

Infection with SARS-CoV-2 via pork meat unlikely according to current state of knowledge

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State media in China have claimed that a worker has become infected with the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) from a knuckle of pork imported from Germany. The infection is reported to have taken place in a cold store. Traces of SARS-CoV-2 were detected on packaging as well as on a door knob.

According to the current state of knowledge, there are no cases that have shown evidence of humans being infected with the novel coronavirus via the consumption of contaminated food. Nor has any reliable evidence being presented to date concerning transmission of the virus via contact with contaminated objects or contaminated surfaces—such as packaging—which would have led to subsequent infections in humans. Imported refrigerated or frozen food and its packaging that has been produced under unhygienic conditions in regions affected by SARS-CoV-2 could contain the virus. Accordingly, the basic rules for day-to-day hygiene and for the preparation of food should always be followed.

The BfR is not aware of any reports of SARS-CoV-2 infections resulting from the consumption of meat or contact with contaminated meat products. According to the current state of knowledge, farm animals used for the production of meat cannot become infected with SARS-CoV-2 and are therefore unable to transmit the virus to humans via this pathway. Contamination of meat and meat products or its packaging with coronavirus could occur during the slaughtering, butchering, processing and packaging processes, however.

According to the reports in the Chinese media, traces of SARS-CoV-2 were found on the packaging of pork knuckles imported from Germany and on a door knob in a cold store. It is unclear whether the detected traces of virus are derived from an infectious virus or whether the virus had already been inactivated by storage or transportation. Nor do the reports state whether the traces of the virus were already present on the imported product or had been transferred to the packaging and door knob by the infected worker.

Generally, coronaviruses can potentially be transferred from an infected person to meat products if hygiene rules are not followed,— for example, by sneezing or coughing onto these products, or through contaminated hands. The same applies to surface contaminations (on packaging, for example). However, the hygiene rules and safety precautions that are commonly observed during the slaughtering, processing and packaging of meat minimise the risk of contamination with pathogens, which also applies for SARS-CoV-2. Coronaviruses cannot multiply in or on food; they require a living animal or human host to do this. Transmission of the virus to another person via a contact infection appears possible only if this person touches a contaminated item of food or packaging and then transfers the virus to the mucous membranes of their nose or eyes with the hands. According to the current state of knowledge, the oral/alimentary route of transmission through the consumption of meat is not relevant for the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

To protect yourself from viral infection, always observe the general rules for everyday hygiene: ensure that you wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face with your hands—especially while preparing food. Furthermore, meat and poultry in general should be heated sufficiently and evenly before consumption, until the meat juice trickling out is clear

and the meat is a whitish (poultry), greyish-pink (pork) or greyish-brown (beef) colour. More information on hygiene when handling food can be found here:

- <https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/364/protection-against-foodborne-infections.pdf>

Further information on this topic from the BfR website ...

BfR Coronavirus FAQ

https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/can_the_new_type_of_coronavirus_be_transmitted_via_food_and_objects_-244090.html



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