

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



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BULLETIN 2021-01 FARM LABOR MANAGEMENT

Considerations for Fruit and Vegetable Growers Related to Coronavirus & COVID-19

Agricultural businesses have been deemed [essential services](#) under Governor Baker's emergency order and continue to be allowed to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic. MDAR is issuing a series of [guidance documents](#) to assist these businesses in performing this service safely. If you have concerns or suggestions please contact the MDAR Produce Safety Team at: Michael.Botelho@mass.gov or via phone at: (508) 985-8751, Department of Career Services (MDCS) at: Jose.Ocasio@detma.org or via phone at: (617) 626-5587 and the Department of Public Health at: Amy.J.Medeiros@mass.gov or via phone at: (617) 624-5757.

Background

COVID-19 is the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus ("the novel coronavirus"). Symptoms can include fever, cough, and shortness of breath, and may appear 2-14 days after exposure. While the majority of COVID-19 illnesses are mild, it can result in severe and fatal illness, particularly in the elderly and among those with underlying health conditions. Much more information is available at the [CDC Situational Summary page](#).

Foodborne Exposure to COVID-19

Currently, there is no evidence that transmission of COVID-19 occurs through food or food packaging. Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a virus that causes respiratory illness. The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. ([U.S. Food & Drug Administration, posted 3/17/20](#)).

Farm Labor in Massachusetts and COVID-19

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts recognizes the critical role that local agriculture plays in assuring a safe and reliable food supply. As we each look to control the spread and impact of COVID-19, there are many questions arising around the risks associated with workers on farms. This guidance document outlines best practices to maintain the health and safety of farm employees and reduce the impact of COVID-19 related illnesses on farms in the Commonwealth.

Please remember simple steps can help stop the spread of this and other respiratory viruses. All farm employees should:

1. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. If hands are visibly dirty, handwashing must occur as dirt will reduce the efficacy of the hand sanitizer.
2. Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth particularly with unwashed hands.
3. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
4. Stay home when sick.
5. Cover coughs or sneezes with their elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash; wash hands afterwards.
6. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Signage reminding workers about how to [stop the spread of germs](#) is available in many languages [from the CDC](#) and must be displayed prominently in work spaces.

A. GENERAL FARM LABOR GUIDANCE- SOCIAL DISTANCING AND WORKER HYGIENE (COVID-19)

1. Social distancing on farms, pack-houses and farm stands

While farms are designated as essential, they are required to follow social distancing protocols for workers in accordance with [guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#) and CDC for social distancing. Farms should continue to enforce social distancing of farm employees, and the isolation of possible illness in work crews, by adopting the following practices:

- a. Develop a plan for the monitoring, isolation and response to possible COVID-19 illness or exposure on the farm.
- b. Strongly encourage farm workers who are sick to notify farm management that they are ill and to stay home.
- c. Verify that staff are free of visible illness or symptoms and are sent home to seek medical care if presenting with symptoms.
- d. Limit contact between workers by increasing the distance (at least 6' if possible) and limiting the duration of contact between them. Limit the number of staff allowed in an area

- at one time.
- e. Consider creating teams or cohorts of employees that always work together in the same shifts, to limit possible exposure across your workforce. Group workers in cohorts based on living arrangements. Reduce crew size if possible.
 - f. Stagger breaks and lunch periods and set up areas for these activities in a way that will prevent gathering of groups and maintain social distancing requirements between staff. Gatherings are currently required to be fewer than 10 people.
 - g. Avoid having staff travel together in the same vehicle.
 - h. Restrict outside visitors' access to the farm, pack-house, greenhouses and other farm infrastructure. Visitors who must visit the farm should be reminded of social distancing requirements, have limited access to farm areas where staff are working, and should follow the same hygiene requirements as workers, such as hand washing and wearing face coverings.
 - i. Provide training to farm staff on social distancing and hygiene requirements, sick leave protocols, and recognizing signs of illness. Training should be provided in a language appropriate for the trainee.
 - j. Use [signage](#), verbal reinforcement and monitoring of staff to ensure that social distancing guidance and farm protocols are clearly understood and adopted and in the native language of the persons at the worksite.

2. The use of face coverings/masks for farm employees in Massachusetts

Masks and cloth face coverings can help prevent transmission of the virus from asymptomatic carriers and protect farm employees. Farm managers should be aware of the difference between respirators, masks and cloth face coverings by reviewing the [FDA fact sheet](#) developed for their use in the Food and Agriculture Sector during the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic.

Respirators or surgical masks (n95) are the most effective barrier and should be obtained when available. As an alternative, properly constructed cloth face coverings can serve as an effective barrier for the disbursement of respiratory droplets from an individual and can minimize transmission. Farms should require the use of face coverings or masks by farm staff and support their use by implementing the following minimum requirements:

- a. Require Farm employees to wear masks or face coverings at all times when in close proximity to one another (within 6'), including in fields and pack houses and while being transported in farm vehicles to and from work sites and housing locations.
- b. Make face coverings available for farm staff and monitor their use. Reusable cloth face coverings should be changed out or laundered regularly, and at least before each daily use.
- c. Follow [CDC guidelines](#) for the proper use, construction and handling of cloth face coverings, [including new information on the benefit of double masking](#). These include:
 - l. Cloth face coverings should fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face

- and be secured with ties or ear loops.
- II. Home-constructed cloth face coverings should include multiple layers of fabric and allow for breathing without restriction.
 - III. Cloth face masks must be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.
- d. Ensure that proper training is provided for farm employees on the proper construction, usage, storage and laundering of face cloth coverings.
 - e. Surgical masks and respirators are not recommended to be worn at this time by farm employees in Massachusetts (unless required for a specific task such as pesticide mixing and application) since they need to be reserved for health care workers and first responders.

3. The use of gloves for farm employees in Massachusetts

Farm staff can utilize gloves according to the farm's established protocols while harvesting, sorting and packing fresh produce in the field and in pack houses and should have a glove use policy in place to ensure gloves are maintained in adequate sanitary conditions. If using gloves for prevention of transmission of the COVID-19 pathogen, disposable gloves should be used. Gloves can provide a barrier between hands and produce, preventing transmission of pathogens to contact surfaces. They can also be a good reminder not to touch your face. Remember, however, that gloves can be a source of contamination if not used properly. Follow [CDC glove removal guidelines](#) and please remember to [follow hand washing guidelines](#) recommended by the CDC before putting on gloves and between glove change-outs. Farm management should support the proper use of disposable gloves by implementing the following requirements and procedures:

- a. If gloves are provided, make available sufficient quantities of disposable gloves to support single use by farm employees.
- b. Ensure that employees are washing hands before putting on gloves and in-between glove change outs.
- c. Identify locations and receptacles where gloves should be disposed.
- d. Consistently monitor the proper storage, use and disposal of disposable gloves.
- e. Ensure that proper training is provided for farm employees on the proper usage, storage and disposal of gloves on the farm.

4. Handwashing

Farm employees are required to wash and sanitize their hands at frequent intervals during the work day and upon entering the farm or any farm vehicles, after coughing, sneezing, eating, touching their face, using the restroom, between work activities, and any other time their hands may be a source of contamination. Farms should support proper hygiene practices during COVID-19 response by implementing the following requirements and procedures:

- a. Ensure adequate handwashing facilities are located at work locations at the farm that support partitioned and dispersed work crews.

- b. Promote frequent and thorough hand washing through signage, verbal reinforcement and training.
- c. Ensure soap and single use paper towels are provided at handwashing stations and restroom facilities on the farm.
- d. Ensure that trash receptacles are provided for the proper disposal of used paper towels at hand washing stations.
- e. Farm management should also provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers for each worker, containing at least 60% alcohol.
- f. Hand washing stations [can be constructed relatively easily](#) and cheaply and deployed in support of personal hygiene practices to reduce the possible transmission of COVID-19.

5. Temperature taking and health assessment for farm employees

Farms may employ temperature monitoring to identify potentially sick employees. In the United States, the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\) issued an update](#) to its guidance that now expressly acknowledges that employers may implement temperature screening measures in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic. ADA-covered employers are also allowed to inquire whether an employee has symptoms of COVID-19. Farms who are considering compulsory temperature taking are advised to weigh several issues prior to the implementation (e.g. who will administer checks, how to enforce compliance, contingencies, etc.) to ensure that all measures are implemented equally and there is no cause to suspect discrimination against any worker or group. Additionally, OSHA rules may apply.

Farm labor camp operators must implement a worker screening process prior to the beginning of each work day according to recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and [requirements outlined by the MA Department of Public Health](#). Individuals providing the worker screenings shall wear appropriate PPE and maintain, to the best of their ability, social distancing guidelines and safety protocols.

- a. Ask each individual worker if they have experienced, in the past 24 hours, unusual coughing, shortness of breath, headaches, chills, shaking chills, sore throat, muscle aches or pains, new loss of taste, or smell or whether they have felt feverish. Workers should be screened in the language that they are most comfortable with.
- b. Take a temperature reading from each worker, or require employees to self-administer a temperature check, with a temporal artery (forehead) thermometer that is disinfected in between each use with an isopropyl alcohol wipe.

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

Once a farm employee 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 or to their on-farm housing unit immediately, or if at home, not be allowed to come to the farm or report to work. Anyone who develops a fever (temperature over 100°F or 38°C) or any of the listed symptoms, must consult with a medical provider. If they are diagnosed with COVID-19 or the provider considers them likely to have COVID-19, regardless of whether a test is performed, the individual must isolate in compliance with CDC and DPH guidance and may not return to work until released from isolation according to that guidance. All confirmed cases of COVID-19 must be reported to the local board of health or the Department of Public Health Epidemiology Line at 617-983-6800.
- b. Farm staff who present severe symptoms (shortness of breath, chest pains, confusion, bluish lips or face) should seek immediate medical care and call 911.
- c. Farm employees experiencing mild symptoms should stay home and get in touch with their doctor or other medical provider.
- d. Areas that were utilized by sick employees should be immediately closed off for 24 hours if practical.
- e. Farm management should then undertake appropriate cleaning measures of the affected workspace or facility, as described below in the “Cleaning and Sanitizing” section and should allow adequate time before allowing the re-entry of farm employees into the affected space.

7. 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 at work or home with an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. Close contact is defined by CDC as someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes starting 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic individuals, two days prior to a positive test specimen collection) until the time the individual is isolated.

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 [MA return to work guidance](#) and 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 for asymptomatic individuals, two days prior to test specimen collection, until the time

- that the individual was isolated.
- d. If farm employees are exposed at work, the employer's [on-site COVID-19 contact person](#) should inform employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace while maintaining confidentiality.
 - e. All individuals on the farm need to be monitored for illness.
 - f. Other individuals in the facility who have separate job duties and did not come into contact with the infected individual or workspace 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.

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

A farm worker can return to work if one of the following protocols have been met:

- a. If a farm employee tests positive or their doctor says they have confirmed or probable COVID-19, they must be directed to stay home for a minimum of 10 days from the 1st day of symptoms appearing AND be fever-free for 24 hours without fever reducing medications AND experience significant improvements in symptoms. Release from isolation is under the jurisdiction of the local board of health where the individual resides.
- b. If a farm employee is displaying symptoms but tests negative or their doctor says they do not have COVID-19, they must be directed to stay home until at least 24 hours after fever is gone without fever reducing medications and symptoms get better.

9. Cleaning, Sanitizing and Disinfecting on-farm.

The frequent cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting of any areas where employees congregate, or that they routinely touch; items such as doorknobs, timeclocks, shared tools and equipment, the employee breakroom and bathroom facilities, is an important step in limiting the impact of illness on farms. Procedures and protocols should be established to determine when cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting steps take place and who is responsible to conduct them. In addition, workers should be instructed and trained to understand their impact on other staff on the farm and should be reminded, through verbal communication and signage posted in conspicuous locations, to limit or avoid the following actions:

- a. Farm management should discourage workers from using other workers' desks, work tools and equipment, or sharing food or utensils. In addition, cell phones may be reservoirs for pathogens and should be kept away from food handling spaces as much as possible.
- b. Explore requiring employees to leave phones in their lockers, check them only during breaks, and sanitize them with a product that has [70% isopropyl alcohol](#) frequently. Set up daily and weekly cleaning schedules and instruct employees to wear disposable gloves to clean and wash their hands thoroughly after they are done.

* ***What is the difference between cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting?***

Cleaning removes germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces and objects using soap or detergent and water to physically remove them. Surfaces should be cleaned before being sanitized or disinfected; a surface cannot be sanitized or disinfected if it is dirty.

Sanitizing kills germs, lowering the number of germs on surfaces or objects to a safe level, as judged by public health standards or requirements. Sanitizers or sanitizing rates are generally not labeled for use against viruses.

Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces or objects to a greater degree than sanitizing, often using a different disinfecting agent or a higher concentration of a sanitizing agent along with a longer contact time on the surface. Disinfectants may be labeled for use against viruses.

10. Routine sanitizing and disinfecting

Sanitizing: For routine cleaning and sanitizing on your farm as part of good agricultural practices for prevention of the spread of pathogens that cause foodborne illnesses, such as *E. coli* and *Salmonella*, you can continue using the cleaning products and sanitizing agents that are part of your existing protocols, such as bleach (sodium hypochlorite) or PAA (peroxyacetic acid) products. These products may have different rates and contact times on their labels for sanitizing and for disinfecting. Sanitizing rates are appropriate for food contact surfaces and for routine sanitation of surfaces that are of low risk for contamination with a viral pathogen.

Disinfecting: The EPA has provided [a list of disinfectants \(referred to as the 'N-list'\) for use against SARS-CoV-2](#), the virus causing COVID-19. Because SARS-CoV-2 is a new pathogen, most products have not been evaluated for efficacy against this particular virus and it will likely not be on the label for these products. The listed products have demonstrated efficacy against harder to kill viruses or other human coronaviruses. The list is being updated with additional products as more information becomes available. Products on this list (which includes bleach and PAA-based products- use your product's EPA # to determine if it is on the N list) are appropriate for use on farms for routine disinfection of hard, non-porous, non-food contact surfaces, such as door handles, railings, trash cans, cash registers, restrooms, and other high-touch surfaces as mentioned previously.

11. What cleaning, sanitizing or disinfecting steps should I take if someone on my farm has been confirmed to have COVID-19?

In the event that someone on your farm is confirmed or likely to be ill with COVID-19, any affected workspaces should be isolated and, if possible, ventilated and left unoccupied for 24 hours. All areas used by the sick person should be disinfected with an appropriate disinfectant (see N list, above, and [CDC recommendations for How to Clean and Disinfect Your Facility](#)). If any **food contact surfaces** require disinfection, follow the instructions of the disinfectant product you are using, then after the

appropriate contact time, rinse with potable water and sanitize as normal. This additional rinse step prevents the disinfectant (often a higher concentration of active ingredient than a sanitizer) from itself becoming a source of contamination of food and the additional sanitizer step reduces any microbial risks introduced by the rinse step.

When using any chemical sanitizer or disinfectant, always follow the label as to the appropriate surface, rate, contact time, application method, and other instructions. Use adequate ventilation and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and do not exceed labeled rates or use in a manner not described on the label. Do not mix chemicals; for instance, do not mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner as a dangerous chemical reaction called gas-off can occur.

B. GENERAL FARM LABOR GUIDANCE- SEASONAL FARM LABOR CAMPS

1. Housing provisions during COVID-19

Housing is one of the most difficult and challenging issues to address given the limited availability of facilities to accommodate arriving workers. However, it is not impossible to create and sustain a safe environment if precautions for conditions which most relate to the health and safety of employees are identified and implemented to reduce the impact of COVID-19 illness and transmission.

The CDC and OSHA recommend a minimum of 6 feet between beds or bunks. If the current housing unit does not allow for segregation of workers under social distancing guidelines, arrangements may be needed to secure additional housing such as rental units at motels and hotels. Beds may also be positioned so that workers sleep head-to-toe to limit exposure to respiratory droplets. Farms are encouraged to provide additional cloth facemasks to employees to wear while in their housing and must ensure that adequate ventilation is provided in habitable rooms, including screened windows and doors that open freely and are not obstructed in any way. Bathrooms, portable toilets and hand-washing stations, in accordance with prior existing regulations on-farm, must be supplied and maintained with soap, single use paper towels and disposal bins to support proper handwashing and general sanitation. Signage reminding workers to wash their hands regularly, and at times and intervals established by on-farm policies and procedures, should be prominently displayed.

Use of alternative housing facilities

Deploying recommended guidelines and safety measures to minimize the impact of the spread of COVID-19 in seasonal farm labor housing may reduce the normal occupancy capacity of prior approved housing units and camps. As a result, employers may need to find alternative housing for some of their workers to comply with social distancing guidelines and/or to accommodate quarantine periods. In addition:

- a. As COVID-19 measures require immediate action, an employer may place workers in other employer provided housing (rental or public accommodation) that complies with applicable local, State and/or Federal farm labor camp standards, once notice of intent is provided to

the MassHire Department of Career Services (MDCS).

- b. In instances where housing becomes unavailable, in whole or in part, the employer must promptly notify MDCS in writing (H2Aprogram@detma.org) or contact DPH in writing at (Amy.J.Medeiros@mass.gov) of the new housing situation and provide documentation demonstrating compliance with applicable standards.
- c. If, after inspection, MDCS determines the alternative housing does not meet the applicable housing standards, MDCS will promptly provide written notification to the employer to remedy all existing deficiencies within 5 calendar days.

2. Seasonal farm labor camp guidance for COVID-19 (Modifications and Requirements)

Modifications and procedures should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. In line with existing Federal, State and Local regulations, field workers and farm staff must be provided with restrooms and handwashing stations supplied and maintained with soap, single use paper towels and trash receptacles.
- b. Surfaces in farm labor camps, i.e., kitchen, dining, bathing, laundry, etc. need to be regularly cleaned, sanitized and disinfected based on usage rates and at intervals identified in procedures and protocols on-farm.
- c. Maintain social distancing requirements (6ft) while farm workers are in-house, including during recreation, cooking and sleeping.
- d. Modify common areas to encourage and maintain social distancing by repositioning furniture in leisure and common areas and by posting guidelines and signage in the native language of the persons occupying the camp, or marked with easily understood pictures or symbols, that clearly indicate the number of workers allowed in an area at one time including during meal preparation and dining, doing laundry, and for the use of bathroom facilities.
- e. Modify bed configurations to maintain social distancing (6ft) in sleeping quarters (see [CDC recommendations](#)). Head to toe configurations may be allowed, upon approval, and may offer increased flexibility for the number of workers allowed in bunk areas.
- f. Provide and ensure residents of seasonal labor camps wear cloth face coverings in shared spaces at all times.

3. Routine Cleaning and Sanitizing in seasonal Farm Labor Camps/Housing:

Housing must be kept clean and in an orderly and sanitary condition at all times. Cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting steps, with a specific focus on high-touch surfaces, including tables, chairs, doorknobs, light switches, handles, toilets, faucets, sinks and field equipment as indicated in the **GENERAL FARM LABOR GUIDANCE- SOCIAL DISTANCING AND WORKER HYGIENE (COVID-19)** above, must be maintained and identified in procedures developed on-farm. In addition, farms supporting seasonal farm labor camps should:

- a. Develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) for cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting farm labor camp spaces that include periodicity, tools and supplies to be used.
- b. Provide adequate cleaning supplies such as cleaning solutions, buckets, mops, and sponges.
- c. Designate a specific individual to manage the process to be sure that cleaning measures are adequate.
- d. Set up a regular weekly and daily schedule for cleaning. See the [CDC's guidance for cleaning homes](#). See the "Cleaning, Sanitizing and disinfecting" sections above for additional information regarding cleaning products and procedures.

4. If a worker has been confirmed to have COVID-19 in Farm Labor Camps/Housing

Have a plan in place for housing in the case that a worker(s) displaying COVID-19 symptoms must be isolated from other occupants. Confine workers with mild respiratory symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection to individual rooms, if possible, and have them avoid common areas. Temporary housing may be needed to limit exposure to other workers. Designated areas for quarantined employees should be provided with separate sleeping, cooking, and bathing facilities. Ensure appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks for workers who develop COVID-19 symptoms or test positive are properly worn to prevent the spread of the virus to others. Ensure quarantined or isolated workers have sufficient food, supplies, and transportation to medical care. See the section entitled "Worker Health" above for more information.

A thorough and deep cleaning of the housing unit is required after a worker is confirmed to have COVID-19 to ensure proper disinfection of the housing and work areas. The following recommended procedures should be performed:

- a. If possible, open the windows and doors of the housing unit or use ventilation fans to increase air circulation in the area.
- b. Wait 24 hours or as long as practical before re-entering the space to begin cleaning and disinfection.
- c. Hard (non-porous) surfaces should be cleaned first using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection as indicated above in **GENERAL FARM LABOR GUIDANCE- SOCIAL DISTANCING AND WORKER HYGIENE (COVID-19)**.
- d. For surfaces such as carpets, rugs, and drapes, remove visible contamination and clean with cleaners appropriate for use on these surfaces.
- e. If items can be laundered, such as bed linens, covers and towels, wash items in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry completely. *(EPA-registered disinfectants suitable for porous surfaces can also be used. See the "Cleaning and Sanitizing" section above for additional information regarding cleaning products and procedures).*

5. Transportation for farm workers

Transportation is often required for workers to travel from their housing units to their worksite,

purchase essential supplies such as food, launder personal items, and obtain access to toilet facilities while working in the field. The following measures can help to maintain social distancing and safety during transportation:

- a. Limit the number of workers transported at one time, maintain 6 feet of physical distance in vehicles whenever possible, and ensure workers are not sitting directly next to each other. Additional drivers may be needed to drive and transport workers to allow for social distancing.
- b. Provide and transport workers in vehicles with functional ventilation systems or operable windows to promote adequate circulation. Designate a trained individual who is responsible for disinfecting transportation vehicles on a routine basis, but no less than daily cleaning.
- c. Schedule trips in advance to the grocery stores to limit the number of workers in a vehicle or in the community at any one time.
- d. Share information about grocery delivery options and encourage employees to consider using these services whenever possible to limit risk of exposure.
- e. Wear cloth face coverings in vehicles and in public settings, in addition to maintaining social distancing measures.

6. CONTROL PLAN - Farm Operations and Standard Operating Procedures for COVID-19

Agriculture is an essential business operation and activity, supported in part by migrant and seasonal farm workers or H-2A guest workers. Coronavirus (COVID-19) can spread rapidly in settings where employees work and live together, such as farm labor camps. Agriculture employers and/or Farm Labor Contractors (FLCs) who provide housing for farm workers must implement plans to prevent exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19, care for individuals exposed to or who test positive for the virus, or that show any symptoms of, COVID-19 and prevent community transmission of the disease.

Control Plans: Agricultural employers in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that house farm workers must develop and adopt a written Control Plan outlining how its workplace will comply with the COVID-19 safety and health standards identified in this guidance document. Completed Control Plans must be maintained on-site and must be made available when requested or during inspectional visits.

Control Plans may be utilized to offer some flexibility for both the number of workers safely housed in farm labor camps as well as for their movement between work locations if the proper procedures and protocols have been established and maintained and are clearly indicated in the Control Plan.

- I. Control Plans should be legible and clearly written.
- II. Supporting documents and records must be maintained and in-line with standard operating procedures (SOPs) and protocols identified in the plan.
- III. A COVID-19 Workplace Coordinator must be identified to manage the implementation and maintenance of the plan, conduct risk assessments and serve as the central point of contact for staff.

- IV. Control Plans may be used, in whole or in part, during inspections or visits, to verify compliance with COVID-19 guidance identified in the document, as well as with applicable procedures and policies identified in the plan.
- V. If, after inspection, MDCS determines that applicable housing standards, including COVID-19 guidance for farm labor/labor camps, as well as SOPs and protocols included in the farm's Control Plan do not meet requirements, MDCS will request that discrepancies be corrected within 5 calendar days.
- VI. Periodic reassessments of the procedures and protocols identified in the plan should be conducted to ensure that they are adequate in meeting COVID-19 guidance.

The Control Plan should include policies, standard operating procedures (SOPs) and supporting documentation/records for the following areas:

a. General Procedures / PPE Usage-Social Distancing / Handwashing

Develop and implement consistent policies and procedures for the use of PPE and for the maintenance of social distancing requirements adjusting work locations, break areas, pack houses and planting and harvest operations to maintain 6 feet of separation between individuals. Signage, in English and the native language of the workers, reminding agricultural workers of PPE and social distancing requirements, must be posted in areas where workers congregate and at bunkhouses and on vehicles used for transportation. Farms must support proper hygiene practices during COVID-19 response by implementing requirements and procedures that support personal hygiene and the frequent washing of hands to prevent the spread of COVID-19. An adequate number of hand-washing stations must be provided on-farm at locations both in the field and in packhouses and work locations where bathroom facilities are not readily available. (Sections A-1, 2, 3, 4 Attestation/Checklist).

b. Deliveries

Create a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and train employees on the handling of deliveries to the farm. While the CDC has stated that transmissions to persons from surfaces has not been documented, this remains a possible route of exposure. According to the NIH, the virus that causes COVID-19 can be stable for several hours to days on surfaces—up to 24 hours on cardboard and up to two to three days on plastic and stainless steel. The length of time that the coronavirus lasts on surfaces depends on a number of factors, including the material of the surface as well as environmental conditions. As this is the case, it is important to emphasize handwashing after handling any deliveries. (Sections A-1, 2, 3 Attestation/Checklist)

c. Farm Visitation/Logs

Develop procedures (SOPs) to keep track of who is visiting your farm, in addition to tracking worker shifts and hours. A visitor log will help you track exposure and support contact tracing, in case a worker or visitor is or becomes ill. Exposed employees will need to be informed of their exposure and take additional precautions, including but not limited to, routine monitoring, social distancing, and the possible implementation of quarantine procedures. (Sections A-1,

Attestation/Checklist)

d. Cleaning and Sanitizing-Routine and after Confirmed Illness Occurrence

Developed SOPs should include a schedule for the routine cleaning and sanitizing of commonly used spaces as well as the steps for the isolation, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting of spaces, tools and materials, including contact surfaces, that may have been contaminated.

Cleaning agents and tools used for the procedure should be listed, adequate for their intended use, and their location identified along with the name of the responsible staff that will support the procedure(s). (Sections A-9, 10, 11 B-3, 4 Attestation/Checklist)

e. Contingencies for Impacts to Farm Labor-Alternative Housing-Quarantine Housing

Develop procedures for possible labor shortages and how an illness occurrence may impact cohorts, housing, and operations across the farm. Create an alternative management structure and delegate key activities in case you or another key manager becomes ill or tests positive for COVID-19. Clearly identify local support organizations, including healthcare, testing, and other community services that may be utilized during the execution of contingency plans, listing their locations and contact information. Quarantine Housing locations and supporting information, including materials and supplies necessary to support staff in quarantine, must be clearly identified in the Control Plan. (Sections A-6, 7, 8 B-1, 4, 5, 6, Attestation/Checklist)

f. On-Farm COVID-19 Screening, Illness Protocols and Procedures

SOPs must be developed that clearly identify the steps to support the monitoring of workers and staff that may be displaying symptoms of COVID-19, including the use of assessments and worker screening both before the start of the workday or at intervals determined by the farm. For workers who are symptomatic or are confirmed to be positive for COVID-19 through testing, procedures must be developed and implemented that isolate the worker in compliance with CDC and State guidance. Confirmed cases must be reported and contact information for both State Epidemiology and local Boards of Health should be included and clearly listed in the Control Plan. Procedures must also be developed that support the safe return of staff to the work place, including the isolation, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting of areas affected. (Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 Attestation/Checklist)

g. Identification of Cohorts

Identify, by name, workers and staff who will be living (farm labor camp) or working together by activity or location in groups, or cohorts, both on and off farm. Keep cohorts together, as much as possible, when assigning tasks or locations and while transporting crews.

(Attestation/Checklist)

h. Testing

Periodic testing, at identified intervals, must be included in procedures and policies identified in the plan. In addition, local, state and CDC guidance for the testing of workers who are symptomatic, have a fever of 100.°F or greater during monitoring and at other intervals that may introduce illness to established crews should also be followed. Intervals for testing include, but are not limited to, workers arriving at housing units, when additional staff are added to work crews or cohorts, and when exposure to a possible COVID-19 illness is suspected. (Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, Attestation/Checklist)

i. Control Plan Training log

Training must be conducted, in the native language of the workers, on COVID-19 procedures and protocols identified in the plan when work crews arrive for the season and at intervals when new staff are added to work crews or cohorts, and when policies and/or procedures are changed after the conduct of assessments. A log or record of the training must be maintained with the name of each individual who has attended the training and the date the training was held. (Attestation Checklist)

j. Attestation Form/Checklist

Farms in the Commonwealth, along with other agricultural operations who support workers should include a completed Attestation Form/ Control Plan Checklist in their Plan and must ensure that the form is signed and dated by the farm manager/owner after the plan has been completed and procedures, policies and protocols inherent to the plan have been implemented.

7. Additional Resources

Families First Coronavirus Response Act:

This Act requires certain employers to provide their employees with federally reimbursable paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. These provisions will apply from April 1st, 2020 to December 31st, 2020. Read more from the U.S. Department of Labor on [MDAR's Farm Labor Resources page](#).

NOTE: The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, extended employer tax credits for paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave voluntarily provided to employees until March 31, 2021. However, this Act did not extend an eligible employee's entitlement to FFCRA leave beyond December 31, 2020.

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 <https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>.

Future Updates

This information is based on what we know now and will be updated as we learn more.

Please visit: <https://www.mass.gov/agr> and <https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19> for updates.