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Interim Guidance for Prevention and Response of COVID-19 at Farms

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This guidance is provided for farm owners, operators, and farm workers so they can incorporate these procedures into farm protocols to prevent and respond to COVID-19.

Background

On March 7, 2020, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo issued [Executive Order 202](#), declaring a state of emergency in response to COVID-19. Community transmission of COVID-19 has occurred throughout New York.

Stop the Spread

[Signage](#) reinforcing social distancing (6 feet), hand-washing, and respiratory health should be posted in prominent locations promoting this message. Signs in [alternative languages](#) are also available.

Hand Hygiene

Regular hand washing with soap and water, for at least 20 seconds, should be done:

- Before and after eating.
- After sneezing, coughing, or nose blowing.
- Avoid touching face and hair.
- After using the restroom.
- Before handling food.
- After touching or cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated, including cell phone and/or clothing.
- After using shared equipment and supplies.

What steps should be taken?

All farms should continue performing routine cleaning and sanitization of their facilities. Additionally, high-risk locations (see below) warrant cleaning and disinfection on a regular schedule.

Maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet (2-meters) for all workers at the worksite and housing settings. Wear face coverings when in public and unable to be socially distance. Wear face coverings when in shared vehicles.

Coordinate with Local Health Department (LHDs) on worker screening and appropriate housing accommodations for workers.

Workers: Follow all steps listed in the "[STOP THE SPREAD](#)" poster. Also, use a face covering if in the presence of others when you are unable to maintain social distancing.

If an individual with laboratory confirmed COVID-19 was symptomatic or positive while on your farm:

Immediately get medical attention for that individual and contact your local health department. Clean and disinfect the area.

Set up and maintain hand washing and equipment sanitizing stations in all common work and housing areas that include soap, water, and paper towels. Hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol can also be provided for workers with unsoiled hands. Hand sanitizer is not effective on heavily soiled hands.

Respiratory Hygiene and Face Coverings

- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or the corner of elbow.
- Dispose of soiled tissues immediately after use.
- Anyone who is over two years old and able to medically tolerate a face-covering, must cover their nose and mouth with a face-covering when in public and unable to social distance per [Executive Order 202.17](#) and [Executive Order 202.18](#), and extensions thereof. This includes wearing face coverings when in vehicles. Additional information can be found at [Interim Guidance on Executive Orders 202.17 and 202.18 Requiring Face Coverings in Public During the COVID-19 Outbreak, April 17, 2020](#).
- Employers must provide essential workers with face coverings, free of charge, to wear when interacting with the public per [Executive Order 202.16](#), and extensions thereof. Additional information can be found at [Interim Guidance on Executive Order 202.16 Requiring Face Coverings for Public and Private Employees Interacting with the Public During the COVID-19 Outbreak, April 14, 2020](#).

Social Distancing

Maintain a 6 foot distance (about 2-meters) from others to minimize the spread of COVID-19:

- Monitor and remind workers to maintain a 6 foot distance throughout their shift. This should occur at all locations, including fields, orchards, vineyards, pack houses, milking parlors, barns, etc.
- Stagger workers over and within rows/aisles.
- Adjust product flow for adequate inspection or sorting with fewer workers on the line.
- Workers must wear face coverings when in public and in cases where social distancing is not possible.
- Those whose job duties permit a continued separation of greater than 6 feet do not have to wear a face covering, unless under quarantine status (see below).
- Use a tape measure or measuring stick to demonstrate a 6 foot distance, which is about 3 arms lengths of the average adult male.
- Advise workers to avoid direct physical social greetings, such as handshakes, hugs, or fist and elbow bumps, and encourage waves and smiles instead.
- Provide adequate time and space for workers to clock in and out of their shifts, while maintaining a safe distance apart.
- Hold meetings and trainings in small groups, so workers can maintain a 6 foot distance and still hear the speaker.
- Provide space to allow workers to maintain a 6 foot distance from others during rest and meal periods.
- Avoid carpooling in shared vehicle spaces where social distance cannot be maintained. Wear face coverings when in a vehicle.

Routine Cleaning

Standard Infection Control Practices

As part of standard infection control practices, routine cleaning should be rigorous and ongoing. Cleaning supplies and time must be provided by operators for individuals to routinely clean on the worksite and in housing. Surfaces touched most frequently must be prioritized for routine cleaning because these surfaces can be reservoirs for germs and an exposure pathway for transmission of COVID-19.

Examples of priority areas for routine cleaning include:

- High contact surfaces that are touched by many different people, such as light switches, steering wheels, utensils, handrails, cart handles, equipment buttons, conveyors, tank handles, shared equipment and doorknobs/handles.
- Feeders.
- Storage containers.
- Floors and walls.
- Trash containers.
- Restrooms.
- Heat and air conditioner vents.
- Horizontal surfaces and light fixtures.
- Frequently used equipment.
- Uniform, protective equipment and/or linens.

Identify and routinely clean and disinfect high-risk locations, even before a confirmed case of COVID-19 occurs.

Examples of high-risk locations include:

Packing Houses, Storage Rooms, Milking Parlors, Barns, Sheds, and Tank Rooms

- Clean and disinfect frequently access surfaces/equipment regularly.
- Discard or launder wipes/cloths after each use.

Restrooms

- Clean and disinfect all restroom surfaces, fixtures, doorknobs, push plates, and switches (at least once daily).

Examples of frequently touched surfaces:

- Shared equipment;
- Counters, tables and chairs;
- Door handles and push plates;
- Levers and steering wheels;
- Handrails;
- Kitchen and bathroom faucets;
- Equipment surfaces;
- Equipment buttons;
- Light switches;
- Remote controls;
- Shared phones, keyboards and electronics;
- Shared sleeping areas.

Note: Some surfaces or equipment are difficult to clean or are sensitive to liquids. When shared, they may contribute to indirect transmission. Locations with shared-use equipment should provide posted signs regarding proper hand-hygiene before and after using such equipment, to minimize disease transmission. Also, consider using removable washable covers to protect hard to clean equipment hardware against spills and to facilitate cleaning.

Dining Areas/Breakrooms

- Clean and disinfect counters, tables, and chairs regularly (at least once daily).

Locker Rooms/Sleeping Quarters

- Clean and disinfect surfaces, tables, chairs, beds, cots and lockers regularly (at least once daily).

Other Frequently Touched Surfaces or Equipment or Areas

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces on a periodic schedule, as operational considerations allow (at least once daily).

Cleaning and Disinfection

Cleaning removes germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces or objects. Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces or objects.

Cleaning and disinfection supplies and instructions on how to use the supplies should be provided to farm workers, for both work and housing areas. Those individuals responsible for cleaning and disinfection should be provided and use protective equipment (e.g. gloves) as recommended on product labels. Carefully read and follow all label instructions for safe and effective use.

Step 1: Cleaning

Always clean surfaces prior to use of disinfectants, in order to reduce soil and remove germs. Dirt and other materials on surfaces can reduce the effectiveness of disinfectants. Clean surfaces using water and soap or detergent to reduce soil and remove germs. For combination products that can both clean and disinfect, always follow the instructions on the specific product label to ensure effective use.

Step 2: Disinfection

Cleaning of soiled areas must be completed prior to disinfection, to ensure the effectiveness of the disinfectant product. Use the Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) [list of products](#) registered in New York State identified as effective against COVID-19. This list corresponds to those identified by the EPA. DEC registration will not be listed on disinfection product labels. If you have any questions about NYSDEC pesticide registration, please call the NYSDEC Bureau of Pesticide Management at (518) 402-8748. If these products are unavailable, disinfect surfaces using an EPA- and DEC*- registered disinfectant labeled to be effective against rhinovirus and/or human coronavirus. If these commercial products are unavailable, it is also acceptable to use a fresh 2% chlorine bleach solution (approximately 1 tablespoon of bleach in 1 quart of water). Prepare the bleach solution daily or as needed.

Label directions must be followed when using disinfectants to ensure the target viruses are effectively killed. This includes adequate contact times (i.e., the amount of time a disinfectant should remain on surfaces to be effective), which may vary between five and ten minutes after application. Disinfectants that come in a wipe form will also list effective contact times on their label.

For disinfectants that come in concentrated forms, it is important to carefully follow instructions for making the diluted concentration needed to effectively kill the target virus. This information can be found on the product label.

Step 3: Disposal

Place all used gloves and other disposable items in a bag that can be tied closed before disposing of them with other waste. Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds immediately after removing gloves or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly soiled.

Local Health Department (LHD) Coordination

Operators should work closely with their LHD to address the screening, isolation and quarantine status, and housing needs of their workers. Operators providing housing to workers should devise a plan if a large number of workers require separate accommodations due to quarantining restrictions imposed by the LHD, or for workers requiring isolation if they become symptomatic. Farm workers are considered essential workers and may continue to work while under quarantine provided the required conditions outlined below are followed.

Screening Guidance

Identify staff responsible for screening workers and coordinating appropriate housing for workers under quarantine or isolation, as set forth below and in conjunction with LHDs.

- Before reporting to the worksite, screening must review the worker's international travel.
- Screening must be conducted as workers enter the worksite, and every 12 hours thereafter.
- Screening should ask workers if they have any COVID-19 related symptoms, such as cough or shortness of breath, or if they have had exposure to anyone who either tested positive for COVID-19 or had symptoms of COVID-19.
- Screening should also check if the individual has a temperature greater than or equal to 100.0°F.

Workers Potentially Exposed to a Confirmed or Suspected Case of COVID-19

The following workers should be precautionary quarantined for 14 days when not at work on the farm, even if they are asymptomatic:

- Workers who in the past 14 days have been in close or proximate contact with someone who was infected with COVID-19.
- Workers who in the past 14 days traveled from another country or who were on a cruise ship (including river cruises).
- Any worker the LHD believes should be quarantined for precautionary reasons.

Workers who are considered essential personnel, as described in the Department's [Health Advisory: Protocols for Essential Personnel to Return to Work Following COVID-19 Exposure or Infection](#), who meet quarantine criteria described above, may be allowed to work in accordance with the Department's Health Advisory and if they:

- Remain asymptomatic.
- Remain in quarantine when not at work. Workers may be quarantined in their own home or at a location designated by the operator that meets LHD quarantine requirements.
- If it is difficult to provide for 6 foot separation between essential workers while in quarantine, essential workers may be quarantined in a recreational vehicle, a motel/hotel room, at home in their own room, etc.

- Rely on LHDs and employers to provide essential needs such as healthcare, food, medications, and laundry.
- Undergo temperature monitoring and symptom checks upon arrival to work, and at least every 12 hours thereafter while at work, and self-monitor (i.e. take temperature, assess for symptoms) twice a day when not at work. Operators must have thermometers on site to perform temperature checks.
- Wear a face covering while in the presence of any other individual.
- Immediately stop work and notify their supervisor if they develop ANY symptoms consistent with COVID-19. The LHD may be consulted on next steps as outlined below.
- Testing should be prioritized for essential personnel with symptoms.

Workers Confirmed or Suspected of COVID-19

Workers who have tested positive for COVID-19, regardless of whether or not they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 and workers who are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, such as a temperature greater than or equal to 100.0°F, cough, or shortness of breath, should be isolated and not permitted to return to work for at least 10 days, or in accordance with any federal or state health guidance issued subsequent to this guidance.

Workers in isolation must:

- Remain isolated in their own room with the door closed;
- Use their own bathroom, if possible. If the employer is providing housing for the affected worker(s), please work with your LHD to arrange how to isolate the worker(s) from others;
- Be monitored by the LHD, as appropriate; and
- Be provided essential needs such as healthcare, food, medications, and laundry.

Isolated workers may not report to work until:

- At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, AND
- At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed without a fever and without the use of fever-reducing medications, AND
- Respiratory symptoms including cough and shortness of breath improve.

Worker Housing Guidance

All worker housing should provide for adequate social distancing, cleaning and disinfection, and the necessary controls to prevent transmission of COVID-19:

- Work with LHDs to screen and assign workers to appropriate housing based on guidance above.
- House workers in the smallest groups possible.
- Distance beds at least 6 feet apart.
- Increase ventilation in all housing areas, including living and sleeping, cooking and eating, and bathroom and shower areas, by opening doors and windows, if outdoor temperatures are agreeable.
- Implement social distancing measures for common areas, such as scheduling staggered use of these areas.

General Isolation/Quarantine Shelter Requirements

- Separate sleeping quarters, with the ability to close the door and separate bathroom facilities for each individual or family group.
- Access to a sink with soap, water, and paper towels.
- Restrict interaction with others outside of a family group.
- Restrict use of shared spaces.
- Provide cleaning supplies, e.g. household cleaning wipes.
- Food must be delivered to the person's quarters.
- Supply face coverings for individuals.
- Garbage must be bagged and left outside by the door of each of the quarters for routine pickup. Special handling is not required.
- A system for temperature and symptom monitoring shall be implemented for assessment in the living quarters.

More Information

New York State Department of Health's COVID-19 Webpage:

- <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/home>

Listing of Local Health Departments:

- https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Webpage:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

FDA guidance regarding food, food handling:

- <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

Cornell CALS COVID-19 Resources and Response:

- <https://cals.cornell.edu/covid-19-response>