

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

251 Causeway Street, Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114
617-626-1700 fax: 617-626-1850 www.mass.gov/agr



CHARLES D. BAKER
Governor

KARYN E. POLITO
Lt. Governor

KATHLEEN A. THEOHARIDES
Secretary

JOHN LEBEAUX
Commissioner

BULLETIN 2020-19

COVID-19 Testing for Food & Agriculture Essential Services Workers

(Effective as of June 4, 2020)

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts recognizes the critical role that local agriculture plays in assuring a safe and reliable food supply. On March 23, and in a subsequent Emergency Order released on March 31, Governor Baker included the food and agriculture sectors in the list of [businesses](#) that provide essential services in the Commonwealth. This classification includes food manufacturing and farm employees who produce, prepare and distribute food grown, harvested, prepared and distributed in Massachusetts. This guidance document outlines testing availability for food and agricultural workers in the Commonwealth. Farms, agricultural businesses, processors, and individuals involved in the Massachusetts food supply chain should reference [BULLETIN 2020-18](#) for guidance on farm labor and housing.

COVID-19 Testing Eligibility:

The Department of Public Health recommends testing for individuals with even mild COVID-19 [symptoms](#) and for [close contacts](#) of confirmed COVID-19 positive cases; these tests should be covered by your insurance provider. Please visit this [interactive map](#) to identify a testing site near you.

Food and agricultural employees continue to serve on the front lines during the COVID-19 response, planting, growing, harvesting, processing, and preparing food for the citizens of the Commonwealth. They continue to serve a critical role in the supply of food produced in the region.

<https://memamaps.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=eba3f0395451430b9f631cb095feb13>.

Farm employees who have symptoms associated with COVID-19 or test positive for COVID-19:

Once a farm worker is diagnosed with COVID-19, the priority is to prevent further spread to other individuals. Transmission occurs primarily via respiratory droplets in the air, but it is possible that transmission may also occur via contact with an infected surface. Farm management and farm supervisors should support the proper identification and isolation of farm employees who may have

symptoms or who have tested positive for COVID-19 by implementing the following practices, requirements and procedures:

- a. Symptomatic farm workers should be sent home immediately, or if at home, not be allowed to come to the farm or report to work. Symptomatic workers should contact their doctor or other medical provider.
- b. Farm owners should contact their local health department to ensure that proper contacts are established, and proper public health protocols are being followed.
- c. Farm staff who present severe symptoms (shortness of breath, chest pains, confusion, bluish lips or face) should seek immediate medical care and call 911.
- d. Indoor areas and equipment that were utilized by sick employees should be immediately closed off and allowed to sit for at least 24 hours if practical.
- e. Farm management should then undertake [appropriate cleaning and disinfection](#) measures of the affected workspace and equipment before allowing the re-entry of farm employees into the affected space.

If a worker has been exposed to COVID-19, do they need to be quarantined?

Agricultural workers are considered essential workers and therefore may be permitted to continue to work following potential exposure to COVID-19, provided they remain asymptomatic and [additional precautions](#) are implemented to protect them and their fellow employees. A potential exposure means having close contact (within 6 feet, for more than 15 minutes) at work, home, or in public spaces with an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. The timeframe for having contact with an individual includes the period of time of 48 hours before the individual became symptomatic or, in the case of people without symptoms, the 48 hours prior to the individual being tested. Farm owners and farm supervisors should be aware of the following:

- a. Farm workers who have been exposed to COVID-19 and remain asymptomatic should follow FDA/CDC guidance issued for [food facilities potentially exposed to COVID-19](#).
- b. The U.S. [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) explicitly allows ADA-covered employers to inquire whether employees have symptoms of COVID-19.
- c. Farms should determine which persons on the farm had contact with the ill employee during the time the employee had symptoms and 2 days prior to symptoms or in the 2 days prior to being tested in people without symptoms.
- d. If farm employees are exposed at work, employers should work with their Local Board of Health to inform employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace while maintaining confidentiality.
- e. Only individuals that were in close contact with the infected worker need to be monitored for illness and should be tested.
- f. Individuals in quarantine should not share bedrooms or bathrooms with anyone else if at all possible. At a minimum, their bed must be at least 6 feet away from other beds and they should disinfect high touch surfaces in the bathroom immediately after using it.
- g. Other individuals in the facility should not be considered high risk for infection, do not require special treatment, and may continue working as normal, [after contact surfaces and areas are isolated, cleaned and disinfected](#), as described below.

When can a farm employee who has been sick return to work?

For those who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, self-isolation ends when both: (a) 72 hours have passed after the fever ends (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and symptoms subside; and (b) at least 10 days have passed after the onset of symptoms.

Where can my workers learn more about COVID-19?

Talk with your employees about coronavirus, how it spreads, and how to prevent getting infected. Print the [CDC factsheets and posters](#) (available in many languages), and post in your workplace and employee housing facilities. Provide usable and appropriate training, education, and informational material about worker health and safety, including proper hygiene practices and the use of any workplace controls (including PPE). Informed workers who feel safe at work are less likely to be unnecessarily absent. For Massachusetts specific updates, visit: <https://www.mass.gov/agr> and www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19.

Operations throughout the supply chain are reminded to implement the best possible COVID-19 mitigation efforts by enforcing social distancing, strictly following guidance issued by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and CDC, and adhering to [guidance issued by MDAR](#) to protect the Massachusetts' workforce and food supply.

Future Updates

This information is based on what we know now and will be updated as we learn more. Please visit: www.mass.gov/agr and www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19 for updates.

[COVID-19 Resources for Agriculture](#)