



Statement in Respect of Preventing and Reducing Transmission of Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Background Information on the virus and its origin

Coronavirus Disease 2019 or COVID-19 (shortened name) is a virus which affects the respiratory system, usually causing mild cold-like symptoms affecting the nose, upper throat, fever and sinuses and producing a cough. However, this can lead to more serious implications, such as pneumonia, respiratory failure and septic shock, particularly in vulnerable groups (e.g. the elderly and immunocompromised). Symptoms usually appear 2-14 days after exposure. The virus can also be transmitted before the person is symptomatic which has made controlling the spread more challenging.

The virus was first recognised in Dec 2019 in the Wuhan province of China and, although its exact origin has not been identified, it is believed to have been spread by a wild animal (bat, mink or snake) on sale at the Huanan Seafood market. It is here where the first case was identified. The market sells not only wild animals but also food for human consumption, both in close proximity to each other.

As of 30th January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has rated the outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern. The largest number of cases are in China but cases have been seen across Asia, Europe, America and the UK. As we live in a global economy, both travelling and sometimes exporting goods from these regions, therefore, it is prudent for our business to review both personnel policies, supply chain assurance, contingency and food safety.

Transmission

Covid-19 is a respiratory virus transmitted in much the same way as a common cold – via sneezing, coughing and direct skin contact or via objects such as door handles (hence why hand washing is so important to help prevent the spread).

So far, there has been no evidence that the virus can be transmitted via food. Coronaviruses need a live host, either human or animal to grow. They cannot grow in food. We will continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of work. There is also no perceived increase in risk for handling post or freight from specified areas.

The virus is heat sensitive, so additional precautions should be made to ensure that hot water and soap is used to wash hands and that food is thoroughly cooked (> 75°C).

Transfer from person-to-person is the key method of transmission within a close working environment such as a factory, office, warehouse etc. Some key aspects for review are personal hygiene, good hygiene practices and supply chain. This will be covered in the next section and is an integral part of the BRC Global Standards.



What are we doing?

The Company has a responsibility to sustain its operations for the benefit of its employees and its own business interests. To this end, Hopwells Limited operates a comprehensive food safety management system which is subject to internal audit and HACCP review. Our intention is to always provide safe and legal products to our end users via a robust Quality Management System - which is accredited to BRC Global Standards. All of our sites are currently graded AA which is the highest rating available in our category group.

Hopwells Limited will proactively manage all operations in the event of an outbreak of the virus. We recognise the importance of resilience to unexpected events and our responsibility to provide continuity of supply to its customers.

We have adopted new procedures for deliveries coming into our sites to ensure that loads have not been subject to contamination by the virus. All of our supply chain has been contacted in respect of this. Visitors and contractors are already subject to strict protocols when visiting any of our premises - which includes, as a minimum, the completion of a health questionnaire (QMCVH-Q) and acceptance of our site rules (QMIVC).

Cases of Coronavirus (COVID-19) within Business

To date, we can confirm that there have been no reported cases of individuals infected with COVID-19.

Supply Chain Issues

At present, we have not witnessed or been informed of any supplier shortages in connection with the virus. We will monitor this situation as an on-going practice. Should this change, we will adopt contingency plans should the outbreak impact our business across the UK and beyond.

Sale or Return

Unfortunately, we are not able to offer a sale or return arrangement on products stocked as part of a contingency plan for COVID-19.

Delivery Status

If deliveries to our customer-base became affected due to a coronavirus outbreak, we would revert to our business continuity plan and take guidance from government agencies where applicable. To ensure continuity of deliveries where possible we may have to adopt a drop-and-go policy, which may involve leaving orders unchecked and therefore unsigned. If this incidence occurs then we would not be able to uphold any credit claims.

Our duty of care to our employees, and our commitment to deliver safe and legal products is paramount to our business. We will work hand-in-hand with customers, and their needs to mitigate any issues surrounding potential disruption to delivery status.



Considerations, Prevention & Controls

As the person-to-person route is the main method of transmission, WHO have stated some basic protective measures which apply to the general public and also within food manufacturing; as well as a storage and distribution environment. We will advise our employees of these which are listed below, however please refer to the site for further details:

- Wash hands frequently – using hot water and soap, followed by sanitiser if possible. This eliminates the virus on the hands. Use a disposable towel paper to turn off taps to avoid recontamination of hands.
- Respiratory hygiene – when coughing and sneezing cover the mouth and nose either into your flexed elbow or into a tissue which is then discarded into a closed bin, then wash hands.
- Social distancing – try to keep 1 to 2 metres between yourself and other people where possible. There is some scepticism around the effectiveness of the general public using face masks, although there is some suggestion that it can help lower the risk of contracting the virus through others sneezing or coughing and via hand to mouth.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth – as hands can pick up the virus from contact surfaces.
- Report all symptoms and seek medical advice – particularly if you have visited one of the key affected areas or been in close proximity with someone who has.

Further considerations:

- Supply chain assurance – we are reviewing the country of origin of all raw materials – particularly if through an agent. It may be that some materials will be restricted and movement of goods restricted as lockdown is in place in some areas in China, Italy etc. We will prepare alternative supply if necessary. We will also review the purchasing method of the item, e.g. direct from farm or local markets.
- We are, at present, in the midst of reviewing audit status – ensuring 3rd party accreditation from suppliers is up to date, or request up to date audits / questionnaires from “at risk” suppliers, especially from agents. We are using Certificates of Analysis as additional assurance.
- Food Fraud – where our supply may be limited but demand stays the same or increases, the risk of food fraud is heightened. We will be vigilant to ensure our supply chain is robust and the methods we adopt to review and approve suppliers as well as contingencies will be reassessed.
- Personnel – we are currently reviewing any business travel, including audits / site visits to affected areas. If necessary, we will postpone where possible and utilise Certificates of Analysis, questionnaires, etc., until normal business can resume.
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- Return to Work – we have a comprehensive system in place, concentrating on areas which are affected. All staff, including office staff, must complete return to work forms (QMFH2-A) following holiday or illness, regardless of their holiday destination.
- Supply Chain Visits/Deliveries – we will screen all site visitors to establish if any person(s) are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 and act accordingly.
- Visits/meetings– we are reviewing visits to site and how critical the visit is, as well as which department they are visiting. We always ensure medical screening of all visitors is undertaken prior to entry. Visitors that have travelled to affected areas will not be allowed entry unless there is evidence of medical clearance. Procedures regarding this have been forwarded to our entire supply chain.
- [BRC/Internal Audit Impact](#) – we will continue to conduct audits, where deemed necessary, to verify our food safety management system remains robust and in line with current government guidelines.

As information is being updated daily regarding the number of cases and epidemiology of the disease, please refer to the links below for any further advice:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>

Should you have any specific queries, please contact your account manager in the first instance, who will direct your query to the relevant Hopwells department. We will be issuing updates when further information becomes available.

Date: 20th March 2020