

# Reusable containers safe during Covid-19 pandemic, say experts

[theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/22/reusable-containers-safe-during-covid-19-pandemic-say-experts](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/22/reusable-containers-safe-during-covid-19-pandemic-say-experts)

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More than 100 scientists will publish a signed statement on Monday to reassure the public that reusable containers are safe during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Amid fears that the environmental battle to reduce single-use plastic waste is losing ground over fears of virus contamination, the 119 scientists from 18 countries say reusable containers do not increase the chance of virus transmission.

Some cafes have stopped accepting reusable cups during the pandemic, raising fears that the push for sustainable and reusable packaging is being set back. Campaigners have also recently accused the plastic industry of exploiting the crisis to lobby against bans on single-use plastics.

The statement by the scientists, who include epidemiologists, virologists, biologists, chemists and doctors, says that based on the best available science and guidance from public health professionals, reusable systems can be used safely by employing basic hygiene.

Charlotte K Williams, a professor of chemistry at Oxford University and one of the signatories, said: “I hope we can come out of the Covid-19 crisis more determined than ever to solve the pernicious problems associated with plastics in the environment.

“In terms of the general public’s response to the Covid crisis, we should make every attempt to avoid over-consumption of single-use plastics, particularly in applications like packaging.”

Evidence indicates that the virus spreads primarily from inhaling aerosolised droplets, rather than through contact with surfaces, the scientists say.

Studies show the virus can remain infectious on surfaces for varying times depending on the material, so in order to prevent transmission as much as possible consumers should assume that any surface in a public space – reusable or disposable – could be contaminated with the virus.

Scientists' advice for consumers is to wash reusable containers thoroughly with hot water and detergent or soap.

Nina Schrank, a campaigner at Greenpeace UK, said: "More and more of us own reusable cups and bottles to cut down on throwaway plastic and protect our wildlife, seas and rivers. Covid-19 has changed many of our routines, so it's great that more than 100 experts have reassured us that reusable containers can be safe for food, drinks and other groceries during the pandemic, if washed properly. "

A ban on single-use plastics will come into force in Europe next year, but there are concerns the packaging industry is using the pandemic to push back against it. The Foodservice Packaging Association (FPA) has put pressure on the Welsh government to delay its ban, with warnings that not doing so would compromise hygiene.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has moved its ban on single-use plastic items back to October because of the challenges of the pandemic, but says it is still determined to bring it in.