

ARE REUSABLES SAFE?

One of the many coronavirus fears is about the safety of using reusables. ANJEC has compiled a list of Q&A and resources to share in your community:



1. Are reusables safe?

– Yes, the short answer is that soap and hot water are effective at killing coronavirus, other viruses, and bacteria. Home and commercial dishwashers are more effective than hand-washing because of the added benefit of high temperature and prolonged washing.

– State health codes ensure that commercial dishwashing will kill all pathogens, and the coronavirus is especially sensitive to soap and heat.

– **Virus Spreads Primarily from Inhaling Aerosolized Droplets, Rather than through Contact with Surfaces**

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Preventions (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 .” While “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,” aerosolized droplets are the only documented method of COVID-19 transmission to date. https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5d696bc69fa6c2515873360a/5ef0e189dfa56f4fdf111e83_Health%20Expert%20Statement%20Version%209.pdf

2. Aren't disposables safer?

– No. Properly washed reusables are safe.

– In addition, according to a recently-released [peer-reviewed scientific consensus statement](#), over 12,000 chemicals are used in food packaging, and many of them are hazardous to human health. Migration of these toxic chemicals out of disposables into our food and drinks is not an issue with non-plastic reusables.

3. Can I use my reusable water bottle or coffee cup?

– Absolutely. Coronavirus mainly spreads through coughs and sneezes, not your reusable water bottle or cup.

– The best water refill options when you're out and on-the-go are hands-free electronic water refilling stations like you see at the airport. If you don't have easy access to one of these, then you can use the tap or the water cooler. Just don't let your water bottle directly touch the spigot, and be mindful about washing your hands after touching communal surfaces.

– The same logic applies to your coffee cup. Just don't touch your cup directly to the spigot or coffee pot, and wash your hands.

– Also, don't forget to wash your bottle or cup with soap and water, preferably in a dishwasher.

4. What are some tips for using a reusable bag?

– Bring clean, washed bags to the grocery store. If possible, sanitize the shopping cart before you put your bags in it. Many stores offer disinfectant wipes at their entrances.

– At checkout, avoid putting your bags on the counter. Rather, keep your bags in the cart as you pack up groceries.

– Wash your bags after each trip to the grocery store. Soap and hot water are effective at killing coronavirus, other viruses, and bacteria.

5. My local grocer is NOT allowing me to use reusable bags. What are my options?

- Understanding the employee safety is number one concern, offer to bag your own groceries
- Choose to put your groceries loosely back in the cart or use a box (e.g., Costco)
- Ask your grocer to stop using single-use plastic: <https://beyondplastics.org/article/ask-your-grocery-store-to-stop-selling-things-packaged-in-single-use-plastic/>

6. How can local restaurants reduce single-use plastic?

- Skip disposable cutlery and straws – Save some money and prevent waste by simply not providing cutlery with take-out or delivery options, or only provide it on request.
- Hold off on condiment packets – Consider providing condiment sachets or to-go cups only on request to save money and prevent packaging and food waste.
- For pick-up orders, allowing customers to bag their own orders in reusable bags saves staff time and reduces customer contact while preventing waste from disposable bags. For contactless deliveries, bags may not be needed if food can simply be placed (in containers) at a customer's door.
- If reusables are not an option, choose better single-use take out containers made from naturally occurring materials. Paper-based items, bamboo plates, wooden utensils, straws made completely from paper, hay, pasta, seaweed, bamboo and more. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V14s9afy3M-9a8VT8EjCXypICiYjLOsj/view>

7. What can be done about all the personal protective equipment (PPE) littering our streets and waterways?

- Ask your grocer/retail store if they will put out specially marked trash containers for PPE. Or allow signage asking people to dispose properly
- Post on social media. Write op-eds.
- On a cleanup, track the amount of PPEs

8. Will coronavirus kill the growing zero waste lifestyle, built on bring-your-own (BYO), reuse, and bulk shopping?

– No, the zero waste lifestyle is here to stay and is gaining more traction every day. While the coronavirus will change many things in our lives for a time, it won't change our core values like working for healthy people, a healthy planet, and a sustainable economy.

– But just like take-out and food delivery, this crisis is also showing us that we need better systems for BYO and bulk shopping. Hands-free dispensers and methods are part of the solution, as are on-site sanitizing for BYO. In addition, businesses can create new systems to provide clean, sanitized reusable containers for bulk purchasing on deposit – similar to how local dairies are bringing back the reusable milk bottle.

We have to stay vigilant. Stay in touch with your township council and community.

Sources

<https://www.upstreamolutions.org/stay-informed>

[Plastic Reduction Tools for Businesses and Communities](#)

<https://www.surfrider.org/programs/ocean-friendly-restaurants>

<https://beyondplastics.org/take-action/>

<https://www.northjersey.com/story/opinion/2020/04/02/coronavirus-nj-dont-frightened-into-using-single-use-plastic-bags-opinion/5088278002/>