

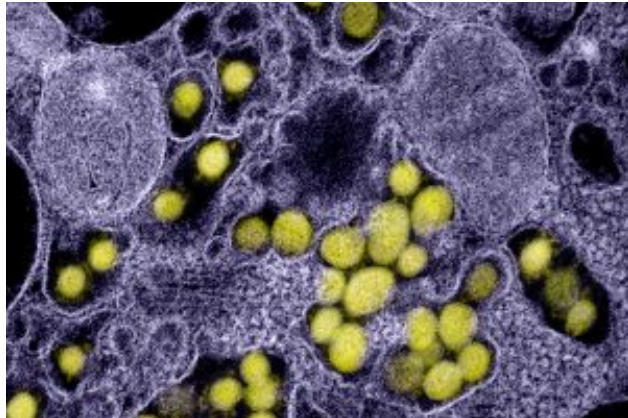
Reuse and COVID-19: A multi-stakeholder debate

Justin Boucher
June 10, 2020

The virus survives on surfaces

Detected in laboratory setting for up to:

- 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel
- 24 hours on cardboard



Transmission electron micrograph of SARS-CoV-2 virus particles, isolated from a patient.

The NEW ENGLAND
JOURNAL of MEDICINE



Editor's Note: This letter was published on March 17, 2020, at NEJM.org.

CORRESPONDENCE

Aerosol and Surface Stability of SARS-CoV-2 as Compared with SARS-CoV-1

April 16, 2020
N Engl J Med 2020; 382:1564-1567
DOI: 10.1056/NEJMc2004973
[Metrics](#)

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TO THE EDITOR:

A novel human coronavirus that is now named severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (formerly called HCoV-19) emerged in Wuhan, China, in late 2019 and is now causing a pandemic.¹ We analyzed the aerosol and surface stability of SARS-CoV-2 and compared it with

Governments announce low concern



- “There is currently no evidence of human or animal food or food packaging being associated with transmission of the coronavirus”
- “However, if you wish, you can wipe down product packaging and allow it to air dry, as an extra precaution.”



- “No infection of SARS-CoV-2 through these exposure pathways are known”
- Be sure to “follow general rules for daily hygiene such as regular hand washing”
- May 27 update: “theoretically possible and cannot be ruled out” . . . “based on the relative low stability of coronaviruses in the environment, it is only probable with a short time window after contamination.”

Manufacturers call for prioritizing single-use

- EuPC requested European Commission to delay upcoming single-use plastics directive:

“... the EU Commission DID NOT TAKE into account the hygienic consequences of banning or reducing Single-Use Plastics.”

“Many independent studies repeatedly show that plastics is the material of choice for ensuring hygiene, safety as well as preservation from contamination.”



Brussels, 8 April 2020

OPEN LETTER

To the kind attention of European Commissioners and their Cabinets:
President, Ms. Ursula von der Leyen
Internal Market Commissioner, Mr. Thierry Breton
Health & Food Safety Commissioner, Ms. Stella Kyriakides
Environment Commissioner, Mr. Virginijus Sinkevičius

Subject: COVID19 – request for a recast or postponement of the Single-Use Plastics Directive

Dear Ms von der Leyen,

Dear Mr. Breton, Dear Ms. Kyriakides, Dear Mr. Sinkevičius,

We hope this letter finds you and your families & Cabinets well and healthy.

We would like to draw the attention to the benefits of plastic products and in particular single-use applications during the difficult times we are experiencing at this moment in history.

Since the beginning, the Single-Use Plastics Directive 2019/904 has proven to be a difficult piece of legislation to follow and implement both at commercial level and at national level by Member States. Some crucial categories of items have been completely banned or reduced in their availability due to the (alleged) existence of a valid alternative. The Directive also hinders the Single Market and the free circulation of packaging and goods among European countries. When drafted and pushed in an extreme short period this “political” piece of legislation **the EU Commission DID NOT TAKE into account the hygienic consequences of banning or reducing Single-Use Plastics**. It only reflected on littering aspects.

Today and tomorrow we are and will be in a completely different world where hygiene and consumer health will be the number one priority for all of us so it is time to reflect on adjusting strategies for Europe and the world in particular related to the use of plastics.

The term single-use plastics is completely wrong and not justified. To reduce littering an anti-litter regulation will be needed to impact both consumers and force industry in circularity thinking and keep going in this direction. The bashing on plastics followed by many politicians is now backfiring and its time to work together to rebuild the economy and safeguard consumer health whilst driving the circularity of the plastics industry.

Unfortunately, the Corona Virus (COVID-19) has shown us that not all materials are the same. Single-use plastics are not easily substitutable, in particular in keeping the same hygienic properties to safeguard

Should single-use packaging restrictions be delayed?



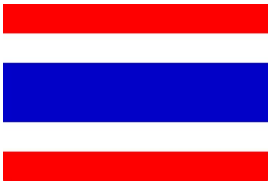
Should reuse efforts be paused?



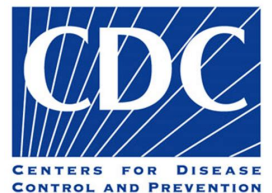
Mixed reactions from governments



- US states pausing, delaying, or cancelling recycling and single-use laws
 - California: plastic bag ban paused
 - Washington: new legislation on recycled content cancelled



- Thailand: planned expansion of single-use plastic bag bans halted
 - >60% increase in plastic waste in April 2020 compared to 2019



- In restaurants “avoid using or sharing items that are reusable . . . Instead, use disposable or digital menus, single serving condiments . . .”

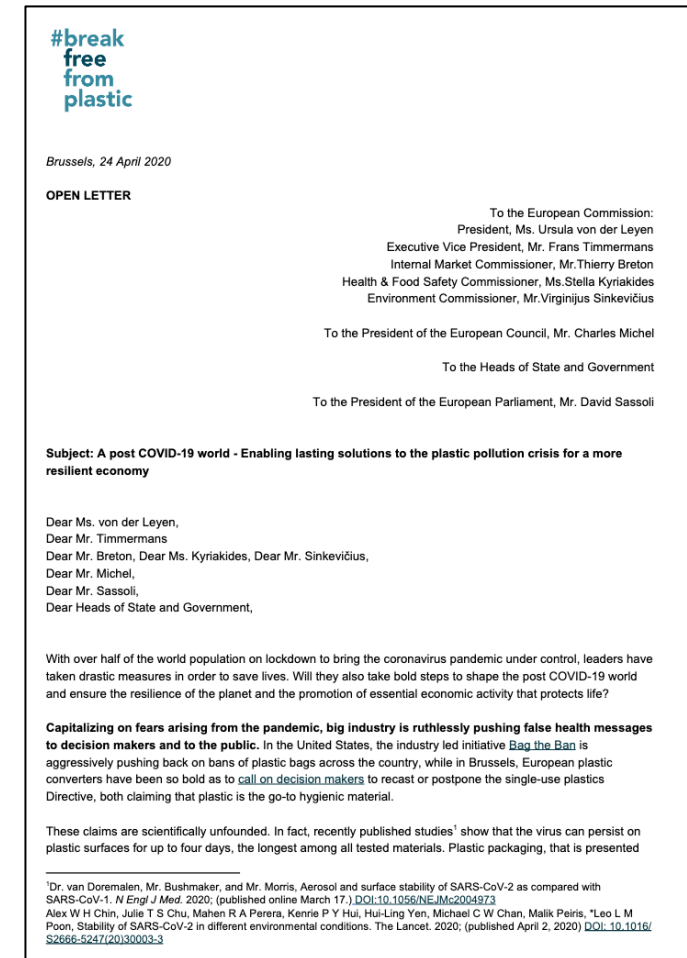


- EU: single-use plastic directive will not be delayed
- New Farm to Fork Strategy will “support the use of innovative and sustainable packaging solutions using environmentally-friendly, re-usable and recyclable materials”

Strong call for resilience by NGOs

#BreakFreeFromPlastic argues against industry claims:

- “Capitalizing on fears arising from the pandemic, big industry is ruthlessly pushing false health messages to decision makers and to the public.”
- Industry statements about hygiene “scientifically unfounded.”
- The virus can survive on both reusable and single-use packaging
- Instead government should “encourage investment in businesses that are redesigning products and systems, and building a more resilient economy and environment.”



What reuse systems exist?



Bring Your Own (BYO) Container



Business Reuse Systems



Deposit Return Schemes



Zero Waste Lifestyle

How to ensure safe reuse?

- Use systematic washing and sanitizing following food laws
- Install on-site reuse and cleaning systems controlled by business
- If BYO unavoidable, prevent contact with customer's containers

THE SAFETY OF REUSE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

ANSWERS TO THE 7 MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE SAFETY OF REUSABLE PRODUCTS

CAN COVID-19 SPREAD THROUGH CONTACT WITH SURFACES OF PRODUCTS?
Short answer: Your chances of getting the virus from surfaces are "virtually nil".
According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person...between people who are in close contact with one another, through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks."
In addition, "It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes."
But the CDC also states that transmission of the virus from surface contact has never been documented.¹ Dr. Ben Loevin, an epidemiologist and consultant to the CDC says, "You really are almost at nil risk of getting a surface contact transmission of COVID-19."
Recommendations for disinfection of surfaces is being made through an abundance of caution approach.²

IF THE VIRUS CAN TRANSFER FROM SURFACES - ARE DISPOSABLE PRODUCTS SAFER THAN REUSABLE ONES?
Short answer: No. Even though odds of getting the virus from surfaces are extremely low, based on how long the virus lasts on surfaces and typical consumer and worker behavior - disposable products are not safer than reusable ones.
The virus lasts up to 24 hours on paper and cardboard and between 2-3 days on plastic and stainless steel.³ COVID-19 can be found on both disposable and reusable materials, and plastic is one of the materials on which it survives longest.
In theory, any object brought into a public space either by customers or workers could have the virus on it. Customer's purses, wallets, credit cards and clothing also touch surfaces. However, they are not temporarily restricted like reusable bags in some places. This points to the inconsistencies, and also lack of rationale and science, which are driving these restrictions.
If you or your customers are still worried about surface transmission of COVID-19 (even though the latest research confirms there's no evidence of this happening), let hygiene and sanitation guide your choices. The virus can last the longest (2-3 days) on plastic. Single-use products like plastic cups, plastic-wrapped utensils, or plastic bags are handled by several retail workers before reaching the customer. Whereas, reusable products provided by a retailer, like cups, utensils, and to-go containers, must be adequately cleaned and sanitized according to food safety regulations.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/s0508coronavirus-covid-19-spread.html> - Retrieved May 1, 2020
² <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0514coronavirus-covid-19-spread.html> - Retrieved May 1, 2020
³ Dr. Benjamin Loevin - statements made during April 30, 2020 webinar - <https://www.upstream.com/watch/3nAG2R4w4u4/>
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UPSTREAM
Food is better when it's better shared.

WHAT DO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES SAY ABOUT RETAIL FOOD SAFETY AND REUSABLE FOODWARE AND PRODUCTS USED BY CONSUMERS AND BUSINESSES?

Short answer: In the CDC and FDA guidances, reusable products are not considered problematic or a cause for concern. Social distancing and hygiene are the primary protections for workers and consumers in retail food settings.
To protect workers and customers in restaurants and bars, current recommendations from CDC defer to the FDA. The FDA guidance on Best Practices for Retail Food Stores, Restaurants, and Food Delivery Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic focuses on social distancing, foodware washing and sanitizing, cleaning and sanitizing, and personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers. No mention is made of any threats posed by reusable bags, cups, or cutlery or other reusable products.¹
The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) states: "The CDC, FDA and CDPH are not aware of any reports at this time that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging."²

WHAT DOES THE FOOD INDUSTRY SAY ABOUT RETAIL SAFETY AND REUSABLE FOODWARE?

Short answer: The National Restaurant Association's Guide to Reopening re: COVID-19 adheres to FDA guidance, focusing on cleaning, disinfecting, and social distancing.
They don't promote single-use products. The only mention of reusable products is a suggestion to clean reusable menus.³

ARE REUSABLE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES REGULATED?

Short answer: Reusable products used in food service must meet strict safety requirements. Restaurants and retail food service are among the most highly regulated businesses in terms of public health.⁴ Existing state food safety codes are based on FDA Guidance to States. State food safety codes require extensive ware washing and sanitizing at high heat that meets the level of hygiene and disinfection required by the FDA and CDC.
Tom Szaky, CEO of TerraCycle/Loop cites their reusable container washing system, "We are protecting for other pathogens and concerns that are way more potent than Covid."⁵

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0514coronavirus-covid-19-spread.html> - Retrieved May 1, 2020
² <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0514coronavirus-covid-19-spread.html> - Retrieved May 1, 2020
³ <https://www.nra.org/~/media/Files/2020/04/2020-04-20-NRA-Guide-to-Reopening-re-COVID-19.pdf>
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¹⁰⁰ <https://www.upstream.com/watch/3nAG2R4w4u4/>

UPSTREAM
Food is better when it's better shared.

HOW CAN WORKERS BE PROTECTED WHEN CUSTOMERS BRING REUSABLES INTO

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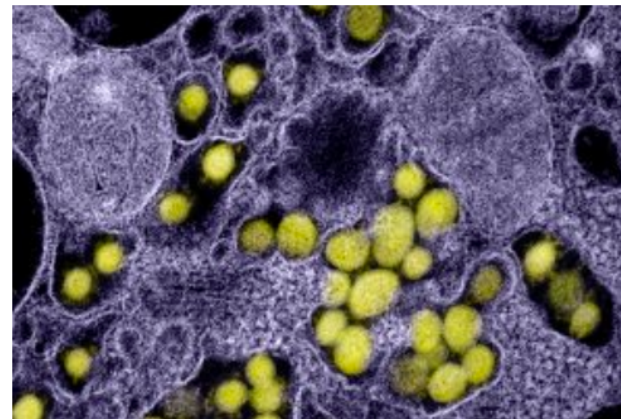
CORONAVIRUS & PACKAGING

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Food Packaging Forum helps to gather, summarize, and communicate relevant information related to food packaging and human health

OVERVIEW

The spread of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has had impacts across all sectors. As health authorities and scientists around the world work towards identifying solutions to bring the situation under control, the Food Packaging Forum is monitoring the situation closely.

This page serves as a resource providing an overview of relevant scientific studies, government and stakeholder communications, and upcoming events related to SARS-CoV-2 and food packaging. It will be regularly updated as the situation develops.



Transmission electron micrograph of SARS-CoV-2 virus particles, isolated from a patient. Credit: NIAID

<https://www.foodpackagingforum.org/coronavirus-and-packaging>