

Guidance for Fruit and Vegetable Operations: Shared/Communal Housing, Harvesting and Processing Considerations for Seasonal Workers Supporting These Operations During COVID-19

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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}

To Maintain Safe Operations

- Provide new residents/employees with a clean cloth face covering and maintain social distancing by keeping them isolated from others, whether individually or as a group
 - Consider a quarantine of up to 14 day for those who have traveled from regions of high community transmission to regions of low transmission. 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.
- Employers should screen residents daily prior to work³ for symptoms (e.g., fever, > 100.4 °F or 38 °C) using no-touch thermometers
 - Ask employee to continue to self-monitor and report symptoms for the duration of the seasonal work program (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath)
 - Employers should consider implementing a daily screening questionnaire to identify employees who may have symptoms of COVID-19⁴
- Modify on-boarding procedures to minimize person-to-person contact, if possible
 - Adhere to social distancing (i.e., on-boarding/training outside)
 - Include information related to COVID-19 in training, in a language and format that will be understood by residents
- Communicate all news, directives, and guidance from state, local, and federal officials regarding COVID-19 to residents

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.

³CDC. 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.

⁴ Washington State Department of Health sample employee/visitor screening questionnaire <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervivitorscreeningguidance.pdf>

- Consider posting information and graphics to address at-risk behaviors related to COVID-19 prevention in multiple languages that are likely to occur in common areas such as kitchens and bathrooms
- Establish and train on personal hygiene and preventive measures to protect employees from the spread of COVID-19
 - Wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds (used alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available)
 - Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth, especially with unwashed hands
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick
 - Use cloth [face coverings](#) when around others
 - Cover coughs and sneezes
- Regularly (more than once a day, if possible) clean and disinfect⁵ shared areas and frequently touched surfaces using [EPA-registered disinfectants](#)⁶
 - Frequently touched surfaces are associated with an increased risk of spreading COVID-19 and include 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, paper towels, tissues and trash bins in common areas
- Encourage [social distancing](#) in the community and communal spaces, as appropriate, and set up physical barriers and directional signage for movement within and outside facilities.
 - Social distancing at the individual level is ideal but may be difficult to accomplish in shared housing environments
 - Encourage workers to think about social distancing between co-workers: If carpool is common, the same workers who share a room should also carpool together, take breaks together, dine together (both at home and in the workplace), etc.
- Provide cloth face coverings, if possible, and/or instruct individuals on how to make their own, and how to wear and remove them appropriately⁷
- Make sure residents are aware of the [symptoms](#) and underlying conditions related to COVID-19 using training sessions, tailgate meetings, posters, [videos](#), websites, emails, and text messaging
- Identify a list of healthcare facilities and alternative care sites where residents with COVID-19 symptoms can receive appropriate medical care, if needed
- Ensure the shared/communal housing address is clearly posted so that it can be provided to health officials, if needed
- Provide housing supervisor contact information to residents
- Encourage residents who are suspected or confirmed COVID-19 positive to self-isolate
 - If possible, provide separate living and eating areas and designate separate bathrooms for residents with COVID-19 symptoms

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

- Confirmed COVID-19 cases should only be housed with other confirmed cases. They should have separate bathroom, cooking and eating facilities from people who are not sick.⁸
- If there are multiple housing units in close proximity, 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 the collective pool of 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 quarantine as they may be unable to provide for themselves during this time.
- Your plan should outline by whom and how transportation will be provided for ill workers who need medical evaluation or treatment. You must consider how the person doing the transporting is to be protected, where the closest health care providers/ facilities are located, and how testing and/or care will be paid for⁸

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
- Use gloves when removing garbage bags and handling or disposing of trash
 - Wash hands after handling 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
- 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

⁸ NC Department of Health. Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Migrant Farmworkers, Their Employers, and Housing Providers. <https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/documents/files/covid-19/interim-covid-guidance-migrant-farm-workers.pdf>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

- Post guidelines for [washing instructions](#) and handling dirty laundry

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
- Ensure bathrooms are stocked with soap and paper towels
- Make sure trash cans are emptied regularly
- Provide information on proper hand washing
- Residents should be instructed to avoid placing toothbrushes or other personal items directly on counter surfaces, as sinks 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

- Provide new /employees with a clean cloth face covering and keep them isolated from others, whether individually or as a group
 - Consider a quarantine of up to 14 day for those who have traveled from regions of high community transmission to regions of low transmission. 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.
- [Screen employees](#) daily for symptoms (e.g., fever, > 100.4 °F or 38 °C) using a no-touch thermometer
 - Ask employee to continue to self-monitor and report symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath)
 - Employers should consider implementing a daily screening questionnaire to identify employees who may have symptoms of COVID-19⁹ recognizing that OSHA record keeping requirements will apply¹⁰
- Modify on-boarding and training procedures to minimize person-to-person contact, if possible
 - Include information related to COVID-19 in training
- 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.

⁹ Washington State Department of Health sample employee/visitor screening questionnaire <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervisitorscreeningguidance.pdf>

¹⁰ 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

- 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 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, if possible
 - 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
- Put special cleaning focus on 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, consider the use of alcohol-based wipes at each water station, requiring field workers and harvest crews to wash their hands before touching the spigot of a water jug and/or if feasible provide individual water bottles or containers.
- Consider adjusting the ratio of workers: handwashing stations and portable toilets, so that fewer people are using each unit
- 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.¹¹
- 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.¹²
 - 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.

¹¹ https://www.wga.com/sites/default/files/wg_COV19_Preventative_Measures_2020_0331.pdf

¹² 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

- Administrative controls, such the use of signs, floor markings, avoiding carpooling, building additional short breaks into staff schedules, splitting workers into two or three shifts (saving one shift for cleaning and sanitation)
 - Screening and monitoring workers before entry into the workplace or addressing return. Consider implementing a daily screening questionnaire to work of exposed and recovered workers and those identified employees may have remained asymptomatic. of COVID-19¹³
 - Workplace hazard assessments must assess the proper use of PPE and stress hand hygiene before and after handling all PPE.
 - 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 requirements¹⁴
 - Ask employee to continue to self-monitor and report symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath) social distancing (6 feet or 2 meters between individuals)
 - See CDC recommendations below for practices in meat and poultry processing facilities¹⁵ that could be useful in your facilities

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	Install physical barriers between workers
	Excluding symptomatic 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 conformed 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 handwashing 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.

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

¹⁵ 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.

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