

Version 5 - Additions are **marked**

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Guide to Pandemic Defence in the Food Business

The current situation represents a new challenge in crisis management for food companies. In particular, personnel planning is one of the most important factors in order to prevent the impending closure of an entire production plant.

The Eurofins Group offers testing and laboratory services, quality management and consulting for the seed, food and feed industry worldwide. With us you have a reliable partner along the entire food value chain. In cooperation with the Association of the Meat Industry in Baden-Wuerttemberg (a sub-association of the BVDF - Federal Association of the German Meat Industry) this guide for food companies on how to defend against pandemics has been prepared. This guide will be updated as new findings are made.

Labour law and economic topics are not listed in this guide because they are communicated by the federal government, the federal states, associations or other institutions. The following information is recommended for food producing companies:

1. General measures:

- ☐ **Designation of a crisis team and, within it, a pandemic officer**, who will be exempted as far as possible for this activity. This should not be the head of QM or the managing director, as they have other tasks to perform in the current situation.

The following measures are determined by the manager:

- Notices for employees to keep them informed
→ also serves to motivate people to implement measures and show understanding for them
- Creation of training materials (see point 3 below)
- Implementation and documentation of the employee training
- Communication with internal departments such as works council, personnel department, press office, legal department, IT, etc. on this topic

□ Defining the core processes

- Which processes must be running to guarantee delivery?
- If possible, separate working processes so that as few people as possible are in the company.
- Consideration of raw material supply. Prepare measures in case delivery dates cannot be met or product groups are no longer available on the market. Ask your German suppliers whether they are also on the KRITIS list of companies. If your suppliers are located abroad, please contact them and ask them on their local situation.

□ Employee monitoring

- Define absolutely necessary personnel and decision-makers, each with a representative, and divide them into shifts that must not be allowed to meet. Here, shared flats and car sharing are to be taken into account.
- Define and further protect employees who have key functions.
- Health monitoring of employees (see following point 2).
- Let all employees, who are not needed in production, work from home (as far as technically possible).
- Reduce business trips to an absolutely mandatory minimum, or better prohibit them. Do not bring persons who have been on business trips into contact with other groups of people.
- Appeal and documented training to all employees not to travel in their private environment and to keep social contacts to an absolute minimum. Here, the requirements of the federal and state governments must be observed.
- If you hire new employees and they do not have IfSG initial instruction, [the possibility that the initial instruction can be carried out by you as a company was unfortunately declined by the Federal Council. If there is no capacity for initial instruction at the responsible health authority, ask for licensed regional doctors](#)

□ External communication

- Inform customers if the product range has to be shortened or changed.
- General information that external personnel may no longer enter the company or determine under which conditions externals that are absolutely necessary (fitters, pest controllers, etc.) may enter the company.
- Answer all enquiries only via the FAQs of the federal authorities, these are constantly updated:
 - Robert-Koch-Institut:
https://www.rki.de/SharedDocs/FAQ/NCOV2019/FAQ_Liste.html (German)
 - Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung:
https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/can_the_new_type_of_coronavirus_be_transmitted_via_food_and_objects_-244090.html
 - Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung:
<https://www.infektionsschutz.de/coronavirus.html> (German)

2. Health monitoring of your employees:

First, divide your employees into three groups based on the information provided by the RKI. The contact times and attendances are elementary for the risk assessment. After this, carry out a risk assessment and evaluation. Since 27 March 2020, the classification of food businesses as critical infrastructure (KRITIS) provides the opportunity to remove people from quarantine in absolute emergencies in the event of staff shortages. The handling of these people was adapted to the situation. It is essential to ensure that those who come back to the company in the event of a relevant shortage of personnel, receive instructions by the company medical service. Details can be found at

https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/InfAZ/N/Neuartiges_Coronavirus/Personal_Kritis.html?nn=13490888.

If you are located abroad, please contact your government to clarify your situation.

I. Category I contact persons with close contact ("higher" risk of infection):

- Employees who have had contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case
 - and had at least 15 minutes of face-to-face contact
 - or had contact with its body fluids or secretions
 - or live in the same household with this person
 - or who were in contact with this person during a flight or train journey and sat in the same or in 2 rows in front or behind. (Source: Landkreis Freising (<https://www.kreisfreising.de/pressemitteilungen/details/news/detail/News/kontakt-mit-demcoronavirus-informationen-zur-einschaetzung-der-persoendlichengesundheitssituation.html>; German))
- Medical Personnel, e.g. the company doctor, with contact to a confirmed COVID-19- case in the context of care or medical examination (≤ 2 m), without protective equipment used.

II. Category II contact persons (lower risk of infection):

- Employees who were in the same room as a confirmed COVID-19-case, but did not have 15 minutes of face-to-face contact, but live in the same family.
- Employees who live with a confirmed COVID-19-case in the same family, but did not have at least 15 minutes face-to-face contact.
- Medical personnel, e.g. the company doctor, who stayed in the same room as the confirmed COVID-19-case without using adequate protective clothing, but never stayed within a distance of less than 2 meters.

III. Category III contact persons:

- Medical personnel, e.g. the company doctor, with contact ≤ 2 m (e.g. during care or medical examination), if adequate protective clothing was worn during the whole time of contact according to category I.
- Medical personnel, e.g. the company doctor, with contact > 2 m, without direct contact with the patient's secretions or excretions and without exposure to aerosols.

A body temperature measurement on daily entry into the company could be a documented procedure, but must be decided in each individual case. It should be noted that a fever measurement on the forehead must always be added + 0.4 ° C and that it is only a monitoring measure. As soon as there are any abnormalities, the respective person must be sent to a doctor (source: <https://www.ben-u-ron.de/feieber/aufklaerung/richtig-feieber-messen>).

The following points should be queried and, above all, documented:

- Illnesses in the immediate environment (daily)
- Visit of certain areas (after absences and weekends)

Procedure in the event of a positive finding of an employee:

- Inform the Public Health Department
- Follow the procedure of the Public Health Department
- In case of suspicion, separate the person and their direct colleagues
- Document the complete procedure

You can find further documents at:

https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/InfAZ/N/Neuartiges_Coronavirus/Kontaktperson/Kontaktpersonenliste.html (German)

3. Preparation of training materials

The training applies to all employees of the company (including those not working in production) and must be documented. The content of the training documents should include at least the following:

- ⇒ **Short introduction to the coronavirus** (highly contagious viral disease, symptoms as with influenza, incubation period 14 days, duration approx. 6 days, classified as pandemic (worldwide spread))
- ⇒ **Transmission channels**
 - Droplet infection (sneezing, speaking, coughing)
 - Handshake
 - Contaminated objects and surfaces (e.g. door handles)
 - IMPORTANT: the virus is transmitted from person to person, not through food (https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/can_the_new_type_of_coronavirus_be_transmitted_via_food_and_objects_-244090.html)

⇒ **Symptoms**

- Sudden high fever > 38 °C (100 °F)
- Cough
- Chills, headaches, muscle and joint pain (aching limbs)
- Pneumonia possible
- Possible temporary loss of smell and taste
- [Diarrhea, other gastrointestinal complaints](#)

⇒ **What to do if symptoms are detected?**

- Contact doctor by telephone
- Contact employer by telephone
- Stay **AT HOME** (at least until the symptoms have subsided [+2 days](#))
- No physical contact with others, stay in a separate room if possible
- Frequent ventilation of the rooms
- [RECOMMENDATION: Wash laundry and dishes at a temperature of at least 60 ° C](#)

⇒ **Vulnerable groups of persons**

- Older persons > 60 years
- People with previous illnesses (e.g. diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, respiratory problems)
- Smokers

⇒ **Protection from infection for yourself and others**

- There is no vaccination protection and no direct medication available
- Thorough hand hygiene including disinfection
- Do not touch your face with your hands
- Permanent face mask for all employees (this does not release from compliance with the hygiene requirements; further information can be found at: https://www.rki.de/SharedDocs/FAQ/NCOV2019/FAQ_Liste.html?nn=13490888, a descriptive illustration can be found at <https://www.uni-weimar.de/de/university/news/bauhausjournal-online/title/keep-your-distance-new-video-of-the-bauhaus-university-weimar-clarifies-how-breathing-air-spread/>
Due to the regulations in the various federal states for wearing mouth and nose protection, this must be decided on a case-by-case basis for food businesses. The protection is part of work clothes and it is the responsibility of the food business operator to determine where and how to wear it in the company. It must be ensured that the protection meets the hygienic requirements and is changed or decontaminated regularly. The Federal Association of the Food Industry (BLL) has published an argumentation aid for food companies in order to maintain proportionality. This is available at <https://www.lebensmittelverband.de/de/aktuell/20200423-coronavirus-covid19-masken-mund-nasen-schutz-lebensmittelbetriebe>.
- Do not shake hands
- It is only recommended to wear gloves at workplaces if there is no washing facility or hand disinfectant available. The gloves must be suitable for use and have no consequences for skin health or for the transmission of smear infections
- Avoid contact with other people, minimum distance of 1.5 m where possible

- Coughing, sneezing in the crook of your arm
- Stay at home when you feel sick
- Keep a distance to each other; during work as well, minimum distance of 1.5 m where possible
- If it is technically not possible to adhere to distance regulations during operation, further measures such as splash protection walls or faceshields in addition to mouth protection may be set up
- Intensify cleaning and disinfection cycles (e.g. door handles, tables, handrails, input keyboards, telephones, etc.)
- RECOMMENDATION: Wash laundry and dishes at a temperature of at least 60 ° C

Since there may be bottlenecks in the delivery due to the increased need for personal protective equipment, the RKI has issued a recommendation for a possible reuse:

https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/InfAZ/N/Neuartiges_Coronavirus/Ressourcen_schonen_Masken.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Federal Centre for Health Education provide various information and videos on hygiene behaviour:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

<https://www.infektionsschutz.de/coronavirus/hygiene.html> (German)

The Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration also provides information in other languages under the following link.

<https://www.integrationsbeauftragte.de/ib-de/amt-und-person/informationen-zum-coronavirus>

4. Procedure in operation - process sequence

a) Goods receipt / suppliers

- Do not let truck drivers enter the building
- Possibly set up toilets outside, so that no toilets in the company have to be used
- Handover of the delivery documents via a letterbox, newspaper roll, or possibly through a window hatch in the goods receiving area, if this can be reached from outside
- Unloading of the goods by own personnel
- Information letter to all suppliers, which concrete measures are planned in the company
- Obtaining information from suppliers about which concrete measures are being implemented in their company

b) Production processes

- Rethink employee paths
- Separate departments and no exchange of personnel
- As few employees as possible in the company at the same time (introduce shifts with at least 1h offset)
- Monitor the delivery situation (check alternative raw material suppliers)

- If it is technically not possible to adhere to distance regulations during operation, further measures such as splash protection walls or faceshields in addition to mouth protection may be set up
- c) Delivery / Carrier**
 - Do not let truck drivers into the building
 - Handover of the delivery documents via a letterbox, newspaper roll, or possibly through a window hatch in the goods receiving area, if this can be reached from outside
 - Loading of the goods by own personnel
 - Information letter to all carriers / logistics service providers, which concrete measures are planned in the company
 - Obtaining information from the carriers / logistics service providers about the concrete measures that are being implemented in their operations
- d) External storage**
 - Check whether storage rooms are sufficient (consider cooling zones)
 - Provide specifications to external service providers that drivers remain in the truck (same specifications as in their own incoming and outgoing goods department)
- e) Social rooms (including canteens)**
 - Close if possible, if this is not possible:
 - Allow employees in these areas only in department groups together
 - Avoid personnel crossings
 - Intensify cleaning and disinfection of tables, benches, door handles
 - Seating in the canteen at 1.5 m intervals, remove tables temporarily if necessary
 - Dishes and cutlery to be handed out, no self-service
- f) Hygiene airlocks**
 - Intensify cleaning and disinfection
 - Provide sufficient soap, disinfectant and towels
 - [Checking the disinfectants used for virucidal activity](#)
 - Maintain distance between employees when washing and drying hands by blocking individual wash basins if necessary
- g) Cleaning / disinfection**
 - Include and document service providers in the training
 - Intensify basic cleaning and disinfection
 - Focus of cleaning on the areas where smear infection can take place (social rooms, door handles, tables, computer keyboards etc.)

5. Further important information

- Ideally, if there is a good relationship with the respective responsible competent authority (e.g. veterinary office [or the health office](#)), the measures are discussed and coordinated in advance.
- Stopping daily sensory tastings or setting preventive measures
- Check the extent to which audits can take place in your company; this must be assessed individually, risk-oriented for each individual location
- IFS certificates lose their validity after expiry. Consultation with the certification body and your customers is still necessary; it is possible to postpone the IFS audit to a later date, this must be specified by the certification body in the database in the corona area. A remote solution has been developed, this is voluntary, not accredited and only applies to IFS-certified companies. It must be carried out by the certification body that issued the last certificate. The result will not be taken into account in future audits (source: <https://www.ifs-certification.com/index.php/de/tools/ifs-remote-surveillance-check>; as of March 31, 2020)
- BRC offers "remote audits", the company has to present an internal audit which meets the requirements of the BRCGS standard. The results incl. traceability test and among others live video control of the production are confirmed by the certification body (Source: https://www.brcgs.com/media/2082384/brc072-brcgs-audits-impacted-by-covid-19-12_03_20.pdf Date 17.03.2020). On 27 April 2020, the BRCGS published a guide as a supplement to the BRCGS food safety standard in order to support companies in the new circumstances. It is available free of charge at <https://www.brcgs.com/about/news/2020/brcgs-guidance-document-managing-food-safety-during-covid-19-april-2020/>.
- FSSC 22000 postpones surveillance audits up to 6 months (Source: <https://www.fssc22000.com/news/position-in-relation-to-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic>; Date: 23.03.2020)
- QS can be extended by three months, pending audits will be decided on a case-by-case basis (<https://www.q-s.de/news-pool-de/coronavirus-durchfuehrung-qs-audits.html>; Stand: 17.03.2020)
- Consultation with other certification bodies regarding further procedures (organic, regional labels, etc.)
- No more visits from customers, visitor groups, etc.
- Consultation with external service providers regarding further procedure (e.g. pest controllers, cleaning agent manufacturers, Eichamt (Metrology and Verification body in Germany), authorities, etc.)
- Food businesses are critical infrastructure operators. The Federal Office for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief has issued a recommendation for action at https://www.kritis.bund.de/SubSites/Kritis/DE/Aktuelles/Meld/200/2007_Pandemieplanung.html?nn=1902420
- In some cases there are bottlenecks in official surveillance, here the EU has passed Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/466 on March 30th, 2020, which allows exceptions (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020R0466&qid=1585723327940&from=DE>)

- For more information, the WHO has published a guide for the food industry (https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331705/WHO-2019-nCoV-Food_Safety-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
- If you employ service companies that provide housing for the employees, include these companies in the pandemic concept. The transport of people from their place of residence to their place of work must also be taken into account. The Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia also published a recommendation on May 11, 2020 (<https://www.mags.nrw/sites/default/files/asset/document/empfehlungen-gemeinschaftliche-unterbringung.pdf>)
- Develop a concept for how to deal with people who are new to or who leave the company, or how you deal with employees who are returning to their home countries during holidays. Take into account the possibilities of a quarantine facility or the proof of a negative test result
- Document the precise areas of application of all employees in the company so that you can quickly access the contact persons in the event of suspicion

List of sources, if not directly indicated:

- Dr Ulrich Nöhle <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3exo9KVGSYk>
- http://www.rki.de/DE/Content/InfAZ/N/Neuartiges_Coronavirus/Kontaktperson/Management.html
- RKI (2020): Ergänzung zum Nationalen Pandemieplan – COVID-19 – neuartige Coronaviruserkrankung
- Behr's Verlag (2020) Training module coronavirus
- Heeschen, W. & Wegner-Hambloch, S. (2020) Praxisleitfaden Corona-Virus Behr's Verlag

The information and details in this guide have been compiled by experts to the best of our knowledge and with the greatest care. The guide is intended as a checklist to support the review of measures that have to be individually determined in advance. Nevertheless, no guarantee is given for its completeness. The guide does not replace instructions from authorities or legal principles. Any liability in connection with the use of the information is therefore excluded.