

# Agricultural Worker Protection

## GUIDANCE DURING COVID-19

Maintaining a safe and healthy work environment for agricultural employees is always a priority. In order to minimize the impact of COVID-19 in the workplace, Maryland Farm Bureau is recommending enhanced measures to further protect worker health, safety, and hygiene.

Even though Maryland's agricultural industry is recognized as a critical and essential infrastructure industry under Governor Hogan's "Gatherings, Stay at Home" Executive Order, agricultural employers need to continue protecting the health of workers and the broader community.

Maryland Farm Bureau is encouraging the agricultural community to expeditiously implement these protective measures at their worksites. The objectives communicated here are: preventing and reducing transmission among staff; protecting people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications; maintaining business operations; and, minimizing adverse effects on other entities in their supply chains. Clickable links to additional guidance and resources are underlined in blue.

### Emergency Operations Plan

- Provide [farm employee](#) and [farm contractor](#) in-transit letters to help employees and contractors clarify to authorities their need to travel on food/ag business.
- Develop an emergency plan for your business operation if key managers/supervisors become ill with COVID-19. This should include all aspects of your farm business operations, from office to field. Who will administer payroll, conduct spraying operations, manage daily workflow, or oversee field activities if key individuals become ill?
- In addition to Executive Orders from the Governor's Office in response to the virus outbreak, check with your local officials as several local health departments have implemented requirements on employers to conduct and document mandatory daily health screenings of all employees to protect the workforce.

### Social Distancing

- Implement social distancing throughout the operation, including:
  - Employees should keep a minimum distance of 6 feet from co-workers when possible. This includes during daily routines, harvesting and processing activities, as well as during breaks.
  - Reducing meetings and group gatherings, including orientation and training to essential communication only and limit such meetings to no more than 10 people if possible.
  - Limiting personal contact and grouping within the facility and worksites and limit the number of people using common facilities at any one time.
  - Considering staggering start times to reduce gatherings and possible food or drink sharing.

## Employee Hygiene

- Employees should wash/sanitize their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds multiple times daily, including before and after work, handling any shipments of materials from the outside, breaks, eating, visits to the water cooler, and use of toilet facilities.
  - If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
  - Employees should avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
  - Have soap or disinfectant, potable water, and single-use disposable towels available at worksites and throughout facilities.
- Employees should wear clean clothes to start each day.
- Employers should consider purchasing PPE when available, or in the meantime, bandanas for each worker, including detergent for daily washing.
- Employees should avoid sharing personal items with co-workers (i.e. food, dishes, cups, gloves, engaging in activities such as playing cards, etc.).
- Employees should cover coughs and sneezes; train them in the following CDC protocol:
  - Cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or use the inside of their elbow.
  - Immediately dispose of used tissues in the trash.
  - Immediately wash their hands according to the CDC hand washing protocol above.
- Follow CDC guidelines on health and hygiene as they evolve.

## Sick Employees

- Require workers not to come to work if they are ill (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath).
  - Many workers do not have the financial means to stay at home, even when they're not feeling well.
  - Consider implementing paid sick leave for your workers to discourage their attendance when feeling ill.
  - Observe work crews when they arrive to work.
  - Consider checking worker temperature with an infrared forehead thermometer as they arrive for their shift.
- If ill, tell them to contact a medical provider or physician by phone before going to the medical office, clinic, or emergency room; another option is to contact a tele-doctor.
- Employees at work that develop symptoms of being ill should be sent home immediately.
- Designate one driver and vehicle for transport of sick workers and have sick individual sit at the back of the vehicle and provide face covering mask. Travel with windows down for added ventilation.
- **[If an employee tests positive for COVID-19](#)**, there is some immediate information that should be collected and actions taken to protect other employees and customers to ensure transparent communication both internally and externally.
  - Make note of the employee's work location, work hours, general and specific work duties, if the employee has traveled to multiple worksites recently with timing, and the last day the employee was at work; identify who has had contact with the employee.

- Call the local health department immediately if you are unable to verify that the ill employee's attending physician has contacted the public health department, and health authorities have not made direct contact with the employer.
- Do not disclose the employee name unless asked to by the health department.
- Health authorities will provide recommendations regarding the next steps in terms of identifying employees and further protective measures.
- This employee should follow the direction and guidance of the relevant health department or health professional regarding specific isolation and quarantine requirements.
- Quarantine or isolate workers (for 14 days) to protect employees and to minimize the risk of transmission to others.
- Have a designated housing unit for quarantined workers (including separate sleeping, living, bath and kitchen facilities).
- Closely monitor any workers who shared housing, transportation or work assignments with the sick worker.

## Routine Cleaning in High Traffic Areas

- Train workers on [cleaning, sanitizing and disinfection practices](#), proper chemical use, and proper personal protection.
- Clean workspaces throughout the day.
- Sanitize and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and spaces according to CDC disinfection protocol, including:
  - Administrative, shipping/processing facilities, and any other enclosed areas where people work multiple times throughout the day.
  - Frequently touched areas including door handles, light switches, bathroom areas, lunchroom table and chairs, kitchen areas, including countertops and appliances, shared space and facilities, time clock areas, shared computers, tools, and any vehicles used at the facility (i.e. forklifts, golf carts, steering wheels, seats)
  - For vehicles, this includes frequent contact areas such as stick shift, control levers, steering wheel, doors, seat belts, air conditioner and radio buttons, glove box, mirrors, armrests, and vehicle keys.
  - Instruct employees to use a disposable protective barrier like a paper towel, plastic bag, etc., when fueling vehicles, especially when touching the fuel pump, credit card station, and other surfaces. Once used, the barrier item should be disposed and the driver should then use hand sanitizer, or better yet, wash his/her hands.
  - Utilize off-hours time to complete aggressive sanitation of frequently touched surfaces and spaces daily.
- Ensure that all bathrooms (portable and in place) are adequately stocked and serviced at regular intervals and disinfected throughout the day.
- Be considerate of social distancing recommendations when transporting employees and regularly clean and sanitize worker transportation buses; make multiple trips as necessary.
- Large coolers containing drinking water for employees should be cleaned and sanitized daily and workers should be told to properly wash their hands before accessing the cooler. Provide single-use cups that can be disposed of after getting a drink.

## Employee Training and Changes to Process

- Train employees to follow these standard operating procedures while Executive Order 2020-21 “Gatherings, Stay at Home” is in effect.
- Provide training on COVID-19 prevention using resources available from the [CDC](#) and [local health departments](#).
  - Include training on appropriate hand washing and hygiene practices and sanitation processes, in addition to food safety and worker protection standard procedures.
- Any materials should be available in English and Spanish.
- Implement a practice of on-going training and daily follow-up.
- Encourage spacing of 6 feet between individuals while harvesting and processing; when not possible, provide appropriate personal protective equipment.
  - Implement social distancing recommendation when transporting employees, making multiple trips as necessary.
  - Be responsive to the individual needs of each employee.
  - The state has specifically indicated populations at risk to be those over the age of 65, residents and farmworkers with underlying health issues, residential care patients, and all those who care for these individuals are uniquely at risk.
  - Understand which employees this guidance applies to; consider whether there are alternative work options or if their current job can be modified to ensure precautions are in place.
  - Be responsive to state guidance and respectful of their decisions related to that guidance.
- Encourage activities such as pre-assembly of cartons and pre-bagging when possible.
- Identify key processes and product and immediately cross-train employees in back-up positions, to be prepared when people must stay home.

## Non-Essential Visits and Travel

- Limit visitors to those necessary for the operation.
- To limit exposure of employees, emphasize on-line ordering for any direct to consumer sales with outside pick-up or delivery options.
- Visitors must be approved before arriving, and employees should maintain social distancing (6 feet) away from any visitor.
- Encourage employees to be safe outside of work and follow Maryland “Gatherings, Stay at Home” order when not at work, as well as all CDC recommendations.
- Eliminate all non-essential and non-related services, including entertainment activities.
- Designate 1-2 individuals to perform shopping for each housing unit.
- Consider establishing on-line banking options for employees.
- To protect your workforce, when transporting workers, keep housing occupants, vans and crews together. If feasible, and for proper ventilation, open vehicle windows.
- Passengers should refrain from eating, drinking, or sharing food in vehicles.
- All vans/buses should have hand sanitizer, or hand washing options available

## Employer-Provided Employee Housing

- Conduct training detailing site-specific and personal protective measures to safeguard against contraction and transmission of COVID-19.
  - This includes training upon arrival for all employees (and guest workers).
  - Training should be based on public health guidance from the CDC, OSHA, state, and local public health authorities, as is specific to COVID-19.
- Train employees to respect social distancing practices (6 feet), as is feasible for the site-specific area, including but not limited to living quarters.
  - In addition to this training, incorporate observation as is appropriate, protective, respectful, and necessary in order to create a safe living environment.
  - Assign and communicate a common point of contact for employee questions, requests, and needs.
  - Establish an actively monitored emergency reporting system.
  - Assign work crews by housing unit to minimize cross-over between groups. This could help minimize exposure and impact if employer must begin quarantining/isolating groups if any workers get sick.
  - Implement site-specific risk assessments and tailor protective practices to address risks.
  - Risks may dictate type and frequency of implementation of protective measures, such as cleaning and sanitation for high-contact areas and surfaces.
- Consider in-camp laundry facilities.
  - Have a designated housing unit for quarantine workers (including separate sleeping, living, bath and kitchen facilities).

Guidelines for Foreign Labor from the U.S. Department of Labor are linked below:

- [COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions Round 1 March 20, 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions Round 2 April 1, 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions Round 3 April 9, 2020](#)

For additional references, resources, and information related to COVID-19 and agriculture, visit:

**[WWW.MDFARMBUREAU.COM/CORONAVIRUS](http://WWW.MDFARMBUREAU.COM/CORONAVIRUS)**

*The processes in this guide were compiled based on reviews of existing, already stringent practices, aligned with the best practices offered by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), World Health Organization, and public health departments. As information related to the pandemic changes, these guidelines will be updated as needed. Posters and other printable information are available from the CDC.*

