

Second-hand clothing imports are presumed to be safe

Many countries around the globe have restricted the movement of their citizens and sometimes even goods to fight the spread of the coronavirus. BIR, the Bureau of International Recycling and EuRIC, the European Recycling Industries' Confederation strongly support those implemented policies and measures which are essential to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, BIR and EuRIC would like to express concern about the restrictions issued by some countries to stop the import of second hand clothing based on the presumption that clothes coming from Europe or elsewhere may be contaminated with the coronavirus. While we entirely understand that governments want to protect their workers such as dockworkers, haulage company workers handling containers or workers who deal with the further processing of used textiles, it is unlikely that those workers can get infected by handling these materials and goods in trade due to the low environmental stability of COVID-19¹ and the average journey time of sea freight from Europe to end markets in Africa or Asia.

The existing knowledge about the current pathways through which the coronavirus COVID-19 is transmitted is based on knowledge of other closely related coronaviruses (SARS and MERS). The transmission routes of these viruses are well known. The most important route of transmission is when the coronaviruses of infected people or animals are released into the air via droplets through coughing or sneezing and then inhaled. Transmission can also occur when a person touches surfaces where there are droplets and then touches their face, particularly their nose or eyes. Hence the advice to wash hands regularly with soap and water and not to touch one's face.

According to the Federal Institute of Risk Assessment in Germany (BfR), based on the transmission routes determined so far and the relatively low environmental stability of coronaviruses, it is unlikely that imported goods such as imported food or commodities and toys, tools, computers, clothing or shoes could be a source of infection of the COVID 19 virus.

In the case of used clothing the average journey time it takes for a shipment to travel as sea freight to its end market in Africa or Asia is typically much longer than the virus can survive outside the body even on hard surfaces. Based on the evidence that is currently available it is very unlikely that exported used clothing could transmit COVID-19. **Nevertheless, as an added precaution we recommend that everybody who purchases used clothing washes the garment with soap and water before wearing it for the first time.** Safety measures for workers such as social distancing applicable in the country of destination shall also be observed to limit the risk of contamination between workers.

¹ Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung (BfR): <https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/349/can-the-new-type-of-coronavirus-be-transmitted-via-food-and-objects.pdf>

Some types of common surfaces and the lifespan of the coronavirus on those surfaces²:

Surface	Lifespan of COVID-19 Virus
Paper and tissue paper	3 hours
Copper	4 hours
Cardboard	24 hours
Wood	2 days
Cloth	2 days
Stainless steel	2-3 days
Polypropylene Plastic	3 days
Glass	4 days
Paper money	4 days
Outside of surgical mask	7 days

For further information, please contact:

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² [New England Journal of Medicine - Aerosol and Surface Stability of SARS-CoV-2 as Compared with SARS-CoV-1](#) and [The Lancet Microbe - Stability of SARS-CoV-2 in different environmental conditions](#)