](#) and [government advice for food businesses on prevention and management of COVID-19](#).

This guidance is intended for all food businesses including takeaways, restaurants, hotels, food retailers, food manufacturers, meat plants, farming and agriculture. Guidance from the Food Standards Agency focuses on the hygiene processes and requirements you must follow to safely operate your food business.

You may have already developed business continuity or contingency plans to deal with outbreak management or other situations where you need to cease normal operations at short notice. If there is more than one case of COVID-19 associated with your workplace, you should contact your local [public health protection team in England, Wales](#) or the [HSC Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland](#) to report the suspected outbreak. You should also keep in contact with your local authority to update them on the status of the suspected outbreak.

Where a decision is taken to shut down your business, this guidance will help you to consider the actions you will need to take from a food hygiene perspective. Before restarting operations, you should refer to our guidance on [reopening and adapting your food business during COVID-19](#).

Review of established shut-down procedures

If the local public health protection team declares an outbreak in your food business, you will be asked to record details of symptomatic staff and assist with the identification of contacts. You will be provided with information about the outbreak management process. This will help you to implement control measures, assist with communications to staff, and reinforce prevention messages.

Where an outbreak is confirmed rapid shut-down may be necessary. To help your business prepare, you should review your established shut-down procedures.

There may be other situations where you are prevented from continuing to produce safe food in line with your established procedures. This may result from reduced staffing capacity due to illness, or a requirement for staff to self-isolate due to COVID-19.

Managing stock safety

You will need to consider your capacity to safely store raw materials, ingredients and consumables for the closure period.

Raw materials, ingredients and products

- **Temperature control** – You should assess your stocks to ensure you have sufficient temperature-controlled storage space for all chilled and frozen foods. You should continue to maintain appropriate monitoring records. If you cannot guarantee the temperature control of products, you should consider alternative arrangements. This could include sending stock to appropriate storage facilities.
- **Durability** – When you re-open you will not be able to use foods which have passed their [use-by date](#). You should assess your stocks as it may be possible to freeze items in-order to extend life. We have guidance on the [bulk freezing of ambient and chilled foods](#).
- **Hygiene** – You will need to ensure that foods can be stored safely and hygienically. Be sure to avoid allergen cross-contamination during storage.
- **Pest control** – It is essential to keep pests out of your premises. You may need to contact your contractor and review programmed inspections during the closure period. We have guidance on [pest control for caterers and small retailers](#).
- **Finished product** – Food manufacturers and slaughterhouses may have finished product awaiting haulage to customers. You will need to assess whether removal of product can be undertaken safely during the closure period. This could include where the product is packed and palletted before dispatch.
- **Foods held in staff canteen, restaurant or welfare areas** – You will need to consider the safe and hygienic storage of any food ingredients and products. This should include temperature controls, assessment of durability and pest control.
- **Redistribution of surplus ingredients or products** – Where storage is not suitable or possible, you can consider re-distribution. WRAP provide guidance on foods suitable for redistribution, and specific guidance on the labelling of foods, in their [redistribution checklist](#).
- **Deliveries** – Where necessary, you should contact suppliers and cancel deliveries which will no longer be required during the closure period.
- **Live animal delivery** – Slaughterhouses will need to instigate their existing emergency procedures to halt deliveries of live animals. This should be done in a way which ensures that the welfare needs of animals are met.
- **Live animals on site** – You should make arrangements to ensure that any live animals which cannot be slaughtered are moved to alternative, suitable facilities for slaughter. You should first consult with the appropriate official control bodies and obtain the necessary permissions.

Consumables (including packaging)

- Storage facilities should remain secure during the closure period. This is particularly important for any chemicals held on site.
- Hygienic storage must be maintained for all food contact and food packaging materials.
- Pest control programmes should include all storage areas.

Plant and machinery

You should follow your normal shut-down cleaning procedures before any rapid shut-down of machinery and equipment takes place. Appropriate cleaning and disinfection of equipment and surfaces should be undertaken. In order to facilitate a rapid shut-down, non-critical cleaning of equipment should be done before re-opening, not at the shut-down stage.

Where you have suspected cases of COVID-19 in the workforce, you should also follow the [cleaning in non-healthcare settings](#) guidance.

Waste collection

You should contact your waste contractor and arrange for collection of general waste as soon as practicable. You should avoid accumulation of waste on site as this will reduce additional issues such as pest infestation.

Businesses generating animal by-products (ABP) should not allow accumulation or undue delay of disposal. You should follow your normal procedures, using an approved premises. You should ensure that the categorisation of ABPs are maintained and appropriate records are kept.

Waste generated in relation to specific COVID-19 cleaning should be handled in accordance with the [cleaning in non-healthcare settings](#) guidance.

Caretaking operations during shut-down

Once appropriate cleaning procedures have been implemented, it should be possible for businesses to undertake on-going 'caretaking' responsibilities. These actions should be related to food safety and hygiene, where a safe process for doing so can be followed. This could include:

- **Freezers and chilled stores** – Where this equipment continues to operate to store raw materials, ingredients or products, you will need to be able to monitor operating temperatures. You may be able to do this remotely and may have alarm procedures in place. Alternatively, such monitoring may need to be undertaken on site.
- **Maintenance** – It may be possible for maintenance of buildings, site and machinery to take place using contractors or staff who are not required to self-isolate.
- **Pest control** – It should be possible to continue with your normal or a reduced schedule if pest control is provided by contractors.

Where a site is to be left empty, appropriate security measures to prevent unauthorised access should be considered.

Staff communications and training

Staff training on your emergency procedures, business continuity or contingency plans should be in proportion to duties and responsibilities. You may need to update this training to include rapid shut-down procedures adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic.

You will need to ensure your communications with staff are appropriate to allow a safe return to work process, when advised it is safe to do so following a rapid shut-down.

Return to work, and [fitness to work procedures](#) should include COVID-19 considerations. PHE have provided further guidance on [safe return to work procedures](#). Your local health protection team will provide advice to assist you with this.

Training on any new procedures instigated following a rapid shut-down to mitigate COVID-19 risks will be needed for all staff. Any changes to Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS) or Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) procedures will also require staff training.

Further guidance on communications with employees is provided in the [guidance for food businesses on prevention and management of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).