

# SARS-CoV-2 and the fresh produce sector

## South African Town Hall Meeting

21 April 2020

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Deon Mahoney



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- 🔗 Background
- 🔗 Food safety considerations
- 🔗 Guidance for food businesses
- 🔗 Masks, hand sanitisers, and resources
- 🔗 Discussion | Questions and answers



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## Background: SARS-CoV-2 virus

Coronaviruses: large family of viruses causing respiratory infections  
(from common cold to serious respiratory diseases)

- SARS-CoV virus (2002–2003)
- MERS virus (2012 – )
- SARS-CoV-2 virus (2019 – )

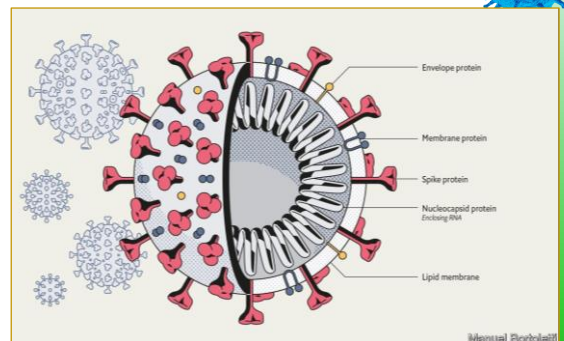
Viruses do NOT replicate outside a living host



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## What we know about SARS-CoV-2 virus

- **Features:** enveloped RNA virus, fragile, easily destroyed by heat, acid, and sanitisers
- **Transmission:** being driven by person-to-person spread and through close contact
- **Control:** isolation, contact tracing, and quarantine



Credit: <https://www.manuelbortoletti.com/>

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## SARS-CoV-2 and food safety

- Transmission by food/food packaging: highly unlikely
- Control:** easily destroyed by heat, acid, and sanitisers
- Advice to food businesses: **Keep routine produce safety practices in place** and **boost workplace hygiene and safety practices**



## Guidelines for the Fresh Produce Industry: COVID-19 and your workforce

### Sections:

- Keeping your workforce informed and engaged
- Recommendations to prevent introduction and spread of COVID-19
- Staff health and welfare
- Protocols if an employee is found to be infected with COVID-19
- Contingency arrangements
- Support your workforce



## Guidance for food businesses

### *Health checks and quarantine*

- Monitor the health of workers
- Encourage self reporting: workers if they are displaying symptoms, or if they observe other workers displaying symptoms, or if they have been exposed to someone diagnosed/suspected to have COVID-19
- Require workers who have contracted COVID-19 to prove they are clear of the virus before returning to work



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## Guidance for food businesses

### *Physical distancing*

- Ensure workers are >1.5 metres apart
- Limit physical interactions between workers (e.g. modify tasks, split shifts, provide sufficient time for cleaning between shifts, using contact-less communication methods)
- Eliminate visitors



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## Guidance for food businesses

### Hygiene, cleaning, and sanitation

- Increase routine cleaning schedules (especially frequently touched surfaces and amenities)
- Train workers in revised requirements and ensure they practice good hygiene
- Ensure ready supply of cleaning agents
- Ensure toilet facilities are maintained
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitiser and ensure availability throughout the workplace



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## Guidance for food businesses

### Communication with workers

- Engage in regular communication with workers
- Ensure all staff are informed about the risks of exposure to the COVID-19 virus and the practices and behaviours they need to implement to reduce the risk and minimise the spread

This checklist is for producers, packers, and processors in the fresh produce sector for use as part of their effort to contain the spread and limit the impact of the COVID-19 virus.

**Key considerations:**

- Maintaining the health and wellbeing of you, your staff, and your family
- Ensuring you maintain work teams to keep your business functioning
- Identifying ways to work that are consistent with current best hygiene practice
- Retaining access to goods and services

No.	Question	Yes (It is in place)	Yes (Needs implementation)	No (Needs action)	No (Not relevant)
1	A safe working environment has been provided for all staff in your business				
2	Precautions are in place for your workers or family who are over 60 or in a high-risk group (underlying medical conditions)				
3	Ensure all workers are briefed on ways of working and can demonstrate them in practice - physical distancing, hygiene, coughing/sneezing, etc.				
4	Workers are provided with appropriate personal protective equipment - gloves, masks, etc. in appropriate				
5	Hand washing facilities and hand sanitisers are provided and regularly maintained				
6	Workers who are sick understand the need to self-isolate				
7	Systems are in place to isolate work teams if a team member tests positive				
8	Visitors are not permitted on site				
9	Contractors are appropriately briefed and follow all hygiene protocols when on site				
10	Regularly check with Government and relevant industry websites on the latest precautions and measures designed to contain the virus				
11	Return a list of key contacts and phone numbers: Department of Health, your doctors and hospitals				

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## What happens if an employee becomes ill?

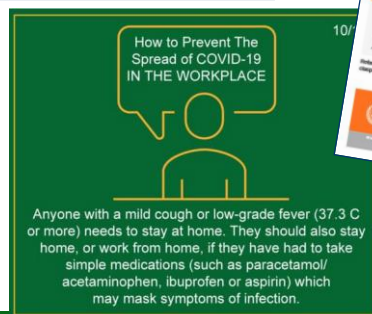
### Actions for employers

- Where a team member receives a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, it is essential that you work closely with the relevant National or Provincial public health authorities as they undertake their investigations



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## Posters



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## Masks

Health authorities still advise against widespread wearing of masks by healthy individuals

Ongoing debate – emerging evidence that asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission of COVID-19 is possible (variations in societal and cultural paradigms)



**Lancet**, March 2020:  
Rational use of face masks in the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Hand sanitisers

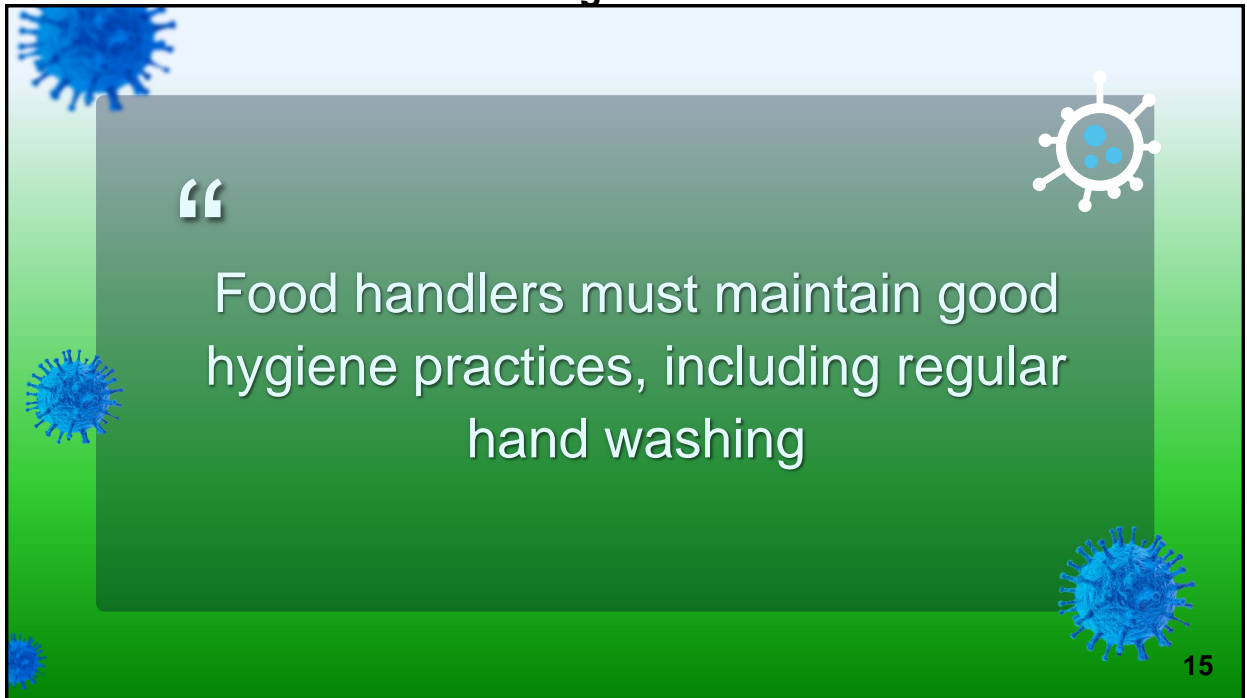
Frequent and effective hand washing is still the recommended approach

Only use hand sanitisers that contains 60–80% ethanol or isopropyl alcohol

Sanitisers are only effective on clean hands



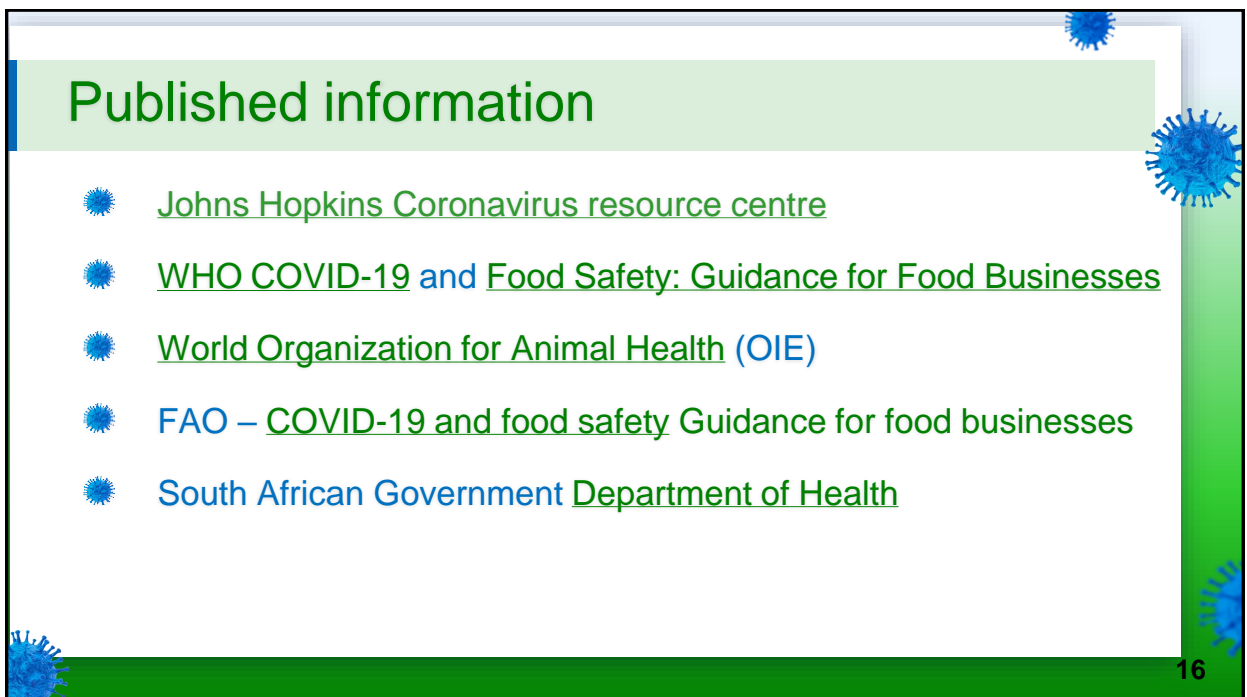
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A decorative slide with a green gradient background. It features several blue virus-like icons with spiky surfaces. A white double quote icon is in the top left. A white virus icon with blue dots is in the top right. The text is centered in a white box.

“

Food handlers must maintain good hygiene practices, including regular hand washing

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A decorative slide with a green gradient background. It features several blue virus-like icons with spiky surfaces. The title is in a green box at the top. The list items are preceded by blue virus icons.

**Published information**

- [Johns Hopkins Coronavirus resource centre](#)
- [WHO COVID-19 and Food Safety: Guidance for Food Businesses](#)
- [World Organization for Animal Health \(OIE\)](#)
- [FAO – COVID-19 and food safety Guidance for food businesses](#)
- [South African Government Department of Health](#)

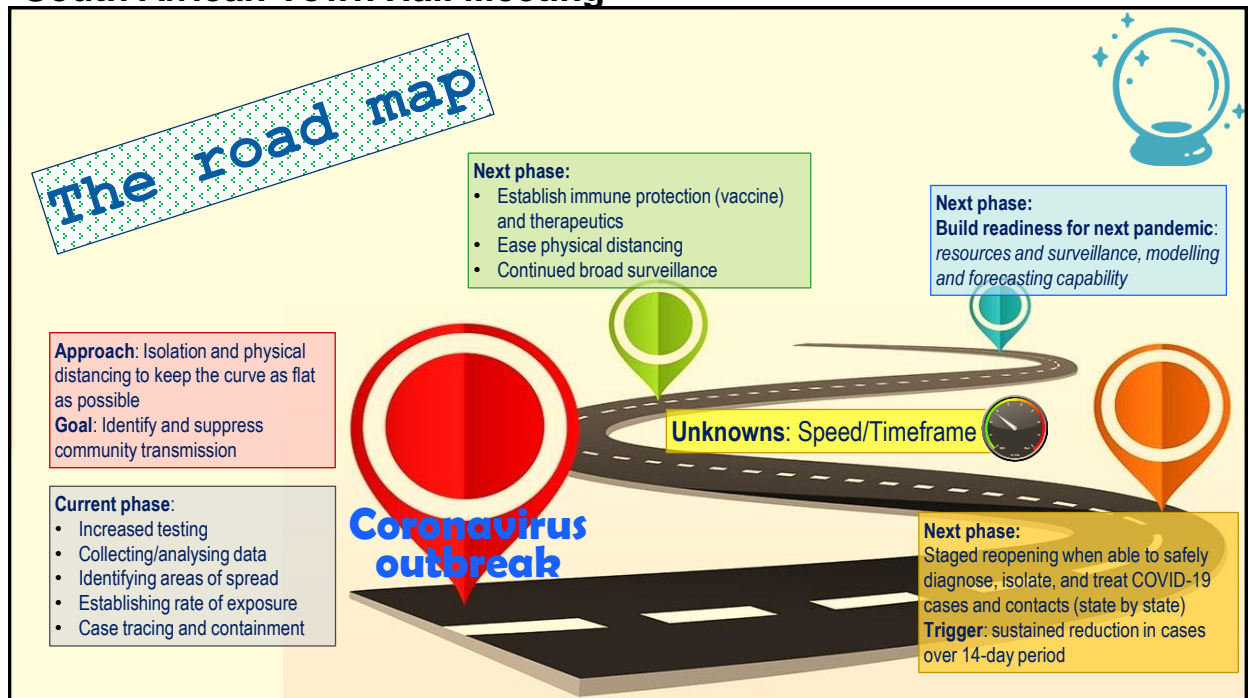
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Check out our website  
[pma-anz.com](http://pma-anz.com)

Question and answer session

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