

FAQ for Certification Bodies regarding Coronavirus (Covid-19) disease



Version 1

March 23, 2020

ENGLISH

FAQ – regarding Coronavirus (Covid-19)

1. Audit Protocol (part 1)

1.1 Topic: Postponement of audit

1.1.1 What should be done if an audit needs to be postponed due to the current situation regarding Coronavirus?

We strongly recommend using the recently provided tick box in the IFS Database. By ticking this box, certification bodies can demonstrate to all database users that a planned audit had to be postponed because of the Corona crisis. In addition to the tick, we highly recommend writing a statement in the comment field that points out the following:

- reason for the postponement
- recent status of production
- additional measures taken by the company to ensure safety and quality of products (e.g. internal audits, employee trainings/instructions)
- additional surveillance measures taken by the CB
- next steps in audit planning

All Database users who have marked the company as a favourite will receive a notification with the information entered in the comment field. We recommend using this tool in order to support the companies in their communication with their retailers and other customers.

The planned audit dates shall not be deleted from the diary function (see also 1.2.1).

1.2 Topic: Diary function

1.2.1 In the current situation, is it still mandatory to maintain and update the diary function of the IFS Database with all audit dates, at latest two (2) weeks before the audit due date?

Yes, the diary function is still mandatory to be used as described in the standard(s). In case of the postponement of the audit due to the Corona situation, the certification body shall not delete the planned audit dates from the diary function.

1.3 Topic: IFS Database extension

1.3.1 In the newsletter from 17th March 2020, IFS communicated that certificates that expired due to the Coronavirus will remain visible over the next twelve (12) months. What does this mean?

Only if the certification body responsible ticks “postponed due to the Corona Crisis” the certificate will remain visible until a new IFS Certificate has been uploaded (after the next certification audit has taken place successfully). All other certificates will not be visible anymore.

1.3.2 What is the deadline for information to be added to the database extension if an IFS Audit could not be carried out due to the Coronavirus?

The tick-box “postponed due to the Corona crisis” can be ticked up until three (3) months after the certificate runs out. If this is not done, the company will no longer be visible in the search function of the database. Nevertheless, we strongly recommend that the information should be added as soon as it is clear that the audit cannot be carried out.

Note: Additional information can still be added after activation of the tick box for Corona information. All companies, which marked the company as a favourite, will receive a notification if the information is edited.

1.4 Topic: Extension audits

1.4.1 How should cases be handled where an audit is carried out, but some production lines are not operating?

Please note that if no exceptional rules have been communicated by IFS related to a specific topic, then the normative standard rules always apply. Therefore, in this case of non-operating production lines during the audit, an extension audit will need to be performed at a later stage when the lines are running again (see e.g. IFS Food Doctrine, 1.3.4.3).

1.5 Topic: Unannounced audits

1.5.1 As it becomes increasingly difficult to organize unannounced audits due to the uncertainty of whether a company is currently able to operate or not, is it possible to switch from the unannounced to the announced option?

If a company wants to switch from the unannounced to announced option due to the Coronavirus situation, then the registration in the database may expire. The CB has to remind the company to inform their customer about this change immediately. There is no need for further actions. The IFS Food Safety Check, which is organized by IFS and could be done after the crisis, might be a good alternative. For more information: <https://www.ifs-certification.com/index.php/en/ifs/quality-assurance/ifs-food-safety-checks>.

If the company would like to postpone the audit and to go through a complete unannounced audit after the corona crisis, the certification body can let the current registration expire. As soon as audits are possible again, the certification body can use “option 2” to set up a new unannounced audit registration.

1.6 Topic: Use of translators

1.6.1 Could an audit be carried out in a different language with the use of a translator in the countries where this is normally not allowed according to IFS Doctrines (e.g. IFS Food Doctrine, 1.5.2.1), if this is the only possibility to conduct the audit due to current restrictions?

Such a special permission is generally possible if this helps the audit to be conducted under the current circumstances. This needs to be requested in advance of the audit by sending an e-mail to the IFS Auditor Management (auditor@ifs-certification.com) and will then be decided case by case. For now, this possibility will exist for audits performed until 30th of June.

1.7 Topic: Use of technical experts

1.7.1 Could an audit be carried out with the use of a technical expert (e.g. IFS Food Doctrine, 1.5.2.4) in Europe, if this is the only possibility to conduct the audit due to current restrictions?

Such a special permission is generally possible if this helps the audit to be conducted under the current circumstances. An example for the use of a technical expert would be if the auditor who was originally scheduled for the audit cannot attend, but a different auditor would be available who is missing a certain product or tech scope. This needs to be requested in advance of the audit by sending an e-mail to IFS Auditor Management (auditor@ifs-certification.com) and will then be decided case by case. All further rules for using a technical expert will apply (see e.g. IFS Food Doctrine, 1.5.2.4). For now, this possibility will exist for audits performed until 30th June.

Note: Loan agreements can also be a solution in such cases to be able to conduct audits when a

CB has no auditor available who covers all scopes of an audit.

1.8 Topic: Remote audits

1.8.1 Does IFS consider the possibility of allowing remote checks due to the current situation?

IFS is currently exploring and analyzing if and how a remote check could be implemented. Nevertheless, we would like to point out that no IFS Certificate validity will be extended and no new Certificate shall be issued without a full on-site audit! Further information will follow by the last week of March.

1.9 Topic: Cancellation of contract between CB and certified company

1.9.1 What can a CB do if a company is asking to cancel the contract with immediate effect because it is currently not possible for the CB to perform the audit?

A termination of the certification agreement with immediate effect must lead to a subsequent withdrawal of the certificate. According to ISO/IEC 17065:2012 the certification body can only maintain the certificate if, on the basis of a contract, monitoring activities (e.g. special investigation visits, etc.) are possible. Since there is no longer a legal binding contract in place, the certificate must be withdrawn immediately.

3. Auditor Management (part 3)

3.1 Topic: IFS Auditor trainings & examinations

3.1.1 Will IFS cancel the IFS Examinations and Trainings that are planned for the next weeks?

All Examination and Training sessions scheduled by IFS until mid-June will be postponed. IFS will provide further information on this topic in a separate newsletter.

General note regarding online trainings:

while we believe that direct, face-to-face interaction often presents an essential part of the learning experience, we would like to give you more flexibility with regards to your auditor trainings during this challenging time. Especially since many auditors have more flexibility in the coming weeks due to cancellation of audits, we welcome the suggestion to invest this time in well-conducted online trainings to lower the burden on auditors' schedules for the time after the Corona crisis. By referring to "online trainings", IFS means trainings which are carried out via a live webinar meeting, including the possibility of screen sharing etc.

When conducting an online training, we kindly ask you to take care of the following points:

- Before the training: make sure that the online training is well designed, taking advantage of the modern tools that are available for such purpose, in order to give your auditors the best training experience possible.
- The training should be performed in not more than 4 units à 4 hours. The total time of 16 hours shall be adhered with.
- The CB is obliged to record these sessions and store the data (for at least 3 years). Identification of participants by name and time frame of the session must be possible.

3.2.1 We have planned our yearly face-to-face 2-day IFS in-house training within the upcoming weeks and we are unsure whether our auditors can attend due to travel restrictions. Can we carry out the training via a 2-days online meeting instead?

If you have already planned the yearly 2-day in-house training in the first half of 2020 (until 30th June), you have the permission to conduct the training as a 2-day online training within this timeframe. Furthermore, if you have planned the face-to-face training for the second half of 2020, it may be worth considering carrying out the training earlier (until 30th June) in an online version in order to reduce the pressure on auditor schedules for the second half of the year.

Please also note that according to the regular IFS Rules, one of the two training days can always be conducted online and the two days of training do not need to be held on consecutive days.

Please carefully consider our general note regarding online trainings above.

3.2.2 We would like to conduct an initial IFS in-house training for new auditor candidates. Can we do the training via an online meeting due to the current travel restrictions?

If you would like to conduct an in-house training for auditor candidates who are supposed to attend the IFS exams in 2020 or in the first half of 2021, you have the permission to conduct the training as a 2-day online training before 30th June 2020.

Please carefully consider our general note regarding online trainings above.

3.2.3 We have planned an IFS scope extension training (PS 3, 7 or 11) for one or more auditors in the upcoming weeks. Can we do the training via an online meeting due to the current travel restrictions?

While we recommend that such trainings are held face-to-face, if possible, there is no specific IFS Rule for scope extension trainings in this regard. Therefore, you may conduct such trainings via an online meeting without previous notice to IFS Auditor Management.

Please carefully consider our general note regarding online trainings above.

Applicability for IFS Global Markets Programs:

- Above questions and answers of no. 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.2.3, 1.3.2, 1.8.1 and 1.9.1 are relevant for IFS Global Markets Programs as well.
- Global Markets Assessor trainings

Due to the current global circumstances, the yearly in-house assessor trainings and the qualifying initial IFS Global Markets Assessor training can be conducted online until 30th June 2020. Please carefully consider our general note regarding online trainings mentioned above in point 3.2. The overall duration of the trainings shall remain as defined in the relevant IFS documents.