

COVID-19 GUIDANCE FOR FARM OPERATIONS

This fact sheet is to assist you in implementing COVID-19 prevention measures and what actions to take in the event that there is a symptomatic worker or positive case of COVID-19 at your farm or farm operation.

COVID-19 Prevention Measures

Keep workplace areas clean

- Provide the necessary hand washing facilities and [cleaning and disinfecting products](#) to maintain a clean and safe workplace
- For workers in the field, consider portable hand wash stations equipped with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitizers
- Evaluate the workplace for areas where people have frequent contact with each other and share spaces and objects, and increase the frequency of cleaning in these areas
- Clean and disinfect high traffic work areas and frequently touched surfaces twice daily
- Ensure that supplies are available for employees to clean and disinfect their workspaces as applicable
- Where distancing cannot be maintained, use barriers, alter work processes and provide face coverings

Physical distancing

- Ensure work areas are at least 2 metres apart and workers are kept distanced
- Reduce activities in the workplace that will bring workers in close proximity, for example meetings
- Consider how workers can distance during travel to different work locations
- Shopping trips:
 - Limit shopping trips or shop online and have groceries delivered or have pick-up
 - Use online banking rather than banking in-person
 - Attempt to have one or a few designated shoppers going to the store for all workers
 - Have hand sanitizers available
 - Wash hands after the trip
- Advise workers to stay at the farm and to avoid meeting with workers from other farms
- Where distancing cannot be maintained, provide barriers, alter work processes and provide face coverings

Employer communication

- Increase communication to workers about COVID-19 and measures you are taking for prevention
- Where feasible, adjust policies and procedures to reduce social contact, such as flexible hours and staggering start times

Continue to screen and self-monitor

- Workers must be screened daily prior to commencing work
- Workers must be made aware that if they develop symptoms of COVID-19, they must notify the employer and refrain from work and be isolated in their accommodations. Ensure they are provided with food, water and heat if applicable

Outdoor Farm gate sales

- Minimize interactions between customers and your employees, such as limiting the number of customers permitted in your establishment or serving customers over the phone. Ideally, a 2 metre separation should be maintained, unless there is a physical barrier (e.g., cubicle, Plexiglass window)

Signage

Download, print and post signs in visible locations to raise awareness about COVID-19 and to encourage healthy behaviours:

- [COVID-19 Self-Assessment](#) (poster for entrances)
- [Sanitize Your Hands](#) (poster for entrances)
- [Correct Hand Washing](#)
- [Physical Distancing](#)
- [Lower Your Risk of COVID-19](#)
- [“Mask or Face Covering Required”](#) (signage for entrance)

Consider using face coverings and masks

- Face coverings (two-layer) or masks are strongly recommended when physical distancing of 2 metres cannot be maintained
- [Train staff on the proper use of masks and how to safely put on and take off a mask](#)
- Masks do not replace the need for physical distancing, hand washing and staying home when sick
- Face coverings may not be tolerated by everyone. Underlying health, behaviour issues or beliefs should be considered
- Business operators [are required to have a policy](#) requiring masks for indoor public spaces

What do I do if there is a symptomatic employee or positive farm worker?

Symptoms

COVID-19 [symptoms](#) can range from mild (like the flu and other common respiratory infections) to severe. [Visit the York Region Public Health COVID-19 page for the latest understanding of common and uncommon symptoms of COVID-19.](#)

If the worker has any severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing or chest pain, call 911.

Isolation and testing

- Immediately isolate an employee with symptoms away from all others including family members
- Ensure safe transport and advise employee to self-isolate away from family members for 14 days
- If the worker lives onsite, immediately isolate the person away from others in temporary alternative accommodations. Continue to monitor for symptoms in workers that reside with or have had close contact with that employee.
- Ensure you have a contingency plan for alternate housing arrangements in the event of ill workers
- Contact York Region Public Health at 1-800-361-5653 to report and arrange testing. Testing is available for anyone:
 - concerned they have been exposed to COVID-19
 - experiencing at least one [symptom](#) of COVID-19, or
 - at risk of exposure to COVID-19 through their employment/work
- Testing is available at COVID-19 Assessment Centres located at:
 - [Markham-Stouffville Hospital](#)
 - [Mackenzie Health](#)
 - [Southlake Regional Health Centre](#)
- Contact HEOCLiaisonCS@york.ca if you are interested in mobile testing at your farm
- If the employee or worker goes to a COVID-19 Assessment Centre for testing, a two layer mask or face covering should be worn
- If the worker has recently travelled outside of Canada, they must remain in self-isolation for the full 14 days, even if test results are negative

- **If you are unsure if the worker needs to self-isolate or get tested, please contact York Region Public Health at 1-800-361-5653.**
- Report occupational illness to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) if they have not been notified. Email your notice within 4 days to MLTSDoccupillness.notices@ontario.ca

Close contacts

- Gather information on the employee's close contacts to assist in case/contact tracing and additional precautions
- Close contacts are people the person lives with, spent time with at work, has had intimate relationships with, people who have cared for the person or that the person has cared for (for example with bathing, feeding or dressing) and people that the person has visited with, or that have come to visit the person at their home
- If you employ crews that attend other farm locations (including private workers) or agency workers, provide all information with respect to additional staff and agencies

Positive COVID-19 cases that live in York Region are reported to York Region Public Health. Positive employees will be contacted directly by a public health COVID-19 case investigator. If a case works for you but resides in a different jurisdiction, they will be contacted by the health unit in that jurisdiction for contact tracing.

York Region workplaces, including farms that have a positive case(s) living within or outside of York Region will also be contacted as part of a thorough public health investigation to control and prevent further spread of the virus. Information collected by York Region Public Health includes details on employees, employee contacts, job functions, precautions and procedures in place and housing/accommodations.

The investigation may also assess potential non-workplace factors that may be contributing to transmission and ongoing cases (e.g., employees carpooling to work, multiple employees living in the same household or similar close contact, employees socializing outside of work hours without physical distancing, and household contacts with higher risk of exposure (e.g., healthcare worker or child care worker)).

The focus of York Region Public Health is communicable disease control associated with a positive case or outbreak. A Public Health Inspector may perform an on-site visit to review precautions, assist in gathering information, provide recommendations to prevent further spread and assist the case investigator. These inspections will be pre-arranged and will involve inspection of worker accommodations where needed. Coordination of on-site inspections with other relevant agencies (e.g., MLTSD, Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)) may also occur.

York Region Public Health Inspectors will also be conducting routine inspections of farm accommodations and work activities.

Can asymptomatic workers that test positive continue to work?

If more than one person tests positive for COVID-19 at your farm, York Region Public Health (YRPH) will determine how likely it is that the infection was transmitted within the workplace. If an outbreak is declared in the workplace, the steps for [investigating and managing a workplace outbreak](#) would be followed. Otherwise, case and contact management will follow the process for **one or a limited number of positive tests**, as outlined below.

Please contact York Region Public Health for specific guidance by visiting york.ca/covid19 or calling 1-800-361-5653.

Steps for the worker who tests positive but has no symptoms (“the case”)

The worker who has the positive test result (the case) must self-isolate or work-isolate (if determined appropriate by YRPH). The worker (case) should be re-tested as soon as possible.

If the result of the re-test is:

- Negative: the person can stop self-isolating or work-isolating and return to work and other normal activity
- Positive: the person must continue to self-isolate or work-isolate until 14 days from the date of their first test.

Steps for the close contacts of the case

Close contacts of the worker who tested positive will be identified in consultation with the employer. Close contacts may include people who have spent time less than 2 metres away from the infected person in the same room, workspace, or area without barriers or protective equipment and people living in the same home.

For 14 days after the last contact with the case, work close contacts who tested negative may continue to work while following additional measures. Work close contacts must:

- self-monitor for symptoms
- wear a mask at all times outside of the home, including at work
- be particularly diligent in maintaining physical distance from other people

These workers should be tested. Work close contacts who were not tested must self-isolate. YRPH may advise that these contacts can work-isolate or continue to work while following the additional measures outlined above for contacts with negative test results.

When the worker who tested positive (the case) is re-tested, if the result is negative all close contacts can return to work and other activities as before the positive test result.

How will positive cases be separated?

Positive cases can be kept together in isolation. For alternate housing accommodations for on-site workers, you will need to re-arrange sleeping units to keep positive workers in isolation together away from others that are not ill or are negative. Enhanced cleaning and disinfection will need to occur before moving individuals.

For more information visit <https://www.ontario.ca/page/targeted-covid-19-workplace-testing-campaigns-farms>

During self-isolation of temporary farm workers

Housing accommodation for self-isolation

- During the 14-day isolation period, the employer should supply the temporary farm workers with necessary supplies required to self-isolate (i.e., adequate food, potable water, toiletries etc.)
- The employer must house self-isolating workers in accommodations that are separate from those not subject to self-isolation. This may require finding alternate accommodations (e.g., hotel) if this requirement cannot be met
- The employer can house workers who are subject to self-isolation together, but the housing should enable them to be 2 metres apart from each other at all times. For example, beds must be at least 2 metres apart. Shared facilities (e.g., bathroom, kitchen, living space) are allowed, provided that there is sufficient space in the accommodations for workers to respect the self-isolation requirements. When it is not possible to maintain 2 metre distance apart, a mask should be worn.

- Ensure surfaces in the accommodations are cleaned and disinfected regularly. It is suggested that surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens and common areas be cleaned and disinfected daily, or more often as required, and that a log be maintained. The employer is expected to provide the cleaning materials (e.g., paper towels, household cleaning and disinfection products, dish soap and laundry soap)
- Have a contingency plan in place in case a worker develops symptoms and consider having a back-up accommodation when needed (e.g., a trailer, a hotel room, etc.)

Employer communication

- Provide information to temporary farm workers about COVID-19 and measures you are taking for prevention
- Post signs in the worker's language advising of COVID-19 precautions of encouraging good respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene, and other healthy practices (please see signs in Spanish and English attached to email)
- Instruct workers to self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 and/or conduct daily check-ins with each worker to assess symptoms
- Consider providing individual or disposable thermometers for workers
- Create a log sheet for each worker and keep daily records of their health status.

Maintain strict physical distancing of 2 metres from workers in self-isolation. Otherwise, the appropriate PPE must be worn, such as mask, gown, gloves, eye protection (goggles or face shield).

More information

Please visit our website at york.ca/covid19 for updated information or call us at 1-800-361-5653.