

Guidance for Fruit and Vegetable Operations: Considerations to Protect Seasonal Workers Supporting Fruit and Vegetable Operations during Harvesting and Processing and in Shared/Communal Housing During COVID-19

As of May 27, 2020, Version 2.1

The purpose of this guidance is to provide useful advice and recommendations to help farm owners and operators of shared/communal housing facilities, as well as seasonal workers and staff prevent the spread of COVID-19. Special considerations exist for the prevention of COVID-19 in shared housing situations as residents often gather together for dining, social leisure, and recreational activities. Below we have outlined some strategies to ensure a healthy working and living environment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) have also released guidance for preparing workplaces and on certain types of shared housing, such as apartments, condominiums, and student or faculty housing that could apply to your facility.^{1,2} Nothing in this document should be interpreted as superseding guidance issued by federal agencies.

To Maintain Safe Operations

Hiring and Transportation Practices

- Provide new employees with clean cloth face coverings, instruct them on how to [wear and remove them appropriately](#)³, and maintain social distancing by keeping employees isolated from others, whether individually or as a group
- Seasonal workers may travel from other regions in order to work. Although CDC suggests that workers who are essential to maintaining critical infrastructure, such as food and agriculture, can work as long as they are asymptomatic and follow other precautions⁴, employers should seek to understand the rate of transmission in these regions prior to the workers' arrivals. Based on these factors, an employer can consider implementing one or more of the following measures, based on potential risk and the resources available locally.
 - quarantine workers for up to 14 days prior to beginning work. This may mean that operations will have to consider bringing in seasonal workers prior to the start of activities, if housing and workers are available, to train, onboard, and assess health
 - test workers for COVID-19
 - implement stringent social distancing (greater than 6 feet at all times), and the use of physical barriers/ partitions if 6 feet cannot be achieved.
 - equip workers with PPE such as N95 masks, if none of the measures above can be achieved

¹CDC. COVID-19 Guidance for Shared or Congregate Housing. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/shared-congregate-house/guidance-shared-congregate-housing.html#accepting-new-residents>. Accessed 29 April 2020.

²OSHA. COVID-19 Guidance. <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf> Accessed 30 April 2020.

³ CDC. Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>

- Employers should screen employees daily prior to work⁵, including at facilities and prior to transport to fields, for symptoms (e.g., fever, > 100.4 °F or 38 °C) using no-touch thermometers
 - Avoid group gatherings during screening by providing a staggered schedule to screen workers
 - Ask employees to self-monitor and report symptoms for the duration of the seasonal work program (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell)
 - Employers should consider implementing a daily screening questionnaire to identify employees who may have symptoms of COVID-19⁶
- Modify on-boarding procedures to minimize person-to-person contact, if possible
 - Adhere to physical distancing through visual cues and spacing chairs, etc. (i.e., minimize and/or create physical distance during on-boarding or orientation meetings)
 - Include information related to COVID-19 in training, in a language and format that will be understood by residents

Workplace and Housing Practices

- Communicate relevant news, directives, and guidance from state, local, and federal officials regarding COVID-19 to residents/employees
 - Consider posting information and graphics about COVID-19 prevention that illustrate how workers can protect themselves and their families from COVID-19 in multiple languages in common areas such as breakrooms and bathrooms
- Establish and train on personal hygiene and preventive measures to protect entire staff from the spread of COVID-19
 - Wash hands often, with soap and water for 20 seconds
 - Before, during, and after harvesting, handling and/or processing food
 - Before preparing meals and prior to eating
 - After using the toilet
 - After coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose
 - If soap and water are not readily available, clean hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
 - Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth, especially with unwashed hands
 - Avoid close contact (within 6 feet or 2 meters) with people who are sick
 - Use cloth face coverings when around others
 - When not wearing a face covering, cover mouth and nose with a tissue or use the inside of the elbow.

⁵CDC. Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

⁶ Washington State Department of Health sample employee/visitor screening questionnaire <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervivitorscreeningguidance.pdf>

- Regularly (more than once a day, if possible) clean and disinfect⁷ shared areas and frequently touched surfaces using [EPA-registered disinfectants](#)⁸
 - Frequently touched surfaces are associated with an increased risk of spreading COVID-19 and includes surfaces such as tables, doorknobs, stairway railings, light switches, microwave doors, refrigerator doors, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks
- Provide soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizers (60% or more), [diluted bleach solutions](#), [alcohol solutions \(60% or more\)](#), paper towels, tissues and trash bins in common areas
- Encourage [social distancing](#) in the community and communal spaces, as appropriate, and physical barriers and directional signage to establish movement flow within and outside facilities
 - Social distancing at the individual level is ideal but may be difficult to accomplish in shared housing environments. In such settings, a face covering is recommended
 - Consider staggering start and stop times to reduce crowding in communal spaces and work settings
 - If carpooling cannot be avoided, encourage the same group of individuals to carpool together (i.e., cohorting). This may include rooming, dining, and working together as a cohort.
- Provide cloth face coverings, and/or provide supplies and instructions on how to make their own and how to [wear and remove them appropriately](#)⁹
 - Cloth face coverings should be laundered before each daily use
- Make sure residents/employees are aware of the [symptoms](#) and underlying conditions related to COVID-19 using training sessions, tailgate meetings, posters, [videos](#), websites, emails, and text messaging
- Provide employees/residents with phone numbers for healthcare facilities and alternative care sites where residents/employees can receive appropriate care for injuries and illnesses, including COVID-19
- Ensure the shared/communal housing address is clearly posted so that it can be provided to health officials, if needed
- Provide residents with the housing supervisor's contact information
- Encourage residents who are suspected or confirmed COVID-19 positive to [self-isolate](#). Work with health officials and follow recommended guidance for individuals identified as having close contact with the ill individual (e.g., roommates, house mates, etc.)¹⁰.
 - If possible, provide separate living and eating areas and designate separate bathrooms for residents with COVID-19 symptoms

⁷ EPA. EPA and CDC Release Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Spaces Where Americans Live, Work, and Play. <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-cdc-release-guidance-cleaning-and-disinfecting-spaces-where-americans-live-work-and>. Accessed 29 April 2020.

⁸ EPA. List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2. <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>. Accessed 29 April 2020.

⁹ CDC. Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>

- Suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases should only be housed with other suspected or confirmed cases. They should have separate bathroom, cooking and eating facilities from people who are not sick.¹¹
- If there are multiple housing units in close proximity or if illness begins to be seen within the community, consider designating separate units for ill and healthy workers who are living in shared housing. This could include the use of motel rooms or developing agreements with local farmers or processors to re-allocate shared housing units, as permitted by law
- Ventilate the room where persons with COVID-19 are housed on regular intervals, as much as possible.
- Your plan should outline how and who will pay for and provide food, water, and medical supplies to symptomatic workers in isolation or exposed but asymptomatic workers in isolation as they may be unable to provide for themselves during this time
- Consider a transportation plan for medical evaluation and treatment of workers. This should include who will transport and how to protect the driver. Also, pre-identify the healthcare clinic and payment for services¹¹
 - Follow CDC guidance to [protect drivers](#) and [clean and disinfect vehicles](#)
- [Previously ill workers should only be allowed to return to work after they have met public health criteria](#)¹²

Considerations for Common Spaces

Kitchens

- Clean and disinfect all surfaces before and after mealtimes
- Restrict the number of people allowed in a kitchen or dining room at one time to ensure 6 feet (2 meters) of separation between individuals
 - Individuals who room together should eat together
 - Those who are sick and their roommates, as well as individuals at higher risk of severe illness should eat in their rooms, if possible
- Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups or eating utensils
- Wash all non-disposable food service items with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher
- Wash hands before and after handling food service items
- Wash hands after removing garbage bags and handling or disposing of trash

Laundry Rooms

- Maintain access to adequate supplies for laundry facilities
- Restrict the number of people allowed in laundry rooms to ensure 6 feet (2 meters) of separation

¹¹ NC Department of Health. Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Migrant Farmworkers, Their Employers, and Housing Providers. <https://files.nc.gov/ncdohhs/documents/files/covid-19/interim-covid-guidance-migrant-farm-workers.pdf>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

¹² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-in-home-patients.html>

- Provide gloves, soap for handwashing, and household cleaners and disinfectants for staff and residents to clean and disinfect buttons, knobs, and handles of laundry machines, laundry baskets, and shared laundry items
 - Consider designating staff to ensure laundry facilities are cleaned daily
- Post guidelines for [washing instructions](#) and handling dirty laundry and proper use of gloves
 - Do not hang cloth face coverings to dry in laundry rooms. They can be machine washed and dried

Bathrooms

- Should be cleaned regularly (at least twice per day – morning and evening or after heavy use)
- Restrict the number of people allowed in bathrooms and restrooms at the same time to maintain physical distance recommendations
- Ensure bathrooms are stocked with soap and paper towels
- Make sure trash cans have liners and are emptied regularly
 - Provide information on proper hand washing, instruct them to wash with soap and warm or cold water for at least 20 seconds
- Residents should be instructed to avoid placing toothbrushes or other personal items directly on counter surfaces, as they can be an infection source
 - Totes could be used for personal items to limit their contact with bathroom surfaces
 - Clean and disinfect any personal storage totes before and after bathroom visits

Considerations for Seasonal Field and Harvesting Workers

- When new employees arrive, provide them with clean cloth face coverings and keep employees isolated from others, whether individually or as a group/cohort
- Although CDC suggests that workers who are essential to maintaining critical infrastructure, such as food and agriculture, can work as long as they are asymptomatic and follow other precautions⁴, employers should seek to understand the rate of transmission in regions from where workers have travelled prior to their arrivals. Based on these factors, an employer can consider implementing one or more of the following measures, based on potential risk and the resources available locally.
 - quarantine workers for up to 14 days prior to beginning work. This may mean that operations will have to consider bringing in seasonal workers prior to the start of activities, if housing and workers are available, to train, onboard, and assess health
 - test workers for COVID-19
 - implement stringent social distancing (greater than 6 feet at all times), and the use of physical barriers/ partitions if 6 feet cannot be achieved.
 - equip workers with PPE such as N95 masks, if none of the measures above can be achieved
- [Screen employees](#) daily for symptoms (e.g., fever, > 100.4 °F or 38 °C) using a no-touch thermometer
 - When performing temperature checks, clean and disinfect no-touch thermometers according to the manufacturer's instructions and company policies
 - Ensure individuals conducting screening are adequately protected (ref FBIA doc)
 - Ask employee to self-monitor and report symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell)

- Employers should consider implementing a daily screening questionnaire to identify employees who may have symptoms of COVID-19¹³ recognizing that OSHA record keeping requirements will apply¹⁴
- Modify on-boarding and training procedures to minimize person-to-person contact, if possible
 - Consider limiting the number of employees (i.e., small groups) during on-boarding and training sessions to maintain physical distance
 - Include information related to COVID-19 in training
- Before starting work shifts, screen employees before entering transportation vehicles. Ensure employees are protected during transportation to and from operations and harvesting:
 - Require hand washing or sanitizing immediately before stepping into the bus, truck or car
 - Clean and disinfect vehicles as often as possible, especially surfaces that are touched frequently
 - Clean hand/power tools wipe down steering wheels, grab handles, controls on tractors, forklifts, and other shared company vehicles.
 - While transporting workers, allow space between workers on buses or other transport vehicles. Limit the number of passengers to help create physical distance, for example filling only every other row of a bus. Consider using assigned seats so that an employee sits in the same seat during each leg of the commute.
 - When there are multiple individuals in vehicles, they should wear cloth face coverings
 - Have tissues and hand sanitizer available for passengers
- Maintain social distancing in a field by:
 - Limiting the number of individuals in a harvest crew
 - Harvesting every other row, or equivalent, to maintain 6-foot distance
 - When mechanical harvesting aids are utilized, consider engineering controls such as the use of physical barriers (impermeable dividers or partitions to separate workers). Consider sanitary design and adherence to standard cleaning and sanitation procedures for these barriers
- Limit the use of shared tools, buckets, and equipment
- Clean areas that people share:
 - Guide rails on buses or vans
 - Guide rails on harvester ladders
 - Door handles on bathrooms/portable toilets
 - Tables and counter tops
 - Shared water jugs
 - When using communal water jugs, consider cleaning/sanitizing them more frequently (e.g., before and after each use), consider the use of alcohol-based wipes at each water station, requiring field workers and

¹³ Washington State Department of Health sample employee/visitor screening questionnaire <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervisitorscreeningguidance.pdf>

¹⁴ CDC Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employees.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/meat-poultry-processing-workers-employers.html> Accessed 2 May 2020

- harvest crews to wash their hands before touching the spigot of a water jug and/or if feasible provide individual water bottles or containers.
- Ensure there are adequate handwashing stations and portable toilets available, and if possible, decrease the ratio of number of workers to each available station (e.g., instead of one station for every [20 workers](#), consider one station for every 10 or 15 workers).
- Intensify tailgate meetings for harvesters on hygiene practices and worker health policies.
 - When running tailgate meetings and other training events, break employees into smaller groups and provide worker separation within the meeting area.¹⁵
- Allow extra time for workers to wash hands throughout the workday

Considerations in Post-harvest Processing Operations

- Consider the development of a COVID-19 assessment and control plan applicable to anyone entering or working in the facility.¹⁶
 - These plans should include engineering and administrative controls:
 - Engineering Controls, such as the use of physical barriers (curtains, impermeable divider or partitions to separate workers) or assessing current cooling and ventilation systems.
 - Administrative controls, such the use of signs, floor markings and traffic flow, avoiding carpooling, building additional short, staggered breaks into staff schedules, splitting workers into two or three shifts (saving one shift for cleaning and sanitation)
 - Screen and monitor workers before entry into the workplace. Consider implementing a daily screening questionnaire to determine employees who might have been exposed and recovered and employees who may have remained asymptomatic of COVID-19¹⁷
 - Conduct a hazard assessment to determine Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needs, follow OSHA's PPE [standards](#) to select and provide appropriate PPE, and instruct employees about PPE proper use and wear.
- Employers should [screen employees](#) for symptoms (e.g., fever, > 100.4 °F or 38 °C) using a no-touch thermometer, and adhere to OSHA record keeping requirements¹⁸
- Ask employee to continue to self-monitor and report symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell) social distancing (6 feet or 2 meters between individuals)
- See CDC recommendations below for practices in meat and poultry processing facilities¹⁹ that could be useful in your facilities

¹⁵ https://www.wga.com/sites/default/files/wg_COV19_Preventative_Measures_2020_0331.pdf

¹⁶ CDC Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employees.. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/meat-poultry-processing-workers-employers.html> Accessed 2 May 2020

¹⁷ Washington State Department of Health sample employee/visitor screening questionnaire <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervisitorscreeningguidance.pdf>

¹⁸ CDC Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employees. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/meat-poultry-processing-workers-employers.html> Accessed 2 May 2020

¹⁹ CDC. MMWR Weekly Report. COVID-19 Among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6918e3.htm?s_cid=mm6918e3_w. Accessed 1 May 2020.

TABLE 2. Observed challenges and recommended changes in practice in response to COVID-19 among workers in meat and poultry processing facilities - selected states,* April 2020

Category	Challenges to effective prevention and control of COVID-19	Recommended changes in facility practice
Structural	Maintaining physical distancing during breaks and when employees enter and exit the facility	Adjust start and stop times of breaks and shifts Add outdoor breakrooms
Maintaining physical distancing on production line	Excluding symptomatic workers	Install physical barriers between workers Screen all workers and visitors entering facility and plan for effective isolation for workers who become ill at work
Operational	Maintaining physical distancing on production line	Reduce rate of animal processing
	Adhering to face covering recommendations	Require universal face covering Ensure face coverings conform to CDC guidance Provide training on donning and doffing
	Adhering to heightened cleaning and disinfection guidelines	Assign additional staff to sanitize "high touch" areas (e.g., handles, buttons, railings) more frequently Add several hand sanitizer dispensers and hand washing stations Implement touch-free time clocks
Sociocultural	Communicating through language and cultural barriers	Engage community partners to develop culturally informed messaging Disseminate messaging in languages spoken among the work force
	Employees live in crowded, multigenerational settings	Include messaging about behaviors employees should take to limit the spread of the virus while at home
	Employees share transportation to and from work	Add additional vehicles to shuttle routes Require use of face coverings during commute
Economic	Employees incentivized to work while ill	Implement personnel policies that provide additional medical leave and disability benefits without loss of seniority or pay Remove financial incentives, such as attendance bonuses

Abbreviation: COVID-19 = coronavirus disease 2019.

* Based on CDC field team deployments to four sites and information gathered from calls with state health departments.

† Based on on-site and remote technical assistance, many facilities have implemented or are planning to implement these strategies.

Additional Resources:

Useful References for Food and Agriculture Operations housed at feedingus.org	
Proper Usage of Face Masks	Click Here
Social Distancing in Food Operations	Click Here
Instituting Employee Screening	Click Here
Company Decision Tool – Employee Symptoms/Testing Status	Click Here
Protocol: When an Employee Tests Positive for COVID-19	Click Here
Considerations: Identifying Employees Exposed to an Individual Positive for COVID-19	Click Here
CDC COVID-19 Guidance (various languages)	Click Here
Proper Hand Washing	Click Here
How to Stay Healthy – Videos, Fact Sheets, Posters	Click Here

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