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Good food manufacturing practices in the Covid-19 context

Boas práticas de fabricação de alimentos no contexto da Covid-19

Abstract

Introduction: After the start of the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus, the world was faced with the need for social isolation. All services not considered essential were instructed to remain indefinitely closed. In this scenario, food services were able to continue working, however, with a range of changes in their routines and good manufacturing practices. **Objective:** This study aimed to analyze the main changes that occurred in the good manufacturing practices of Food Units, after the beginning of the new coronavirus pandemic. **Method:** A qualitative study was carried out, with data production through online interviews with managers of Food Units. The questionnaire used was developed especially for this project, being divided into three stages: personal data, unit data and changes made due to the pandemic. **Result:** In total, the survey obtained 70 responses, from professionals who work in the city of Curitiba, PR. Among the actions most often mentioned, we highlight the acquisition of new protective equipment, reduction of cafeteria capacity and increase in the use of cleaning products and alcohol gel. **Conclusion:** The development of good practices and the implementation of additional safety measures can contribute to reducing the transmission of the new coronavirus, but it is essential that professionals adopt only measures based on current legislation and guidelines of the top health organizations, in order to avoid the dissemination of dubious and erroneous information.

Keywords: Good manufacturing practices. Restaurants. Corona virus.

Resumo

Introdução: Após o início da pandemia ocasionada pelo novo coronavírus, o mundo se deparou com a necessidade do isolamento social. Todos os serviços não considerados essenciais tiveram a orientação de permanecerem fechados por tempo indeterminado. Nesse cenário, os serviços de alimentação puderam continuar funcionando, porém, com uma gama de alterações em suas rotinas e nas boas práticas de fabricação. **Objetivo:** Este trabalho teve como objetivo analisar as principais mudanças ocorridas nas boas práticas de fabricação de Unidades de Alimentação, após o início da pandemia do novo coronavírus. **Método:** Foi realizado um estudo qualitativo, com produção de dados por meio de entrevistas *on-line*, com gestores de Unidades de Alimentação. O questionário utilizado foi desenvolvido especialmente para este projeto, sendo segmentado em três etapas: dados pessoais, dados da unidade e alterações realizadas devido à pandemia. **Resultado:** Ao total, a pesquisa obteve 70 respostas, provenientes de profissionais que atuam na cidade de Curitiba-PR. Dentre as medidas mais citadas, destaca-se a aquisição de novos equipamentos de proteção, redução da capacidade do refeitório e aumento no uso de produtos de limpeza e álcool em gel. **Conclusão:** O fortalecimento das boas práticas e a implantação

de medidas de segurança adicionais podem contribuir para a redução da transmissão do novo coronavírus, mas é fundamental que os profissionais adotem unicamente medidas baseadas nas legislações vigentes e nas orientações dos principais órgãos de saúde, a fim de evitar a disseminação de informações dúbias e errôneas

Palavras-chave: Boas práticas de fabricação. Restaurantes. Coronavírus.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 began in a historical scenario – the world was paralyzed by the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus – also known as Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared on January 30 that the outbreak of the disease constituted a Public Health Emergency of international Importance. The disease, hitherto unknown, caused many uncertainties, given what science has discovered about the virus in the ongoing pandemic,¹ constantly updating coping strategies and their repercussions on a global scale.²

Among the main recommendations about the disease, social distancing stood out. Several industries had to adjust their routines, which caused a strong economic, social and emotional impact on the population.^{3,4} In this scenario, companies had to adapt to the *home office* concept and the Unidades de Alimentação e Nutrição – UANs (Food and Nutrition Units) needed to reinvent themselves to continue operating under the new legislation.⁵ The mandatory aspect of social distancing led to changes in the way of eating and, as a result, in the flow of those units. Amidst so many changes, food delivery services gained scale in the daily lives of the population.⁶

In this context, the need for the dissemination of correct and scientifically based information became clearer, so that professionals in the food area could adapt their units and services offered. Given the above, this article analyzes the main changes that have occurred in the UANs' good manufacturing practices in the context of the Covid-19 pandemics.

METHODS

A cross-sectional, quantitative study with production data was carried out through online interviews with nutritionists who work directly with food production. The online format was chosen considering social isolation recommendations due to Covid-19. Managers of Food and Nutrition Units – units responsible for providing meals, in this case, administrative restaurants and hospital kitchens – of both genders and over 18 years of age, through the LinkedIn platform, were invited to take part in the interview. As exclusion criteria, we consider the incorrect filling of the form, individuals under the age of 18, in addition to professionals who are not in the field of Nutrition and who do not work as managers.

The questionnaire used was developed especially for this project, segmented into three stages: personal data, unit data and changes made due to the pandemic. It relies on 25 open-ended, easy, and understandable questions (chart1). The time expected to answer it is 30 minutes. The project was submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee. The Termo de Consentimento de Uso de Dados-TCUD (Data Use Consent Agreement) and the Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido-TCLE (Informed Consent Form) were available on the first page of the interview. The interviews were held between July and October, 2020. According to data published by the Conselho Nacional de Secretários de Saúde -CONASS (National Council of Health Secretaries) and the Ministry of Health, the survey was conducted during the pandemic apex in Braziland, therefore, under the stricter measures adopted during 2020.

Chart 1. Questionnaire Structure

Profile of interviewees	1	Full name:
	2	Age:
	3	Occupation:
	4	Occupation Area:
	5	Experience:
	6	Position:

Chart 1. Questionnaire Structure

Profile of units	7	Business name:
	8	Business location:
	9	Number of diners per day:
	10	What is the distribution modality?
	11	What is the management modality?
	12	What is the number of meals offered per day (example: two – lunch and dinner)?
	13	How many employees per shift?
Main changes during the pandemic	14	From your standpoint, what were the main changes in your unit after the pandemic started?
	15	What were the biggest difficulties found?
	16	How did the staff handle the changes made?
	17	How did customers see the changes made?
	18	Which media were used to communicate with customers?
	19	Has a contingency plan been prepared? If so, how was it recorded?
	20	Which sectors have most actively participated in the contingency plan?
	21	Was there any increase in unit costs? If yes, was this cost passed on to the customer?
	22	How did you get updated on current legislation at the different stages of the pandemic?
	23	How did you control the employees' mask change, established in the legislation?
	24	In your opinion, what was the role of the nutritionist in this pandemic?
	25	Which security measures will remain in place after the pandemic?

In Paraná, Decree no. 4942 was published on 30 June 2020, on restrictive measures to fight Covid-19. It established that non-essential economic activities should be suspended for 14 days. Also, according to this decree, the municipalities referred to in it were authorized to adopt more restrictive measures if the local epidemiological scenario required. This decree was revoked by Decree no. 5882 on 7 October 2020.^{7,8}

In Curitiba, SMS Resolution no. 1, published on 16 April 2020, stood out for being the first to impose and instruct on containment measures for the spread of the virus. The measures included complementary guidelines for social distancing, covering public spaces. These regionalized measures were based on laws, ordinances and regulations at the federal level.⁹

To prepare the questionnaire questions, three Technical Notes (NT) published during the pandemic were used as a basis, namely: NT 47/2020,¹⁰ which guides the industry on the use of gloves and masks in establishments; NT 48/2020,¹¹ which deals with good manufacturing practices, adding and reinforcing measures for the proper handling of food; and NT 49/2020,¹² which brings recommendations for food services with customer service.

In order to understand how these regulations impacted the routine of the UANs, the guiding question of this study was related to changes made in the hygienic and sanitary control of the units, based on legislation, in different aspects of production and distribution, as described below.

The data collected were processed using the software Microsoft Excel® and, at a later stage, a descriptive analysis of the data was performed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS E DISCUSSION

The survey results were segmented into the three question themes of the questionnaire, namely: personal data, unit data and changes made due to the pandemic. The survey received 70 answers; however, two of them were not considered for not fulfilling all the inclusion criteria. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of the sample. The respondents were also questioned as for the characteristics of their meal producing units. Table 2 lists the data relative to the units' profile.

Table1. Profile of Interviewees. Curitiba-PR, 2021.

n = 68	Percentage Data	
Gender	Female	100% (68)
	Male	0% (0)
Age Range	18-25years old	26,47% (18)
	25-30years old	14,70% (10)
	30-60years old	58,82% (40)
Occupation	Administrator	26,47% (18)
	Nutritionist	73,52% (50)
Occupation Area	Quality	13,23% (9)
	Food Production	76,47% (52)
	Clinic and Production	10,3% (7)
Time of Service	Less than 5 years	10,3% (7)
	Between 5 and 10 years	75% (51)
	More than 10 years	14,70% (10)
Position	Production Supervisor	36,76% (25)
	Production Nutritionist	19,11% (13)
	Kitchen Supervisor	22% (15)
	Coordinator	22% (15)

Table 2. Profile of Units. Curitiba-PR, 2021

n = 68	Percentage Data	
Location	Curitiba – Paraná	100% (68)
Number of diners per day	< 500	2.94% (2)
	500-1.000	92.64% (63)
	> 1.000	4.4% (3)
Food Distribution Modality	<i>Self-Service</i>	85.2% (58)
	<i>Rotisserie</i>	8.8% (6)
	<i>À la carte</i>	5.9% (4)
Management System	Institutional	92.64% (63)
	Commercial	7.3% (5)
Number of meals per day	< 100	17.64% (12)
	100-500	66% (45)
	> 500	16% (11)
Number of employees	< 20	2.94% (2)
	20-60	80.9% (55)
	60-100	14.70% (10)
	> 100	1.4% (1)

With regard the changes made in the UANs, the change in the way food is distributed is noteworthy. The main finding was relative to the replacement of the self-service (buffet) format experienced by 35% of the respondents. Such measure confirms the municipal Resolution no. 1, published in April 2020, Curitiba, PR, which, according to its article 6, suspended the buffet-style operation. In October of that year, that resolution was revoked by municipal decree no. 1350/2020, which authorized the service again due to the stabilization of number of cases in the capital city of the State.¹³ Although the legislation was against the continuation of self-service during the period in which the interview was carried out, 20.5% of the participants reported the maintenance of the self-service system. In these cases, the managers replaced buffet utensils every 30 minutes, and adopted the use of disposable plastic gloves during the distribution process. According to the Technical Note no.47 published by ANVISA on 3 June 2020, there is no evidence that the use of gloves effectively prevents the transmission of the Covid-19, whereas the most important recommendation would be proper hand hygiene.¹⁰ Table 3 describes the main changes made by these managers.

Table 3. Principais alterações nas unidades. Curitiba-PR, 2021.

n = 68	Percentage Data	
Main changes from the manager's standpoint	Replacement of the self-service format	35% (24)
	Increase in the room cleaning frequency	16% (11)
	Adherence to delivery service	8% (5)
	Implementation of home office for administrative positions	18% (12)
	Increased frequency of hand hygiene	19% (13)
	Supply of disposable masks	66% (45)
	Control of number of cafeteria customers	100% (68)
	Increased visual signage	44% (30)
Major difficulties encountered	Employee layoff	77% (52)
	Questions on the legislation in effect	37% (25)
	Adjustment to changes	89% (61)
Staff reaction to changes	Resistant	16% (11)
	Neutral	30% (20)
	Favorable	54% (37)
Customer reaction to changes	Resistant	72% (49)
	Neutral	10% (7)
	Favorable	18% (12)
Media used for guidance on changes	Posters and stickers	22% (15)
	Social media	100% (68)
	Electronic equipment in the cafeteria	38% (26)
	Institutional programs	34% (23)
Preparation of contingency plan	Prepared and recorded in Standard Operating Procedure format	100% (68)
Area that participated most actively in the contingency plan	Marketing	48.5% (33)
	SESMT	32% (22)
	Human Resources	30% (20)
	Quality	30% (20)
Changes in unit costs	Increase	59% (40)
	Reduction	0% (0)
	No change	41% (28)
Managers' source of update on current legislation	Social media	22% (15)
	Informative booklets	48.5% (33)
	Website of local nutrition councils	17.6% (12)
	Website of ANVISA	12% (8)

Tabela 3. Principais alterações nas unidades. Curitiba-PR, 2021.(Cont.)

n = 68	Percentage Data	
Methods of control over the use of masks by employees	Masks with different colors	7.3% (5)
	Alarm	4.4% (3)
	Employees' signature	38% (26)
	No control	50% (34)
Role of the nutritionist in the pandemic from the managers' standpoint	Ensure food and nutrition security	56% (38)
	Prevent virus contamination inside the units	95.5% (65)
	Instruct employees	28% (19)
	Adapt the unit to current legislation	76.4% (52)
Security measures that will remain in place after the end of the pandemic	Hand sanitizers at strategic points of the production area	84% (57)
	Less seats at the cafeteria	7.3% (5)
	Replacement of the self-service format	37% (25)
	Increased frequency of hand hygiene for employees	68% (46)

It should also be noted that most of the changes reported were carried out in the environment of the units. Technical Note no. 49, published on 2 June 2020, brings the main recommendations relative to the environment, namely: ensure that table layout has safe distancing between individuals; provide neutral soap, paper towels and 70% alcohol gel; keep the place ventilated and intensify the cleaning of the environment.¹² With regard to environmental sanitation, similarly to Technical Note no. 49, the Technical Note no. 48, published on 5 June 2020 by ANVISA, suggests improving sanitation procedures for higher frequency contact surfaces. Thus, units should double their cleaning and disinfection efforts. In this sense, 16% of the respondents reported an increase in the frequency of environment cleaning.¹¹

Although most respondents distribute meals in the same production place, some of the managers resorted to implementing a delivery service during the pandemic. This modality has become a good option during periods of greater efforts for social distancing, but it is noteworthy that this type of service must also follow the recommendations of the main health agencies.¹⁴

Of the respondents, 59% stated that there was an increase in the cost of meals after the onset of the pandemic. As for the input cost increase, data from the National Food Staples Survey, conducted by the Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos-DIEESE (Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies), indicated that, in 2020, food staples prices increased in all the surveyed capitals. It is important to mention that, with the increase in the cost of meals, this amount is often passed on to the customer, as in the case of commercial restaurants, making meals more expensive.^{15,16}

It should also be noted that 77% reported downsizing their staff due to medical leave and layoffs. With regard to medical leave due to symptoms compatible with Covid-19, the respondents claimed to have carried out the control of the employees' signs and symptoms provided for in the legislation. Technical Note no. 18, published on 6 April 2020 by ANVISA, recommends the businesses establish specific procedures to assess the health status of the food-handling staff.¹⁴ With regard to the layoff rate, it is clear that in addition to the health crisis, one of the consequences of the pandemic was the unemployment increase. In Brazil, the measures adopted by the government were: a relief funding for the socially vulnerable population, increase in unemployment insurance period, full leave or reduction in working hours subsidized by the federal government, reduction of rates paid by companies to self-employed social

services (the so-called S System), relief of the Imposto sobre Operações Financeiras -IOF (tax on financial transactions) and credit operation tax.¹⁷

It should also be highlighted that 18% of the respondents claimed to have adopted the home office modality for employees in charge of administrative tasks at the UANs. This modality is now included in the new forms of organization and work relationships, and should be governed by Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho-CLT (Labor Law Code).¹⁸ It should also be noted that telecommuting presents challenges.

Another important data mentioned by 19% of the respondents relates to the increased frequency of hand sanitation on the part of the employees. This measure is in compliance with Technical Note no. 18 published by ANVISA on 6 April 2020, which states that: "hand cleaning is one of the most effective strategies to reduce the risk of transmission and contamination by the new coronavirus".¹⁴

As for employee adherence to the new recommendations and procedures, the majority stated that the staff accepted them well; however, 16% claim to have a lot of resistance from the team. Studies indicate that the pandemic situation has generated mood swings, contributing to the instability of organizations.¹⁹

As for the use of PPEs, we should highlight their unique role in the protection of employees, who should be adequately trained for that use. This information complies with Technical Note no. 18, which states that businesses must ensure employee access to PPEs and provide training. Because it is an airborne virus, the use of PPEs becomes indispensable and a standard precaution measure.^{20,21}

Subsequently to these recommendations, 66% of the respondents mentioned making disposable masks available to their employees. According to the MS/SEPRT Joint Ordinance no. 20, published in 18 June 2020, organizations must instruct and prepare workers on mask use, cleaning, disposal and replacement. It should also be considered that PPE and other protective equipment cannot be shared by workers during work activities.^{22,23}

It was noticed that during the implementation of contingency measures in companies, nutrition services had the support of other areas of knowledge. The areas that most helped the nutrition service in fighting the pandemic and implementing new safety procedures, according to the respondents, were: marketing (48.5%), SESMT - Serviços Especializados em Engenharia de Segurança e em Medicina do Trabalho (Specialized Services in Safety Engineering and Occupational Medicine) (32%), human resources (30%) and quality (30%). In this scenario, 44% of the respondents claimed to have increased the number of visual signage in the food distribution places. The dissemination of informational materials helps individuals understand and accept the new procedures, due to the protective measures implemented.²⁴

The important role of the nutritionist during the pandemic is then reinforced, as evidenced in the survey responses, to overcome the difficulties encountered and provide quality and safe food, in addition to ensuring safe working conditions for their staff.

CONCLUSION

Although there is no evidence of contamination by the new coronavirus through food, the development of good practices and the implementation of additional safety measures can contribute to reducing the transmission of the disease in food and nutrition services. Based on the main findings of this study, it is noted that the interviewed managers needed to adjust to the new legislation, 100% of whom prepared a contingency plan and reported it as Standard Operating Procedure.

Among the most adopted measures listed in the plans, we highlight the following: limiting the number of cafeteria customers (100%), staff downsizing (77%) and replacement of the self-service food distribution model (35%). Of the respondents, 84% stated that will continue to offer alcohol in gel at strategic points of the production site.

Given the above, the managers play a fundamental role in ensuring food and nutritional safety, by ensuring the hygienic and sanitary quality of the food offered, as well as protecting its employees and customers through measures based on current legislation and recommendations of the main health bodies, in order to prevent the dissemination of misinformation.

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