Ensuring safety in seafood work places

Sujit Das
Technical Officer-INFOfISH
COVID-19 & Seafood sector

• There is no evidence suggesting that food products and food packaging have been associated with transmission and spread of COVID-19 confirmed by the U.S. FDA and EFSA

• Although COVID-19 has no proven relation with the seafood sector but it has already made an unprecedented impact on seafood manufacturers, retailers, fishers and fish farmers

• World Trade expected to fall by between 13-33 % in 2020 as COVID-19 pandemic disrupted normal economic activity and life around the world
How seafood workplaces being affected?

Personal hygiene and sanitation is mandatory under HACCP guidelines at every stage. During a pandemic like COVID-19 it should be done repeatedly. Seafood factories generally ensure the basic fitness of workers and food safety protocols through HACCP, cGMP and ISO guidelines. While re-evaluation of ongoing food safety programmes addressing personal hygiene including handwashing and respiratory etiquette is necessary to prevent:

- Disruption in seafood supply chain
- Change in patterns of seafood business
- Increased rate of workers absenteeism
Why safety is required?

To prepare safe workplaces, continue business and ensure food safety in seafood supply chain; an interim guideline is required to respond COVID-19. It will also help to:

A. Reduce transmission among workers  
B. Maintain safe workplaces  
C. Maintain healthy business operations
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A. Reduce transmission among workers

A.1. Develop infectious disease preparedness and response plan (if one doesn’t already exist)
  - Workers risks at workplace, at home and community, individual risk and controls to address the risks

A.2. Identify and isolate sick individual
  - Sick individuals should be identified and isolated, encourage self-monitoring, restrict entries in isolation areas, maintain social distance. Actively encourage them to stay at home and bound to follow the preventive guidelines.

A.3. Educate workers to reduce spread
  - How to protect, aware about high risk for complications and what to do when sick. Workers should also be trained regarding common guidelines i.e. hand washing, personal hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
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B. Maintain safe work place

B.1. Safe work practices
- Give emphasis to personal hygiene, ensure sufficient soap and water or sanitizers. Routine disinfection of workstation, keyboard, telephone, handrails and doorknobs. Avoid them using common phone, desk, office, work tools and equipment's.

B.2. Implement factory flexibilities and protections
- Use high efficiency air filter, increase ventilation rate and install drive through /takeaway windows

B.3. Use of Personal Protection Equipment's
- Ensure use of face mask, face shield, PPE, hair net and shoe cover and train employees regarding proper disposal of PPE

B.4. Routine environmental cleaning and disinfection
- Perform routine cleaning and disinfection; and activities enhanced while positive individual reported

B.5. Restriction in travel
- Traveling within the country or abroad may not be medically advisable
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C. Maintain healthy business operations
   - Identify a workplace coordinator who is responsible for contingency response

C.1. Implement supportive policies and practices
   - Flexible sick leave, encourage home office and virtual meeting, discourage outdoor customer visit and allow extra shifts to reduce no of employees

C.2. Determine operational technique during high absenteeism
   - Prepare to institute flexible workplace and policies. Cross train employees to perform essential functions

C.3. Assess essential functions
   - Identify alternative supplier/market, prioritize existing business, discuss with partner and suspend some operation if needed

C.4. Consider policies and practices for social distancing
   - Increase space among employees, arrange drive through/takeaway partitions for customers, deliver services remotely (e.g. telephone, video, online)
Some specific measures to ensure food safety

- Fishing vessel operators should maintain quarantine and farm, hatchery owners, feed millers, processors, distributors, seafood market place should maintain stringent biosecurity measures.
- Seafood market place should arrange hygiene and sanitation facilities for the visitors in entry and exit point and maintain physical distance strictly.
- There should be a strong co-ordination between production and supply chain to manage the inventory judiciously.
- Processors, distributors, retailer, food service and allied industries should carry on business maintaining food safety measures for community continuity and community resilience.
Some specific measures to ensure food safety

▪ Consumers should apply “Sterile technique” before stocking packed, frozen or canned seafood in house

▪ Consumers must follow the steps Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill to keep food safe and prevent illness during seafood handling, cooking and preparation

▪ Whole sellers, restaurants and supermarkets should maintain preventive measures during home deliveries and drive through options

▪ Propaganda like ‘Do not eat fish or seafood’ in social media should be monitored. Whereas people should be encouraged to eat fish regularly to build immunity
Conclusive remarks

✓ Handwashing, personal hygiene, social distancing, identifying infected person and testing are considered as the short and preventive food safety measures.

✓ Seafood actors should give emphasis in creating more suppliers and diversified markets, prioritize existing customers, production plan during contingency, re-evaluate the risks and awareness among workers as the long term food safety measures and sustainable business.

✓ A comprehensive online platform among the seafood value chain actors can help to minimize loss in seafood sector.
References

1. Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) /CDC.pdf
THANK YOU