

# Cash Handling & COVID-19

## How safe is cash?



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In the current uncertain climate with the Coronavirus impacting many countries throughout the world, having the ability to automate transactions is even more important for practicing good hygiene for businesses and society as whole.

At present, authorities have identified where people could contract COVID-19 but are currently unclear how long coronavirus can survive on different surfaces. COVID-19 can spread as long as it is able to make contact with a surface or person. In theory, this means that the virus could spread via banknotes, although according to experts, the chances of contracting it from currency are very low. Indeed, Dr Christine Tait-Burkard, a research fellow and expert in infection at the University of Edinburgh's Roslin Institute said, "People would not contract COVID-19 from a note unless someone is using a banknote to sneeze in."<sup>1</sup>

Earlier this month The World Health Organisation (WHO) were quoted in the UK media saying banknotes could transmit COVID-19 as they may cling to the surface for a number of days. They also were cited advising people to use contactless payments instead of cash to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission<sup>2</sup>. However, they have since issued a statement saying that they were misrepresented. WHO spokeswoman Fadela Chaib said, "WHO did NOT say banknotes would transmit COVID-19, nor have we issued any warnings or statements about this. We were asked if we thought banknotes could transmit COVID-19 and we said you should wash your hands after handling money, especially if handling or eating food. Doing so is good hygiene practice<sup>3</sup>."

In addition, The ESTA (The Cash Management Companies Association) issued a statement on 18 March stating that there is no risk of contamination with COVID-19 on banknotes and no evidence that cash helps COVID-19 spread. In their statement they made reference to different authorities such as the World Health Organization, the European Central Bank and other national central banks, plus renowned scientific institutions who have confirmed that there is no scientific evidence and have ruled out that the coronavirus spreads through banknotes<sup>4</sup>.

Bundesbank Executive Board member Johannes Beermann has indicated that the risk of picking up coronavirus via cash is extremely minimal. In a press briefing at the Bundesbank, Mr Beermann noted that "the probability of becoming ill from handling cash is smaller than from many other objects used in everyday life"<sup>5</sup>.

## Automating Transactions & Good Hygiene

Amid the panic buying and empty supermarket shelves, local shops will undoubtedly see an increase in the number of customers, some of which only accept cash. Across many parts of Europe, cash transaction automation is already practiced. For example, in some butchers in Europe, cash can be deposited directly into machines and change given without the need for cash to be handled by the shop owner. Therefore, cash transactions can just as clean as card keypads and payment terminals which are continually being touched by many.

Overall, handling cards, mobile devices and touching keypads in public places, as well as many other surfaces, can carry an equal risk. What is important is frequent hand sanitising to kill off any viral droplets, given that the virus has a fragile envelope surrounding it which can be readily destroyed through disinfectants<sup>6</sup>.

According to The Wall Street Journal, it might be the right decision to keep extra cash on hand and consumers who favour mobile wallets might have just as much to worry about as those who handle cash, since smartphones can be “a haven for germs.”<sup>7</sup> Banks around the world are taking extra steps to make sure any cash they handle is sanitised. In China, the country’s central bank has taken this a step further and implemented a new strategy to contain the virus by disinfecting and destroying potentially infected cash.

In conclusion, it seems that the best protection is to follow the recommendations of health authorities and always maintain good hygiene levels. This means regularly sanitise hands and disinfect surfaces, which may have been contaminated by viral droplets, while avoiding, as far as possible, touching one’s nose, eyes or mouth.

1 <https://www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/1251075/Coronavirus-banknotes-can-coronavirus-spread-banknotes>

2 <https://fullfact.org/health/coronavirus-WHO-cash-comments/>

3 <https://www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/1251075/Coronavirus-banknotes-can-coronavirus-spread-banknotes>

4 [https://www.g4s.com/en-gb/media-centre/news/2020/03/19/esta-statement-on-cash-and-coronavirus?utm\\_source=facebook](https://www.g4s.com/en-gb/media-centre/news/2020/03/19/esta-statement-on-cash-and-coronavirus?utm_source=facebook)

5 <https://www.bundesbank.de/en/tasks/topics/cash-poses-no-particular-risk-of-infection-for-public-828762>

6 <https://cashessentials.org/new-coronavirus-health-crisis-separating-fact-from-fiction/>

7 <https://www.paymentssource.com/list/coronavirus-vs-cash-whats-really-happening>