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Guide for dairy farmers during the COVID-19 public health crisis

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness disease that can be spread from person to person. There is no evidence of transfer of COVID-19 between humans and cattle. COVID-19 is unrelated to the type of coronavirus cattle are susceptible to. The [Food and Drug Administration](#) has stated that there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of the virus.¹ The consensus in the medical community is that coronaviruses are mainly spread from person to person through inhaled respiratory droplets due to coughing or sneezing. It can also be spread when someone touches an object with the virus on it and then touches his or her mouth, face or eyes.

What steps can be taken to minimize spread at the farm?

- Proactively communicate so that employees understand what COVID-19 is, the practices they should use at work and at home to minimize the risk of infection or spread, and the procedures the farm will take to maintain a healthy and safe workplace. The Center of Disease Control and Prevention has printable factsheets available for your use. They can be posted and/or distributed to your workers. They are available in English and Spanish [here](#).²
- Take preventative measures, including the following examples:
 - Practice social distancing – minimizing close interactions of less than 6 feet.
 - Tell symptomatic workers to stay home. Symptoms include fever, cough and shortness of breath and normally appear two to 14 days after exposure. Consider flexible leave or sick job policies and develop plans to cover shifts to encourage appropriate behavior.
 - Promote hygiene both at the farm and away from the farm such as frequent handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or alcohol-based hand rubs that contain at least 60% alcohol, avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands, respiratory etiquette by covering coughs and sneezes, washing uniforms and clothes between each use, and regularly disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.
 - Maintain a regularly scheduled routine for cleaning and disinfecting high-use areas using chemicals that are [EPA-registered “disinfectant” products for COVID-19](#).³ This should include bathrooms, locker rooms, break rooms, kitchens, time-card machines, computers, door handles and other frequently touched surfaces.

OSHA has issued guidance [here](#) ⁴, and the CDC has issued guidance [here](#).⁵



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- Suspend non-essential visits to your farm. For essential visits, a record should be made to note the person, time and date of visit. Limit direct interactions with field staff, milk haulers, etc., unless critically necessary.
- The [EEOC](#)⁶, the agency charged with enforcing anti-discrimination laws, has guidance to help employers navigate the impact of COVID-19 in the workplace. Now that COVID-19 has reached the level of a global pandemic, some regulations have been relaxed allowing farms during this specific time period to:
 - Send home employees who display symptoms associated with COVID-19.
 - Ask employees who report feeling ill at work, or who call in sick, questions about their symptoms to determine if they have or may have COVID-19. These symptoms include, for example, fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or sore throat.
 - Require precautionary employee body temperature screening. As with all medical information, the fact that an employee had a fever would be subject to ADA confidentiality requirements. Employers should note that not all people with COVID-19 display a fever.
 - Require employees to practice infection control protocols such as regular handwashing, coughing and sneezing etiquette, and proper tissue usage and disposal.

What should I do if a worker arrives at work with visible symptoms of COVID-19?

- Workers who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or who become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available). If workers with such symptoms remain on the premises, they should be placed in an isolated room with a door, away from others. If surgical masks are available, the employee should be asked to wear one to protect others from the spread of disease through coughing.
- Immediately and quickly determine, preferably via telephone or with six-foot distance if in person, what close contact the worker had with others within the last 14 days.
- Follow up with the worker to determine whether the individual's medical provider recommended a COVID-19 test and the results.

What should I do if a worker calls to inform they tested positive for COVID-19?

- Workers who test positive should be instructed to follow their provider's advice on isolation and any return to work timeline. For example, the CDC's current Discontinuation of Home Isolation for



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Persons with COVID-19 (Interim Guidance) non-test based strategy directs that persons with COVID-19 who have symptoms and were directed to care for themselves at home may discontinue home isolation under the following conditions:

- At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and,
- At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- Public health officials should be conducting an investigation when an infection is identified, but if they have not yet made contact with an employee who may have been exposed, determine via phone conversation with the worker what close contact they had with others within the last 14 days.
 - The employer should inform the identified individuals/coworkers of their possible exposure in the workplace but maintain confidentiality.
 - Exposed coworkers/ individuals should be instructed to self-quarantine. It may be difficult to require testing, as it appears that there are insufficient numbers of tests available at this time. Symptomatic individuals should be directed to seek medical help. Asymptomatic individuals should remain in self-quarantine for 14 days at home, or as instructed by public health officials.
- In cases where further cleaning and decontamination may be necessary, consult [CDC guidance for cleaning and disinfecting environments](#) as well as following any direction from public health officials.⁷
- Continue to maintain communication with the afflicted employee and exposed employees to ensure their health and well-being while away from the farm. Ensure they are monitoring their symptoms and know to seek medical attention immediately if symptoms worsen.

How can I prepare for a potential shortage of workers?

- Make sure workers are cross trained to perform job tasks they are not regularly required to do.
- Start inquiring about additional workers. A good place to begin is by asking your current workers if family members or friends are available.

What if businesses are ordered to close?

Some states, including Wisconsin, have issued orders advising people to stay home and non-essential businesses to close. Farms and related food supply chain businesses are designated by the federal government as essential. It is recommended that farms supply their workers with essential certification letters to travel to and from work. However, each applicable state and local order should be reviewed to ensure this exception is included and because they sometimes dictate parameters under which even essential businesses must operate. [Click here](#) for a template.



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¹ Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Questions & Answers.

<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>. Accessed on 3/23/20.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Print Resources. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html> Accessed on 3/23/20.

³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2.

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2> Accessed on 3/23/20.

⁴ OSHA, Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19. <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf> Accessed on 3/23/20.

⁵ CDC, Clean & Disinfect. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/cleaning-disinfection.html>. Date accessed 3/25/20.

⁶ U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. What you should know about the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and COVID-19. https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/wysk/wysk_ada_rehabilitaion_act_coronavirus.cfm Accessed on 3/23/20.

⁷ CDC, Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>. Date accessed 3/25/20.