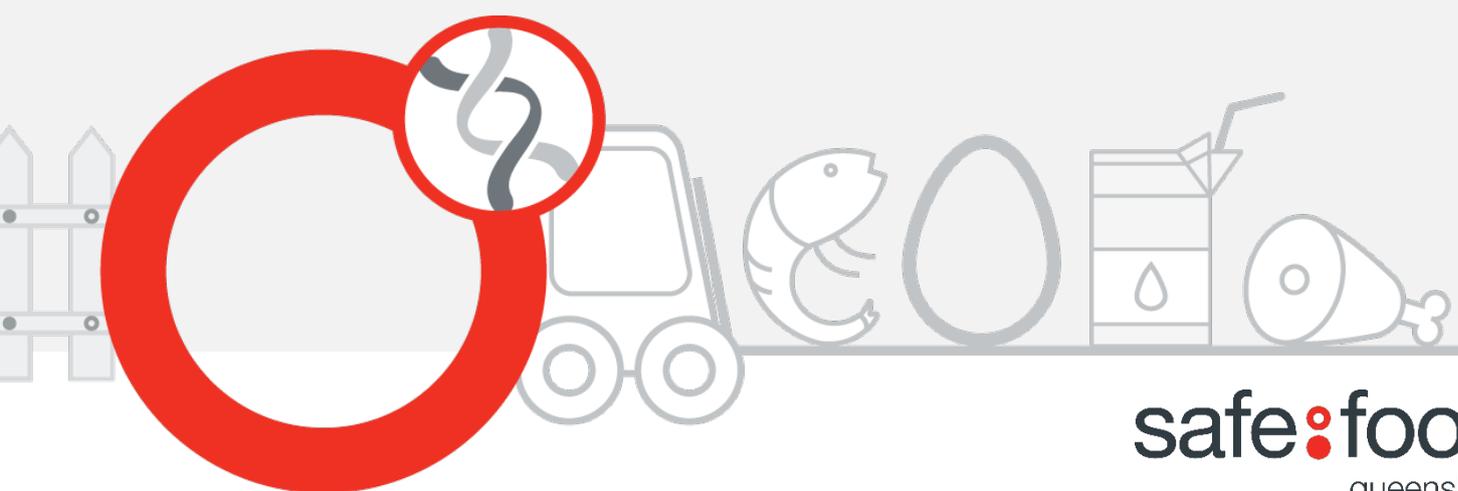

Communication Advice for Food Businesses for a Confirmed Case of COVID-19

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If there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in your business, clear and timely communication will be key to protect your employees, the local community and reduce the impact on your business. This document provides some best practice advice for how to communicate during a such an event, and how your business can be better prepared.

Who will you communicate with?

Consider who you will need to communicate with if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in your business. Examples include:

- Regulators (e.g. Queensland Health, local Public Health Unit (PHU), WorkSafe, Safe Food Production Queensland)
- Staff
- Visitors, contractors or suppliers
- Customers (domestic and overseas)
- General public
- Media

Tip: Audit your records now to ensure you have up-to-date contact details for all staff, contractors, suppliers and customers (email address and mobile phone at a minimum).

What will you communicate?

As a best practice, your communications should be:

- **Reassuring** – demonstrate that your business is well prepared and responding quickly to the situation
- **Consistent** – ensure your message is consistent with the advice or directives of Queensland Health
- **Clear** – what do you want your intended audience to know or do?
- **Timely** – a timely response will help you control the message or story

Proactive communication will help alleviate alarm or panic among impacted stakeholders and enable them to get on the front foot as well. It's important to reassure your customers and the general public that you have appropriate measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Inform them of what precautions you have in place for employees, contractors and visitors, and what you are doing to contain the issue.



How will you communicate?

Consider how you will communicate quickly during a crisis. This may include one of more of the following methods:

- Face-to-face (e.g. staff meeting)
- Virtual meeting
- Email
- SMS
- Phone call
- Website
- Social media
- Fax
- Notice board / posters / handouts

Tip: Consider multiple ways to get your message out – don't just rely on one.

Assemble your communications team

Nominate a person or small team in your business who will be responsible for communicating with stakeholders. Their job may involve liaising with the media, updating your website/social media pages and/or fielding questions from staff and visitors.

This team does not replace the role of your local PHU, who will manage contact tracing activities, but would be there to answer questions specific about the business. It's important that your communications team remains informed on the situation as it evolves so that messages being disseminated are accurate.

Communicating with staff

A confirmed case of COVID-19 in your business can elicit a range of responses from staff – shock, fear, anxiety, uncertainty, anger. It's important to reassure your workforce that appropriate steps are being taken to manage the situation and that their health is your top priority.



You will need their cooperation during this time to follow the directions of Queensland Health, get tested and self-isolate (if required), assist with deep cleaning (if required) and follow other procedures set out by your business. Be clear on what you want staff to do.

Timely and proactive communication will be important to help control rumours among your workforce. Be open and honest about how you are responding and advise staff not to speak to the media directly about the situation, or post about it on their personal social media accounts. Make them aware of your nominated communications team and that any questions should be directed towards them.

Holding statements

If there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in your business, you will need to move fast. Having some pre-drafted holding statements ready will help buy you some time while you enact your response protocol.

A holding statement should include:

- A factual headline
- The date and time
- The location of the incident
- Basic details that have been confirmed
- Actions your organisation is taking that you are willing to make public
- An expression of compassion or empathy (if appropriate)
- Contact details OR details on further updates

A holding statement can be published on your website, social media channels and/or emailed to media outlets if they contact you for a statement.

Tip: Draft 3 versions of a holding statement to address the different scenarios your business may find itself in (i.e. partial, temporary or complete shutdown).



Liaising with the media

A confirmed case of COVID-19 in your business is likely to attract some media attention. It's important to be on the front foot and engage with the media in order to control the message. Remember, journalists are just trying to do their job and inform the public - and you can actually help with that! Follow these best practices for liaising with the media:

Be Prepared	Media Do's	Media Don't
Empower your nominated communications contact with all the facts before they address the media	When speaking to the media, keep your emotions in check and your message on point. Convey confidence, assurance and leadership during this time	Don't downplay the situation
Define what key messages your business wants to convey to the public. Limit it to 3-4 speaking points and think of 6 different ways to say each one. This will help avoid rambling or going off on tangents	Take your time answering a question and always give accurate information. If you're not sure about something, say so and that you will have get back to the journalist (and follow through on that promise).	Don't give false or misleading information. If you are not the best expert on a topic, direct them to a source who is
Is there anything you can't discuss publicly? Define the scope of what you will speak about to keep your message on-point and relevant to the issue at hand	Respect the privacy of those who have been impacted by the situation, uphold their anonymity	Don't attribute blame for what's happened. Keep the message positive and communicate what you are doing now to address the situation
If you need time to gather your thoughts, ask for it and call the journalist back	Get back to journalists when you say you will	Don't speak off the cuff or repeat 'facts' second-hand - speak to what you know
Prepare for difficult questions that may appear irrelevant to the current situation (e.g. background questions, past issues in your business)	Keep interviews short and to the point. The longer you talk, the more chance you will say something you shouldn't	Don't assume anything is off the record



Start preparing now

Don't wait for a confirmed case of COVID-19. Be prepared now. Start by assembling your communications team and walk through what your communications response might look like in the **first 2 hours** of a crisis. Ask yourself the following:

1. *Who* do we need to communicate with?
2. *What* do we need to communicate?
3. *How* will we communicate?
4. *Who* will be responsible for sending out this communication?

Consider others that may need to be involved in your communication efforts (e.g. your website administrator, HR team, etc.) and ensure you have out of hours contact details for them in the event of an emergency.

Document everything to avoid confusion

Ensure login details for your social media accounts are written down and your communications team knows where to find them.

Have a holding statement pre-drafted so that all you need to do is complete the particulars and publish it. Make your communications team aware of where this is saved.

The better prepared you are now, the better chance you have of protecting staff, the local community and getting back to business sooner.

Resources

[Crisis Communications: Preparing Your Holding Statement](#)

[Crisis Communications: What to Say and How to Say It](#)

[Talking to the Media Guidelines](#)