

Could frozen food transmit COVID-19?

November 20 2020, by Tuti Siregar



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In mid-September, China [suspended importing fishery products from Indonesia](#) due to novel coronavirus contamination in the outer packages.

A month earlier, China also reported [frozen chicken wings imported from Brazil](#) have traces of the [virus](#) as well as frozen prawns from

Ecuador.

China has reported around 10 cases of SARS-CoV-2, the COVID-19 virus in the frozen products or its packaging.

Reports from China have highlighted [safety issues](#) on imported frozen foods. But most international food safety authorities state that there's no evidence of COVID-19 transmission through frozen foods.

Even so, [food producers](#) and consumers should be vigilant and follow COVID-19 protocol such as wash hand using soap under running water at least 20 seconds before and after touching frozen food. Also, producers should not prepare or package food if they are sick.

Food safety

The news from China about the possibility of COVID-19 transmission through frozen products has prompted the New Zealand government to [track down the virus in frozen goods](#).

In August, after more than three months having zero new cases, New Zealand found a positive case. The lady, [in her 50s](#), had no record of overseas travel nor local transmission indication.

In the beginning, there was speculation that her husband, who worked at a frozen goods packaging company, contracted the virus from his working environment and transmitted it to her. He experienced COVID-19 symptom [two weeks earlier](#).

But, the government said the possibility is negligible. However, there was [no clarity of the virus source](#).

Research findings

The World Health Organization (WHO) in April stated that it's highly unlikely that people can contract COVID-19 from food or food packaging.

The United States Food and Drug Administration (US-FDA), The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), and the Australian and New Zealand Food Standards also stated that there's no evidence of COVID-19 transmission from food.

These statements are in-line with new research findings from [U.S. and China](#) using animal experiment to test whether virus SARS-CoV-2 can be transmitted through oral injection.

Their result showed when the virus is entering the gastrointestinal tract, it could not survive due to high acidity in the stomach.

Research from [Minnesota university](#) also showed that the cooking process, using heat, kills the virus. Therefore, cooked food should be safe to consume.

How about low temperature such as frozen food with traces of the virus?

The head of microbiology at the China National Center for Food Safety Risk Assessment, Li Fengqin, in June [stated](#) the contamination of COVID-19 through frozen food could potentially be a source of transmission. This statement is underpinned by the latest report, also from China, that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was still alive in [frozen food packaging](#).

Contaminated food or food packaging may give positive result under PCR test. But, if the RNA in the virus is dead, the virus could not

replicate further, ruling out chances of further transmission.

We need more data on RNA replication test from contaminated frozen food to determine protocols on food or food packaging. Currently, China is actively conducting research to [fulfill the data](#) as part of their awareness to this pandemic.

It is possible with more available data, the current consensus on [food safety](#) will change, similar to the shift in advice on wearing masks for [healthy people](#).

What we should do as a food producer or consumer?

With more people staying at home during the pandemic, online-based food retail has significantly increased. Therefore, food delivery must also follow good health protocols. Good hygiene and sanitation practices are also important along the food chain.

Companies, including small and medium and household enterprises to apply [Good Manufacturing Practices \(GMP\)](#) such as using personal protective equipment (mask, gloves) as well as sanitation and hygiene.

Consumers who order ready-to-eat food should warm their food before consumption to ensure [food](#) is virus-free. A little bit of inconvenience is better to stay healthy than being sick.

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