



HAZARD ALERT

Cherie Berry, Commissioner of Labor

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COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for Food Processing Facilities

This document provides health and safety guidelines for food processing facilities. These guidelines are intended to be used in conjunction with guidance and other requirements outlined by public health authorities and local and state officials. In addition to this document, employers should reference the most recent information provided by the CDC, N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), and the N.C. Governor's Office.

It is important for companies to have procedures in place to limit entry of the virus into the workplace and to reduce spread within the facility. In order to minimize the risk from COVID-19 in the workplace, take the following steps:

Employee and Visitor Screening

- Conduct screening for **signs or symptoms** of COVID-19 prior to employees or visitors entering the facility. Ask employees to evaluate themselves before coming to work and to stay home if they are not well.
- Prior to allowing employees or visitors to enter the building, use verbal screening to determine whether they have had a fever, felt feverish, or had chills, coughing, difficulty breathing, or new loss of sense of taste or smell in the past 24 hours.
- Conduct temperature screening to identify anyone with a fever of 100.4°F or greater, if it can be done with proper social distancing and hygiene.
- If a worker or visitor answers “yes” to any of the screening questions or has a temperature at or above 100.4°F confirmed with a thermometer, they should not enter the workplace. They should be encouraged to self-isolate and contact a healthcare provider.
- Ensure personnel performing screening activities are adequately protected from exposure to potentially infectious workers or visitors.
 - Implement engineering controls, such as physical barriers to maintain at least 6 feet of distance.
 - Provide appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, a gown, face shield, and face mask. N95 respirators may be appropriate for screeners or workers managing a sick employee in the workplace if that worker has signs or symptoms of COVID-19.
- Limit visitors to those essential to business operations and restrict where visitors can go within the facility.

- Confirm visitors have had no travel to destinations with widespread COVID-19 transmission within the past 14 days.

Distancing

- Implement distancing guidelines in the facility. Workers should be spaced at least 6 feet apart in all parts of the facility, if possible.
- Implement operational changes that allow for workers' physical distancing of at least 6 feet in all directions as outlined in **CDC guidelines**.
- Where possible, position workstations so workers do not face one another.
- Install partitions of plexiglass or stretched plastic on a frame of nonporous, smooth material to provide barrier protection between workers, especially where physical distancing of 6 feet cannot be consistently maintained.

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Centers for Disease Control

Coronavirus Webpage

CDC Guidance Documents

CDC COVID-19 Symptom List

N.C. Department of Health and Human Services

COVID-19 Webpage

N.C. Department of Labor

Coronavirus Safety and Health Topic Webpage

Respiratory Protection Safety and Health Topic Webpage

Training Resources: PowerPoints, pre-recorded webinars, online videos, Podcasts, and other COVID-19 training resources (under the Solutions tab)

N.C. State Government

COVID-19 Webpage

Federal Occupational Safety and Health

Interim Guidance for Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers

Employee Health and Food Safety Checklist for Human and Animal Food Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Coronavirus Safety and Health Topic Webpage

Various Guidance Documents on COVID-19

- Designate one-way entrances and exits in and out of the facility to support 6 feet of physical distancing for workers.
- Designate an area for isolating workers who show symptoms of COVID-19 infection, such as a wellness area, isolated first aid station or other area where access can be restricted.
- Mark out 6-foot distances or circles for workers to stand in while they wait to punch in, to conduct health assessments, to perform handwashing, waiting for transportation and in other areas where workers would normally congregate.
- Add additional clock-in/out stations, if possible, that are spaced apart, to reduce crowding in these areas. Consider alternatives such as touch-free methods or staggering times for workers to clock in/out.
- Instruct employees to maintain at least 6-feet of distance in changing rooms, cafeterias and breakrooms.
- Mark out a 6-foot line in front of desks used by staff.
- Ensure at least 6-foot distances between chairs and people during meetings.
- Have designated staff monitor and instruct workers about compliance with distancing protocols and hygiene requirements.
- Routinely inspect, maintain, clean and disinfect separation barriers and other safeguards.

Face Coverings and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Require that all workers routinely wear face coverings along with the standard PPE that is needed. **Executive Order 147** states “all workers in any meat or poultry processing plant, packing plant, or slaughterhouse must wear face coverings when they are or may be within 6 feet of another person, and those face coverings must be surgical masks, as long as surgical mask supplies are available.”
- Face coverings are not considered PPE and are not an appropriate substitute for required respiratory protection. Face coverings capture large particles that are expelled while the wearer coughs, sneezes, talks, or breathes and are designed to protect other people, not the wearer. Since individuals may be contagious without showing symptoms, face coverings are one way to reduce the spread of the virus.
- Clean face coverings should be worn each day. Employers should provide additional clean face coverings to replace any coverings that become wet, soiled or visibly contaminated during the work shift.
- If surgical masks are not available and cloth face coverings are worn, the cloth face coverings should:
 - Fit over the nose and mouth and fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face.
 - Be secured with ties or ear loops.
 - Include multiple layers of fabric.
 - Allow for breathing without restriction.
 - Be laundered using the warmest appropriate water setting and machine dried daily after the shift, without damage or change to shape (a clean cloth face covering should be used each day).

- Not be used if they become wet or contaminated.
- Be replaced with clean replacements, provided by employer, as needed.
- Be handled as little as possible to prevent transferring infectious materials to the cloth.
- Not be worn with or instead of respiratory protection when respirators are needed.
- Required PPE, such as gloves, face shields, gowns, N95 respirators, along with training on appropriate donning, use and doffing, is to be provided and paid for by the employer.
- Limit the use of filtering facepiece N95 respirators by following other COVID-19 exposure control strategies and use of other facial coverings. If respirators are needed, they must be used in the context of a comprehensive respiratory protection program that includes medical exams, fit testing, and training in accordance with OSHA’s Respiratory Protection standard. Reference the **Respiratory Protection** Safety and Health Topic Webpage for more information.

Personal Hygiene

- Require and allow workers enough time to wash their hands frequently, including arrival and departure from the workplace, before and after using the restroom, before eating and drinking, and after touching surfaces that may be contaminated.
- Have handwashing facilities easily available that can be accessed without workers congregating in groups.
- Maintain ample supplies of soap and hand towels for handwashing.
- Provide additional (portable) handwashing stations, where needed.
- Encourage workers to wash hands for at least 20 seconds.
- Provide work areas with hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Consider touch-free dispensers.
- Require cough and sneeze etiquette.
- Provide tissues and touch-free trash receptacles.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Fully clean and disinfect work area equipment and tools at least as often as workers change workstations or move to a new set of tools. Clean and disinfect common areas at least daily, and at every shift change.
- Pay special attention to high touch areas such as tools, guards, stair railings, doorknobs or push bars, computers, microwave or refrigerator handles, vending machine touch pads, etc.
- If a worker becomes ill at work, their work area and tools must be cleaned and disinfected before another worker may be assigned to their work area.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered disinfectants (List N) to sanitize surfaces. Follow label directions and observe contact times to ensure cleaning and disinfection is effective.
- Ensure procedures are also consistent with the facility’s sanitation procedures required by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

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- Consider increasing staffing for cleaning and disinfecting necessary to increase frequency of cleaning and disinfection throughout the facility including break areas, lunchrooms and bathrooms.
- The CDC has issued guidance for **Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility**.

Ventilation

- Ensure the facility is adequately ventilated and use air filters in systems where this is feasible.
- Consider consulting with a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning engineer to ensure adequate ventilation and optimized airflow management in work areas to help minimize workers' potential exposures.

Production, Work-shift Schedules and Work-break Schedules

- Adjust line speeds and configurations so workers can maintain distancing of at least 6 feet. The CDC provides suggested diagrams for line layout and physical barrier placement.
- Stagger work schedules to prevent congregating in changing rooms, at entrances, transportation areas, health screening areas, and time clock areas.
- Revise break times to prevent congregating in cafeterias and breakrooms.
- Designate additional areas for breaks and meals.
- Consider grouping workers who are always assigned to the same shifts. This may reduce the number of co-workers who encounter each other during the week and may limit the number exposed to a sick employee.
- Limit workers in business offices to only those deemed critical to facility operations. Allow workers to work remotely if they can perform their work.
- Use virtual platforms for meetings when possible.
- Restrict or suspend business travel.

Transportation

- Encourage workers to avoid carpooling to and from work, if possible.
- If carpooling or using company shuttle vehicles is necessary for workers, the following control practices should be used:
 - Limit the number of people per vehicle as much as possible. This may mean using more vehicles.
 - Encourage employees to maintain social distancing as much as possible.
 - Encourage employees to use hand hygiene before entering the vehicle and when arriving at the destination.
 - Encourage employees in a shared van or car space to wear face coverings.
 - Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces after each carpool or shuttle trip (e.g., door handles, handrails, seatbelt buckles).

- Encourage employees to follow coughing and sneezing etiquette when in the vehicle.

Communication

- Communicate with workers about actions being taken to prevent COVID-19 exposure through routine meetings, postings, including electronic postings, the company website and start-of-day reminders.
- Include information about the COVID-19, such as illness symptoms, methods of transmission, proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and other safeguards to prevent exposure.
- Institute a process for workers to report COVID-19 symptoms and other hazards in the workplace.
- Remind workers not to come to work if they are having symptoms of COVID-19 and fully inform and allow workers to use sick leave and other benefits if they are ill.
- Provide information in languages understood by workers and prominently post instructions and reminders about illness symptoms, handwashing and hygiene etiquette and to immediately report if they are feeling ill to a supervisor.

COVID-19 Assessment and Control Plan

- Identify a coordinator who will be responsible for COVID-19 assessment and control planning.
- The coordinator should reach out to state and/or local public health officials and occupational safety and health professionals to ensure they are getting relevant and current information concerning COVID-19. The workplace coordinator and management should also be aware of and follow all applicable federal regulations and public health agency guidelines.
- All workers in the facility should know how to contact the identified coordinator with any COVID-19 concerns.
- Worksite assessments to identify COVID-19 risks and prevention strategies should be done periodically as part of sound occupational health and public health practice.
- Provide an orientation for workers about the company's COVID-19 business plan and the measures taken to minimize employee exposure to COVID-19, including changes to production and maintenance schedules and procedures, human resources policies and worker safety.
- Managers and supervisors should monitor the effectiveness of the COVID-19 business plan.

EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES ITEMS

Managing Sick Workers

- Workers showing signs/symptoms of the COVID-19 virus must be isolated from other workers and sent home.
- Ensure personnel assisting sick workers are provided with adequate protection from exposure and are provided with PPE such as gloves, gown, face shield, and N95 filtering facepiece respirator when they must be within 6 feet of the ill employee. If respirators are needed, they must be used in the context of a comprehensive respiratory protection program that includes

medical exams, fit testing, and training in accordance with OSHA's Respiratory Protection standard.

- Human resources should help arrange for sick workers to return home.
- If a worker is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform anyone they had contact with (including fellow workers, inspectors, graders, etc.) of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace, but should maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The employer should instruct fellow workers about how to proceed based on the CDC's guide to **Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19**.
- Reintegration (bringing back) of exposed, asymptomatic workers to onsite operations should follow the **CDC Critical Infrastructure Guidance**. The guidance advises that employers may permit workers who have been exposed to COVID-19, but remain without symptoms, to continue to work, provided they adhere to additional safety precautions. Consultation with an occupational health provider and state and local health officials will help employers develop the most appropriate plan consistent with CDC guidance.
- Reintegration of workers with COVID-19 (COVID-19 positive), including those workers who have remained asymptomatic, to onsite operations should follow the CDC interim guidance, **Discontinuation of Isolation for Persons with COVID-19 Not in Healthcare Settings.**"
- Employers should work with state, local, tribal, and/or territorial health officials to facilitate the identification of other exposed and potentially exposed individuals.

When can an ill worker return to work?

- Workers with COVID-19 who have symptoms and have stayed home (home isolated) should not return to work until they have met the **CDC criteria to discontinue home isolation**, and have consulted with their healthcare providers and state and local health departments.
- The situation is constantly changing, so employers of critical infrastructure workers will need to continue to reassess the virus's transmission levels in their area.

Employment Status

- Clarify employment status with workers and contractors during the COVID-19 pandemic, including alternative work shifts, working from home, not working and wage changes.
- Clarify that discrimination against workers for any reason will not be tolerated and must be reported.

Incentive Programs

- Modify worker incentive programs, if necessary, to ensure workers stay home when they are sick to protect others working at the facility.
- Communicate clearly that workers will not face adverse consequences for staying home when they are sick.

Medical Assistance

- Consider waiving co-pays on medical appointments for COVID-19 related treatment.
- Provide access to medical professionals, including tele-medicine options, if an on-site nurse is not available.
- If a doctor's note is required to be absent from work, don't require employees to have a doctor's note in advance of approving an absence.

How can I get help from the N.C. Department of Labor?

- The N.C. Department of Labor, OSH Division provides consultations, training, and technical assistance at no cost to employers.
- The OSH Complaint Desk should be contacted via telephone at 919-779-8560 and/or submit an **online complaint** if employees are exposed to serious hazards in their workplace associated with COVID-19 that their employers do not address.
- The **Training Calendar** provides currently scheduled webinars. You may also request online training by going to our **Outreach Request Form**.
- Questions regarding occupational safety and health can be submitted to the Standards Section of the Education, Training and Technical Assistance Bureau at ask.osh@labor.nc.gov or speak to a standards officer by calling 919-707-7876.

This document was revised in Sept. 2020 and may be subject to change.



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