

Food for Thought

How catering establishments around the world are dealing with COVID-19

Restaurants, cafes and other **catering establishments can do their part** to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus and safeguard the wellbeing of their clientele and staff. The World Health Organization recommends that businesses and workplaces take the following measures to prepare for COVID-19:

- Keep workplaces clean and hygienic, wiping surfaces (such as tables and counter-tops) and objects (such as menus, phones and door-handles) with disinfectant regularly.
- Promote regular and thorough hand-washing by employees and customers. Make hand sanitiser freely available and ensure employees and customers have access to places where they can wash their hands with soap and water. Ensure that soap and sanitiser are regularly replenished/refilled.
- Promote and offer guidance on hand-washing, such as by displaying informative posters. Such posters can be found in both Maltese and English at the following link:
<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/Pages/Novel-coronavirus.aspx>
- Promote good respiratory hygiene practices (covering nose and mouth with a tissue or inner side of flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing instead of sneezing or coughing into one's hands, disposing of used tissues immediately in bins, avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth before washing one's hands). Such posters can be found in both Maltese and English at the following link:
<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/Pages/Novel-coronavirus.aspx>
- Advise employees to follow national guidance regarding travel and quarantine upon return. For Malta such advice can be found on <https://covid19malta.info/travel/> and <https://covid19malta.info/quarantine/> respectively.
- Inform employees that anyone who is unwell with fever, cough and/or shortness of breath should stay home, even if they are only experiencing mild symptoms.

Here are some examples of how food outlets across the globe are putting these recommendations into practice to combat the Novel Coronavirus:

- Baristas at a global coffeeshop chain are **washing their hands every 30 minutes**. Some areas in the shops are being sanitised as often as **every 8 minutes**.
- Employees at a fast food giant are cleaning surfaces such as **door handles**, self-order kiosks and tabletops more frequently.
- **Reusable mugs** are no longer an option at various popular café franchises.
- Many restaurants are **increasing the number of hand sanitizer dispensers**, cleaning shared serving utensils more frequently, wiping down chairs and tables after each use with fresh cleaning cloths or disposable towels and disinfectants that health authorities say are effective against COVID-19, and sanitizing other high-touch surfaces more often. Some are conducting an hourly sanitation of door handles, concierge desks, escalator handrails and elevator buttons, as well as **frequent disinfection of the toilets**.
- One company has placed **kitchen timers in its restaurants** and setting them to go off periodically for some time limit under an hour. When the timer rings, employees must complete a specific cleaning task, like wiping down a cash register, napkin dispenser or laminated menus. **Tracking sheets and video surveillance** can ensure that employees are following the stricter policies.

- Restaurants are **adding more staff or extending hours** to ensure that employees can keep up with increased cleaning efforts.
- One North American restaurant company is also **deploying tamper-proof packaging** for takeaway orders. The measure was in the works even before the outbreak, but now carries more significance because third-party delivery drivers have contact with multiple restaurants and consumers.
- Buffets can carry an increased risk due to the fact that several patrons serve themselves directly from the food on display and patrons may come into close contact with each other in the buffet queue. Ideally **buffets should be eliminated altogether**. On the famous Las Vegas Strip, buffets will be shut down starting Sunday.
- Some outlets are replacing individual mini packets of ketchup, mayo and other sauces with larger bottles which are **wiped clean after each use**.
- Some cafes have **rearranged their dining room to keep tables five feet 1.5 metres apart** wherever possible. Others are **encouraging diners to take food home or outside** instead of consuming it on the premises.

Do you have other **ideas or practical suggestions** you would like to share? Send them to us on covid19.mtcp@gov.mt

[For more information and updates about the coronavirus visit https://covid19malta.info/](https://covid19malta.info/)