



Editorial

COVID-19 Pandemic and Food Safety Issues in Pakistan

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After the first wave of the pandemic COVID-19, an extra attention is has been paid to the hygienic and safe handling, transportation, and storage of the food materials. As COVID-19 infection is highly transmissible. So, it has been supposed that contracting with the contaminated food, food packages or containers with the SARS-CoV-2 could disseminate the virus in human being. It is generally known that viruses do not multiply in food systems as they require an animal or plant host to multiply. However, until now, no researches have explored the survival of SARS-CoV-2 in food systems. However, a previous study reported the survival of respiratory infectious virus (coronavirus) on surface of lettuce for two days (Yépez-Gómez et al., 2013). These results indicate that the respiratory virus can transfer from the surface of the food to hands and then to the mouth, nose or eyes, and cause infection.

Pakistan is a developing country where a significant attention is not paid towards the food safety and hygienic conditions therefore, the occurrence of many food-borne illnesses is common. Estimation of diseases transmitted by food in Pakistan is a difficult job because any monitoring or control program for food-borne infections is still absent. Unhygienic processing, storage, and transportation practices are major causes of this issue in Pakistan. Punjab Food Authority of Pakistan recently provided a set of COVID-19 guidelines intended for the food industry to control the spread of outbreak in country. New guidelines focused on the needs of food industry, food handlers, and consumers to comply with the recommended practices by Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and World Health Organization (WHO).

FDA (2020) recommended that food handlers and consumers must comply with the minimum food safety system requirements, namely constantly sanitizing hands, cough and sneeze etiquette, and use of masks to prevent SARS-CoV-2 transmission to protect food workers from COVID-19 contracts and to strengthen the food sanitation practices. The imposition of the personnel hygiene practices among workers associated with food handling seems practicable solution to control viral transmission. If SARS-CoV-2 happens to contaminate the food contact surfaces, food grade sanitizers, UV light, and cold plasma can be used effectively to inactivate the virus.

Despite of the COVID-19 outbreak in Pakistan, the adulteration of food beverage has continued unchecked. Authorities had to grasp and dispose of a huge quantity of dairy, fruits, spices, and other food items despite persistent food supply shortage in the country amid COVID-19 outbreak. A substantial population of country is already facing severe poverty because of restrictions imposed by government due to upward trend in COVID-19 infections. In current circumstances, it is very essential to conserve the food supply and avoid food wastage as much as possible via preventing the rampant adulteration of foods and beverage.

Currently, there is no evidence that SARS-CoV-2 transmit through food, as this virus is associated with the causing respiratory infection and does not cause food-borne illness. Further investigation is required to explore the survival and inactivation behavior of SARS-CoV-2 in food systems. However, there is a need to continuously follow the basic practices for food safety and to consume nutritious food for good health.

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