

BRIEF Q&A ON PLASTIC AND COVID-19



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Reusable and disposable goods: what is important to know in connection with the spread of the coronavirus

Now the situation with COVID-19 is extremely serious in almost all countries of the world, including the Baltic Sea Region.

In addition to the direct impact on public health and the economy of countries, the current crisis has its own impact on the environment. One of the immediate consequences is a significant increase of usage of single-use plastics and concerns among the general public about the usage of disposables.

The Coalition Clean Baltic reiterates and shares information and tips developed by [Plastic pollution, Reuse, and Covid-19](#) from [UPSTREAM](#) and [Break Free From Plastic](#) on how to protect yourself and at the same time reduce the environmental burden from single use plastics in the current situation.

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 handwashing 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.
- As Dr. Vineet Menachery, a microbiologist at the University of Texas Medical Branch [recently said](#), “I wouldn’t expect any virus to survive a dishwasher.”

2. Aren’t single-use packagings safer?

- No, they’re not when compared to properly washed reusables. Single-use disposables can harbor viruses and pathogenic bacteria. They are subject to whatever pathogens have settled on them from manufacture, transport, inventory stocking and eventual use.
- 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 people still use reusable water bottles or coffee cups?

- Absolutely. Coronavirus mainly spreads through coughs and sneezes, not through a personal reusable water bottle or cup.
- The best water refill options when you’re out and on-the-go are hand-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 let your cup directly touch 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. Many coffee chains and food outlets recently announced they were no longer allowing customers to bring their own cups to use and refill in its stores. Do you think this will continue, and what does this mean?

- Today, many businesses are rightly focused on how to keep people all safe. But when the coronavirus passes, plastic pollution will continue to be a huge environmental issue.
- The coronavirus crisis is showing us that we don't have the systems we need for reusable to-go, take-out and food delivery. Because of this, there is likely to be an explosion of single-use products as restaurants scramble to shift to food delivery to survive, and people shift to dining at home instead of eating out.
- But in parts of the world, companies have already developed reusable to-go services for take-out and food delivery. These businesses provide clean, sanitized reusable cups and to-go containers to restaurants and cafes. The dirty ones are collected, washed and sanitized in commercial dishwashers, then put back into service.

5. 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. Hand-free dispensers and methods are part of the solution, as is 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.



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Address: Östra Ågatan 53, SE-753 22, Uppsala, Sweden

+46 (0) 18 71 11 70

Email: secretariat@ccb.se

URL: www.ccb.se