

Public Health COVID-19 Guidance: Farm and Agricultural Workers in Washington State

Contents

Section 1: Introduction	1
<i>Definitions for terms used in this document</i>	2
Section 2: Facility policies and procedures	4
Section 3: Education plan for workers	4
<i>COVID-19 workplace education topics may include</i>	4
Section 4: Employer responsibilities for screening & managing sick workers	5
Section 5: Employer instructions for responding to cases of COVID-19	6
Section 6: Testing	7
Section 7: Additional resources	8
<i>CDC and other federal guidance</i>	8
<i>Washington state guidance</i>	9
Section 8: Example “Line List” for reporting cases of COVID-19	10
More COVID-19 Information and Resources	10

Section 1: Introduction

Farm and agricultural product processing facilities are a component of the critical infrastructure within the food and agriculture sector. Multiple outbreaks of COVID-19 among farm and agricultural products processing facility workers have occurred in Washington State. Outbreaks in agricultural settings can threaten the health of workers, their families, and their communities, as well as the food supply and economic recovery for Washington State and beyond. This document provides guidance about how to reduce the frequency and severity of outbreaks for farm and agricultural product processing facilities, employers, and workers — including those involved in fruit, vegetable, and other food production and packaging operations.

This document is meant to provide public health guidance to employers and businesses in the farm and agricultural sectors in Washington State. Guidance in this document is meant to complement, not to replace, Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 246-358-002 and WAC 296-307-16102. It does not replace or override requirements from the Washington

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Department of Labor & Industry (L&I), the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), or any legal requirements as written in the WAC or Revised Code of Washington (RCW). These documents are available in **Section 7** of this guidance.

Definitions for terms used in this document

Asymptomatic case: People can have a COVID-19 infection and test positive without showing any symptoms of the illness. These are called asymptomatic cases.

Case investigation: A case investigation may be carried out by a local health jurisdiction or the state health department to identify cases in a disease outbreak, and to conduct contact tracing among other activities.

Cleaning: Cleaning means to remove germs, dirt and other impurities from a surface, usually with soap and water.

Close contact: In a COVID-19 outbreak, someone is considered a “close contact” when they have spent 15 minutes or longer within 6 feet of someone confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19.

Cloth masks or Cloth face coverings: These are masks made of cloth which cover the nose and mouth. The CDC recommends that people wear cloth face coverings to reduce the spread of COVID-19. These coverings do not replace PPE such as masks or respirators that may be required for certain tasks in a workplace. For more information about cloth face coverings, see the following guidance from CDC: (Recommendations for Cloth Face Covers - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>)

Confirmed case: A confirmed case of COVID-19 occurs when a worker tests positive for COVID-19 with a RNA or molecular-based test. Other types of tests, such as blood tests that look for antibodies to the virus that causes COVID-19, may be less reliable and cannot be used to confirm a case of COVID-19.

Contact tracing: The process of interviewing a confirmed case to identify people who have been in close contact with a person who is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 during that person’s infectious period.

COVID-19: COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus called SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms can include a fever, cough, and shortness of breath, as well as other symptoms. COVID-19 can range from very mild to severe; even people who do not show any symptoms can spread the virus. Some people become so sick they must be admitted to the hospital, and some people may die from the illness. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about six feet or two meters).
- Through droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.

- By touching a surface that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or face.

COVID-19 Outbreak: Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH) defines an outbreak of COVID-19 as the following:

Within the same location or worksite,

- 2 or more cases of COVID-19 (including at least one confirmed case; may include one or more probable cases)
- Occurring within a 14 day time period
- With a likely link between the two (worked near each other, shared shifts or lunch breaks, shared housing, etc.)

Disinfecting: Disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs that might be on a surface. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a list of disinfectants that can be used to kill the virus that causes COVID-19: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

Group shelter means a dwelling unit or cluster of dwelling units for up to fifteen occupants.

Housing: When employers provide workers with housing, such as for guest workers in H2A housing, special precautions should be taken to ensure that the housing unit does not contribute to the spread of COVID-19.

Isolation and quarantine help protect the public by preventing exposure to people who have or may have a contagious disease. **Isolation** separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick. **Quarantine** separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.

Local Health Jurisdiction (LHJ): A local health jurisdiction is the local county or district agency providing public health services to persons within the area. All cases of COVID-19 and outbreaks must be reported to the local health jurisdiction per Washington state law ([WAC 246-101](#)).

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Personal protective equipment, commonly referred to as "PPE", is equipment worn to minimize exposure to hazards that cause serious workplace injuries and illnesses. PPE may be needed to prevent certain exposures when Engineering and Administrative controls do not ensure that employees will be able to maintain physical distancing at all times. Examples of PPE include: gloves, goggles, face shields, and face masks.

Physical distancing: Also known as "social distancing," this is the practice of separating people so that they are at least 6 feet, or about 2 meters, apart.

Probable case: A probable case occurs when a person who has had close contact with a confirmed case shows symptoms of COVID-19 infection, defined by current CDC guidelines (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>).

Public Health Officer: The Health Officer of the local health jurisdiction has legal authority to take action needed to control and prevent the spread of any dangerous contagious or infectious diseases that may occur within his or her jurisdiction.

Transportation: When employers provide transportation for workers to any location such as the work site, employer-provided housing, or when transporting workers to complete personal errands such as food shopping, care must be taken to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Section 2: Facility policies and procedures

1. Employers should identify at least one workplace COVID-19 coordinator; this could be a shift or plant supervisor, a health and safety manager, a human resources (HR) staff member, etc. that is the point of contact for the local Public Health Jurisdiction (LHJ).
2. Employers should develop a written COVID-19 policy/plan for each worksite. This should follow the DOSH directive as included in **Section 7** of this guidance. This directive provides enforcement policy when evaluating workplace implementation of social distancing, facial coverings and respiratory protection, sanitation and sick employee practices as required under the Governor's Proclamation: Stay Home- Stay Healthy Order.

Section 3: Education plan for workers

In order to reduce opportunities for transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace, employers should provide education to all workers about COVID-19 symptoms, ways to prevent the spread, and worksite policies aimed at protecting workers and stopping the spread. Employers should work with their local health jurisdiction to utilize currently available education materials and posters and see education resources in **Section 7** of this guidance.

COVID-19 workplace education topics may include:

1. COVID-19 symptoms and when employees should seek medical help.
2. How COVID-19 is spread.
3. How an infected person can spread COVID-19 to others even when they are not sick.
4. The employer's plan for screening workers for COVID-19.
5. Employer's sick leave policies.
6. How employees can protect themselves and prevent the spread of COVID-19 at the work site.
 - a. Explain any new equipment, procedures, or policies created to limit the spread of COVID-19 at the work site.
7. Proper handwashing in the work site and at home:
 - a. When employees arrive and before they leave work.

- b. Before and after eating or using the toilet.
 - c. After close interaction with other persons.
 - d. After contacting shared surfaces or tools.
 - e. Before and after wearing a mask or gloves.
 - f. After blowing nose, coughing or sneezing.
8. Explain that alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be used if a sink or hand-washing station is not immediately available. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is as effective as washing hands with soap and water, unless hands are visibly soiled.
9. The importance of physical distancing at work and at home.
10. How to properly use cloth face covers and what they do, including:
 - a. Recommendation that everyone should use cloth face covers when around other people, including at work, while using shared transportation, and when out in the community.
 - b. Cloth face covers can help protect persons around the user of the cloth face cover when combined with physical distancing and frequent hand washing.
 - c. Cloth face covers are not protective equipment and do not protect the person wearing a cloth face cover from COVID-19.
 - d. Cloth face coverings should be washed and dried daily between usages.
 - e. Cloth face coverings should be replaced with a clean mask or face covering when they become wet or soiled.
 - f. Employer policy for cloth face coverings, including how to request face coverings at the worksite if a new one is needed during the workday.
11. Provide signage and other visual markers to remind workers of key policies and procedures.
12. Training materials and signage should be made available in the languages employees are most likely to understand.
 - a. For COVID-19 educational materials in 26 languages, please visit <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020/HealthEducation>
 - b. The Washington Department of Health has a COVID-19 Community Engagement Task Force which can provide additional resources and guidance: doh-cetf@doh.wa.gov

Section 4: Employer responsibilities for screening & managing sick workers

Employers should:

1. Develop a plan to screen all workers for symptoms of COVID-19 on a daily basis, and identify next steps if someone in the workplace becomes symptomatic.
2. Develop flexible, non-punitive sick leave policies so that workers are not punished for getting sent home, or for staying home while ill.
3. Institute symptom and temperature screening (with a no-touch/infrared thermometer) for all workers upon arrival to work, as well as any visitors.

- a. Any worker or visitor who reports symptoms or has a fever (temperature 100.4°f/ 38°c or greater) should be immediately sent home from work and directed to self-isolate.
 - b. Use current CDC guidelines for COVID-19 symptoms to guide screening (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>)
 - c. Follow Washington DOH Guidance for Daily COVID-19 Screening of Staff and Visitors:
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervisitorscreeningguidance.pdf>
 - d. Employees conducting symptom/temperature screening should wear PPE including masks and eye protection; consider adding a barrier such as a Plexiglas screen to provide additional protection.
4. Educate workers to report any COVID-19 symptoms to their manager or supervisor should they develop symptoms during the work day.
 5. Develop a plan for responding to symptomatic workers in the work site or in employer-provided housing. The plan should include information about where to send workers for testing if needed. Community and migrant health centers provide testing in many areas. Contact the local health jurisdiction for testing options in your community.
 6. Direct workers who show or develop symptoms of COVID-19 to obtain testing according to the employer’s plan.
 7. Instruct workers who show symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 to isolate themselves at home or in isolation facilities as instructed by the local health jurisdiction.

Section 5: Employer instructions for responding to cases of COVID-19

1. **Employers are required by law to report probable or confirmed cases of COVID-19 that occur at the work site or at employer-provided housing.** Employers must make the report to the local health jurisdiction as required under WAC 296-307-16190.
 - a. If workers have worked at multiple locations, or if the worker lives in one jurisdiction and works in another jurisdiction, employers may have to report cases to multiple local health departments.
 - b. A list of all local health jurisdiction contacts can be found here:
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/PublicHealthSystem/LocalHealthJurisdictions>
2. Employers are required by law to cooperate with any case investigation or contact tracing efforts undertaken by the local health jurisdiction.
 - a. The local health officer has authority to compel a facility to undergo an investigation as outlined in WAC 246-101-105
(<https://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=246-101-505.>)
 - b. The Local Health Jurisdiction may open a formal case investigation and contact tracing process coordinated with both the employer as well as DOH.
3. When one or more cases is identified at a workplace the employer should:
 - a. Take immediate action to identify workers who may have had prolonged contact with the confirmed case.

- b. Work with the local health jurisdiction to decide who will lead a worksite or housing unit contact investigation.
 - c. Collect the following information related to each person with a confirmed cases in the workplace or housing unit:
 - i. Name, date of birth of each person who is suspected or who has tested positive
 - ii. Contact information such as phone number and home address
 - iii. Work details, including dates worked, shifts, and locations within the plant or farm
 - iv. A list of contacts that the worker had close contact with during their contagious period
 - v. **Section 8** Includes an example list, called a “line list,” which may help employers collect and report information about outbreaks or potential outbreaks of COVID-19 in the workplace.
4. Employers should send home any workers with prolonged contact with a confirmed case and direct them to quarantine themselves for 14 days from the date of their last exposure.
- a. In critical workforce sectors, exposed workers without symptoms may continue working according to CDC guidance and the DOSH directive (<https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-rules/enforcement-policies/DD170.pdf>), as long as the following are in place in the work site:
 - i. Daily work symptom screening for all workers
 - ii. Cloth face coverings or masks are used by all workers
 - iii. Physical distancing measures are in place
 - iv. Cleaning/disinfection of the workspace occurs per state guidance.
 - v. Lack of adequate workforce
 - b. Employers should contact their local health jurisdiction for questions about these policies.
5. Employers must notify their workers that a case has been identified at the worksite without naming the person who tested positive.
- a. Inform workers that they may have been exposed to someone who has tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19. It is appropriate to give details such as: dates shifts the person worked, locations within the worksite, etc.
 - b. Remind exposed workers of symptoms of COVID-19 (See Section 3 – Education) and ask them to report any symptoms that develop while they are working.
 - c. Instruct workers that if symptoms develop at home, they should not report to their next shift. Instead direct them to notify the appropriate point of contact in the workplace (such as their supervisor, HR personnel, or the designated COVID-19 contact at the worksite).

Section 6: Testing

1. The health officer of each local health jurisdiction has the authority to specify the recommended testing strategy and the local health jurisdiction will coordinate with

local healthcare providers as needed. All testing is to be performed with a respiratory sample submitted for COVID-19 nucleic acid or antigen testing. Strategies for testing include several options:

- a. Testing all symptomatic staff and workers as identified in the workplace by daily symptom screening. Workers who test positive must be sent home and instructed to isolate themselves for the appropriate amount of time according to current CDC and DOH guidance.
 - b. If a single member of a housing unit or group shelter tests positive, the local health jurisdiction may order testing of the entire group shelter.
 - c. For ongoing outbreaks, consider wider testing strategies. The public health officer has authority to order testing for **all** staff and employees to identify both symptomatic and asymptomatic persons within the building or site and make site specific isolation and quarantine orders.
 - d. If employers have any questions about testing plans for a worksite or housing unit, they should contact their local health jurisdiction.
2. The Washington State DOH will provide enough test kits to adequately test the volume of persons under investigation within each local health jurisdiction. Local health jurisdictions have the ability to order supplies through a centralized warehouse located in Tumwater, Washington. The Washington State Public Health Lab (PHL) will ensure adequate testing capacity within the state at the Shoreline Washington site as well as with several contracted labs to handle the volume needed. Testing supplies and lab capacity will be coordinated between the LHJ and DOH.
 3. The local health jurisdiction will be responsible for notifying people who test positive for COVID-19, including workers and any others identified in the course of an investigation.

Section 7: Additional resources

CDC and other federal guidance:

- **Symptoms of Coronavirus:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>
- **CDC COVID-19 website:** www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/
- **CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers: Plan, Prepare and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019:** www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html
- **CDC Recommendations for Cloth Face Covers:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>
- **CDC Tools for Cross-Cultural Communication and Language Access:** <https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/culture.html>
- **NIOSH Coronavirus Disease 2019 website:** www.cdc.gov/niosh/emres/2019_ncov.html
- **For meat and poultry processing employers:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/meat-poultry-processing-workers-employers.html>

- **CDC Resources for Shared or Congregate Housing Facilities:**
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/sharedcongregate-house/index.html>
- **CDC guidelines for Cleaning and Disinfection for Non-emergency Transport Vehicles:**
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/disinfecting-transport-vehicles.html>
- **MMWR: COVID-19 Among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities:**
<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/pdfs/mm6918e3-H.pdf>
- **US Department of Homeland Security: Critical Infrastructure guidance (Including Food and Agriculture Sector):**
[https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Version 3.0 CISA Guidance on Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers 1.pdf](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Version%203.0%20CISA%20Guidance%20on%20Essential%20Critical%20Infrastructure%20Workers%201.pdf)
- **OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19:**
<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>
- **EPA List N: Disinfectants for use against SARS-COV-2:** <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

Washington state guidance:

- **Washington DOH COVID-19 website:** <https://www.doh.wa.gov/emergencies/coronavirus>
- **Local Health Jurisdiction Contacts:**
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/PublicHealthSystem/LocalHealthJurisdictions>
- **COVID-19 education materials in 26 languages:**
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020/HealthEducation>
- **Guidance for Daily COVID-19 Screening of Staff and Visitors:**
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervisitorscreeningguidance.pdf>
- **Guidance on Developing a COVID-19 Safety Plan for Critical Infrastructure:**
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/COVID19GuidanceDevelopingSafetyPlan.pdf>
- **DOSH Directive: General Coronavirus Prevention Under Stay Home-Stay Healthy Order Updated: May 15, 2020:** <https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-rules/enforcement-policies/DD170.pdf>
- **Washington Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) Coronavirus (COVID-19) Prevention in Agriculture and Related Industries:** <https://www.lni.wa.gov/forms-publications/F414-165-000.pdf>
- **Washington Department of Labor & Industry (LNI) Food Processing-Warehouse Coronavirus (COVID-19) Fact Sheet:** <https://www.lni.wa.gov/forms-publications/F414-166-000.pdf>
- **Washington Coronavirus Hazard Considerations for Employers (except COVID-19 care in hospitals & clinics):** Face coverings, masks, and respirator choices:
<https://www.lni.wa.gov/agency/docs/wacoronavirushazardconsiderationsemployers.pdf>
- **DOH and L&I Joint Rules CR-103E Adoption Language link to the L&I version (same as DOH):** <https://lni.wa.gov/rulemaking-activity/AO20-09/2009CR103EAdoption.pdf>

Section 8: Example “Line List” for reporting cases of COVID-19

See attached excel file.

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee’s proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

The risk of COVID-19 is not connected to race, ethnicity or nationality. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

Have more questions about COVID-19? Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127**. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.

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