Background COVID-19

As of: 02/04/2020- 2 p.m.

What do SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 mean?
Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease. It is caused by a novel coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 ("Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome"-Coronavirus-2) which originated in China and quickly spread from there across the world. On 11 March, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak a pandemic, i.e. a worldwide epidemic. There is as yet no therapy or vaccination against coronaviruses.

What are coronaviruses?
As of: 07/04/2020- 11 a.m.
The coronavirus family includes a number of different pathogenic agents of mammals and birds.

Coronaviruses also occur naturally in pet and farmed animals. However, these are clearly distinguishable from the pathogens causing severe respiratory diseases in humans. Human-to-human transmission plays a key role in the transmission of the coronavirus.

How can SARS-CoV-2 be contracted?
Coronaviruses are mainly transmitted via droplet infection. This means: via mouth and eye secretions. To protect yourself from infection, it is important that you keep physical distance from other people, preferably 2 metres, and wash your hands regularly.

Where does SARS-CoV-2 come from?
As of: 02.04.2020 - 4:00 p.m.
Studies carried out to date indicate that it originated in bats. A large number of pathogens are found in bats, including viruses that are transmissible to humans. Examples include the Ebola virus, SARS-CoV and also SARS-CoV-2. It is still not known whether SARS-CoV-2 was directly transmitted from bats to humans or whether another animal species played a role as intermediate host.

For further information, please go to:
- WHO
- Robert Koch Institut
- Johns Hopkins University

Food/ food safety/ food inspections

Can I contract the coronavirus via foods and products from the supermarket?
As of: 03/04/2020- 8 a.m.
In principle, coronaviruses can migrate into foodstuffs by direct coughing or sneezing and be transmitted from there. It is therefore important to comply with the general rules of hygiene. In concrete terms this means washing your hands thoroughly and regularly, keeping your hands away from your face and rinsing foods with plenty of water prior to preparation.

Are our foods safe despite the spread of the coronavirus?
As of: 26/03/2020- 11 a.m.
Our foods are still safe. Companies are still required to place only safe foods on the market. The requirements for the quality of official food controls also remain in place.

What about foodstuffs that come from abroad?
Here too, there is not a single known case to date. Overall, it is unlikely that the coronavirus can be transmitted by goods coming from abroad.

Even so, should I take any steps when handling food?
Even though a transmission of the virus is unlikely via contaminated foods or imported products, it is important to observe the general rules of everyday hygiene when handling food, such as washing your hands regularly and complying with hygiene rules during the preparation of food.

One thing is certain: the viruses are heat-sensitive. We can thus reduce the already minor risk further by heating foodstuffs.

Further information can be found at:
- Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung

Nutrition

What do mothers have to bear in mind when breastfeeding?
Breastfeeding is still recommended. The National Breastfeeding Committee states in an opinion that so far, no COVID-19 pathogens have been detected in breast milk of infected women, although the studies are still based on a very small number of cases. Therefore there is currently no scientific evidence
suggesting that COVID-19 can be transmitted via breast milk. The main risk factor for transmission via breastfeeding is close contact with the skin. The benefits of breastfeeding outweigh the risks so that breastfeeding is recommended, subject to the required hygiene measures being complied with. Mothers who are infected or suspected of being infected should, during breastfeeding, prevent transmission of the virus via droplet infection by taking hygiene measures such as washing hands thoroughly before and after contact with the child and wearing a face mask.

**Food supplements**
As of: 01/04/2020 - 2 p.m.

**Can I protect myself from becoming infected with the coronavirus by taking food supplements?**
It is prohibited to make specific references to corona to advertise food supplements. The general rule applying to food supplements and all other foods is that health-promoting effects may only be attributed to them if these claims have been approved by the European Commission after a positive scientific examination conducted by the European Food Safety Authority.

Nevertheless, “Corona food supplements” are on offer on different platforms on the Internet. The Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) will now contact the operators of the platforms and ask them to pay greater attention to these offers and to no longer offer such products for sale.

Please see the website of the Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) for further information on this issue.
https://www.bvl.bund.de/DE/Arbeitsbereiche/01_Lebensmittel/03_Verbraucher/17_FAQ/FAQ_NEM-Corona/FAQ_NEM-Corona_node.html

**Away-from-home consumption**
As of: 01.04.2020 - 2 p.m.

**Is it still safe to eat in a canteen?**
If you dine out, you should bear a few things in mind because coronaviruses can migrate into items by direct coughing or sneezing and be transmitted from there. This primarily concerns trays and cutlery boxes in canteens. It is therefore imperative that cutlery should be handed to guests - for example when paying. Cashless payment is also advised in the interest of hygiene.

Beyond this, it is important that individual diners keep at a sufficient distance from each other and that queues are avoided. This means that measures to control and restrict access must be in place.

And last but not least, spices, sugar casters, tables, chairs and door handles must be disinfected or replaced more frequently.

**Can I continue to order food from delivery services?**
Those who use delivery services should take care that customers and delivery staff do not come into contact with each other. To protect yourself and others, you should order food by phone or online and also pay online. The delivery can then be left on your own doorstep.

Irrespective of the Corona situation, the general rule is that those who prepare food for others need to pay particular attention to hygiene and cleanliness.

The hygiene plan according to the Protection against Infection Act also needs to be reviewed on a regular basis. Hygiene training for company staff should be repeated at regular intervals.

Particular attention should also be paid to bakery shops and self-service automatic bakery machines. Flaps, tongs and other objects in the bakery shops are touched by customers, who may then bag their pastries by hand and transport viruses in doing so.
Supply situation/ Emergency food preparedness
As of: 27/03/2020 - 11 a.m.

Are there any bottlenecks in the supply of food?
There are no problems with the supply of staple foods in the current situation. The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture engages in regular talks on this matter with the agri-food associations concerned.

But why do I see empty shelves?
Even if certain products such as flour or fresh milk cannot be found in some stores, this is merely due to logistical reasons: trucks that are stuck in traffic jams due to border controls, for example, or goods that simply cannot be reloaded quickly enough. Despite this, the supply of these goods is currently assured. Panic buying is therefore not necessary.

Would Germany be able to provide for itself?
Germany has a high degree of self-sufficiency for many staple foods. The degree of self-sufficiency is over 100 percent in the case of wheat, potatoes, meat and milk products. This means that more potatoes and meat are produced in Germany than the amount that is purchased, eaten or used for processing.

Will panic buying remain a problem?
Consumers are realising that food retailing is efficient and highly motivated. Fortunately, it can be seen that panic buying of some foods is gradually declining. This includes noodles, flour and pureed tomatoes. This decline in panic-buying is both the right course and an expression of solidarity.

Some supermarkets are restricting the sale of individual products per purchase (e.g. a maximum of two packets of noodles per customer). Are there exceptions for large families, which have a correspondingly higher need?
The retail trade itself decides whether temporary limits should be placed on the sale of certain products. As far as the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture is aware, there are no official restrictions in this respect. Those adversely affected by such restrictions, such as large families, should address their questions directly to their local supermarket or chemist.

Is there any rule in place governing the opening hours of shops during the Corona crisis? Particularly with reference to opening hours on Sundays and public holidays to avoid a throng of customers?
The question of shop opening hours falls outside the competence of the Federal Government. The federal states adopt their own rules in this regard.

What must I bear in mind when shopping before public holidays?
Experience shows that purchases are made immediately before public holidays. Due to the currently high safety precautions and hygiene regulations, long queues and waiting times can occur in supermarkets, even during normal operation. This is why food retailers are recommending that people start shopping for public holidays in good time. Generally speaking, you should only buy what you need.

Are there any government food stocks in Germany?
The Federal Government keeps rice, peas, lentils, condensed milk, wheat, oats and rye in reserve - in the event that a supply of food to the population via the market is no longer guaranteed in a crisis situation. In such a case, state emergency food preparedness should help to bridge short-term bottlenecks in the supply of food. The causes of a food supply crisis can include natural and environmental disasters, accidents in large-scale facilities (e.g. Chernobyl), large-scale animal diseases, but also strikes or terrorist
attacks. Germany has to-date never had to use these emergency food supplies. This is also due to the strength of our food industry.

For further information on emergency food supplies kept by the state, please go to: https://ernaehrungsvorsorge.de/staetliche-vorsorge/haeufig-gestellte-fragen-faq/

**When would the Federal Government intervene in order to ensure food supplies?**
As of: 27/03/2020- 3 p.m.
This would only happen in the event of a supply crisis within the meaning of the relevant Act (Act governing the security of food supplies and emergency food supplies, ESVG in short). However, currently, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture does not expect the Coronavirus situation to result in such a supply crisis. Food supplies for the population are secure at present. According to the ESVG, a supply crisis is only deemed to exist if

- there is a serious risk that it will not be possible to meet the essential demand for food in large parts of Germany; and

- if, without intervention in the market by the Federal Government, this risk either cannot be allayed in time or can only be allayed by unjustifiable means.

**Price development for foods/ Emergency legislation in the event of rising prices**

**Will the spread of the coronavirus cause a rise in the prices of food?**
As of: 02/04/2020- 5 p.m.
There is currently no justification and, with a few exceptions, no evidence of food price hikes.

This could change if bottlenecks were to occur in the coming weeks due to disruptions, e.g. in the supply chain. The Federal Government is monitoring the development of the situation very closely in order to prevent or minimise such disruptions.

The situation is stable at the moment:

the supply of milk and milk products such as butter, cheese and drinking milk, is currently secure and consumer prices are, all in all, still stable.

Neither are there any major price surges for meat at present. In some cases there is currently even a decline in consumer prices for these products.

**Can the Federal Government intervene if there is a sharp increase in food prices?**
It is, in principle, possible for the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture to stipulate prices. However, this rule only enters into force if there is a supply crisis in accordance with the relevant Act (Act governing the security of food supplies and emergency food supplies, ESVG in short)

Currently, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture does not expect the Coronavirus situation to result in such a supply crisis. Food supplies for the population are secure at present.

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- there is a serious risk that it will not be possible to meet the essential demand for food in large parts of Germany; and

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