

## Frequently asked questions about the use of customers' own refillable cups for "Coffee to go"

BfR FAQ of 26 June 2018

Customers using their own refillable cups for "coffee to go" has become a fairly widespread practice. More and more providers, such as filling stations, bakery outlets, cafes and late-opening stores, refill reusable cups brought by customers with hot drinks. People who enjoy a cup of hot coffee, tea or chocolate when they are out and about but want to avoid the waste produced by disposable cups can choose from a wide range of reusable cups, including thermo mugs. What private users should keep in mind in order to avoid potential health risks when refilling their cups is the subject of these FAQs from the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR).

To ensure that nothing prevents people from enjoying a hot drink from a hygiene point of view, refillable cups should be empty and clean. This means that consumers should regularly wash their reusable cups with hot water and washing-up liquid or in the dishwasher, if suitable, and allow them to dry completely after rinsing. No matter whether the beverage is served or filled in a self-service system, the refillable cup should not make contact with the filler spout from which the hot drink flows in order to prevent the spread of any germs.

Refillable cups can be made of stainless steel, porcelain, glass or plastic. Reusable cups made from so-called natural materials like bamboo consist mainly of synthetic materials such as melamine resin. "Natural" materials are then added to these plastics as fillers. If products made of melamine resin are used at temperatures of up to 70° C, which is usually the case when filling with hot drinks, there are no reservations from a health point of view. Instructions for use of the products should be observed.

### **What should consumers observe when they have their cups refilled with hot drinks in a store?**

The refillable cups that people bring with them should be made of a smooth, easy-to-clean material and should be empty and clean. This means that consumers should regularly clean their refillable cups with hot water and washing-up liquid or put them in a dishwasher if they are suitable for this purpose. Cups should then be dried or left to dry completely.

Any lids or covers should be removed by the customer before having a cup refilled by sales personnel so that sales personnel do not come into contact with it. In order to prevent the spread of germs, it should also be ensured that when using refillable cups at self-service sales points, such as drinks dispensers in filling stations, canteens and cafeterias, private refillable cups do not come into contact with the filler spout from which the hot drink flows. It may be advisable not to have a cup refilled if the automatic filling systems is dirty or seems unhygienic.

### **Does the refilling of hot drinks in reusable cups pose a health risk to users?**

The risk of infection is generally regarded as low with hot drinks, since few of the bacteria survive at high temperatures. If hygiene recommendations and proper handling procedures are followed, no substantial additional health risk is expected from the refilling of hot drinks into reusable cups that customers bring with them.

### **What are the health risks if refillable cups are not clean?**

In principle, the risk of using refillable cups is that any germs which may be contained therein, could find their way into the hot drink when the cup is filled. If penetrating further into the

body, harmful germs can then trigger infections in humans. Therefore, reusable cups with visible dirt should generally not be refilled, but always be cleaned in advance.

#### **What materials are suitable for refillable cups?**

Cups made from materials with a smooth, easy-to-clean surface such as porcelaine, stainless steel, form and temperature-stable plastics or glass are suitable. In line with applicable legal provisions, they must be manufactured in a way that they do not transfer their constituents to food or drinks in quantities which could endanger human health when the cups are put to their intended or foreseeable use. The materials should be dishwasher safe and heat resistant and ideally also resistant to disinfectants and corrosion. Refillable cups should only be used for as long as their surface remains smooth and free of hairline cracks and visible signs of use.

#### **Are refillable cups made from so-called natural materials suitable?**

Refillable cups which are marked as being made of “natural” materials, such as bamboo, consist mainly of plastics, such as melamine resin. “Natural” materials are added to these plastics as fillers. Melamine resins are polymers consisting of the basic building blocks melamine and formaldehyde. These materials are used for the manufacturing of refillable cups for “coffee to go” as well as other dishes and kitchen utensils because they are hard and breakproof. There are no health risks if refillable cups made of melamine resin are used at temperatures of up to 70° C. This applies to the filling of hot drinks into reusable cups. The BfR has published the following opinion on the release of melamine and formaldehyde from dishes and kitchen utensils:

[https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/349/release\\_of\\_melamine\\_and\\_formaldehyde\\_from\\_dishes\\_and\\_kitchen\\_utensils.pdf](https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/349/release_of_melamine_and_formaldehyde_from_dishes_and_kitchen_utensils.pdf)

#### **What should consumers observe additionally?**

The BfR recommends compliance with the manufacturers’ instructions for use. This applies, for example, to non-suitability for cleaning in a dishwasher or use in a microwave oven.

#### **What rules have to be observed to comply with hygiene requirements?**

Each local authority is responsible for its own food monitoring. The basis is the Food Hygiene Regulation (LMHV), which is uniform throughout Germany and which regulates the hygiene requirements for the commercial manufacturing, treatment and marketing of foods. Accordingly, food sold to consumers may not be exposed to any negative influences of any kind. Main responsibility for this lies with the food entrepreneur and the sales personnel who offer the hot drink. In this regard, it is up to the sales personnel to check and decide whether reusable cups that customers bring with them can be accepted for refilling.

*This text version is a translation of the original German text which is the only legally binding version*