

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Guidance for Migrant Farmworkers, Their Employers and Housing Providers

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the illness caused by the new coronavirus that appeared in late 2019. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are dry cough, shortness of breath, and fever, loss of taste or smell. Some people may develop more severe forms of the disease, such as pneumonia. COVID-19 is spread by person-to-person contact, mainly through respiratory droplets. Unfortunately this means that COVID-19 can spread easily in settings where many people live in close proximity, such as the residential facilities set up to house migrant farmworkers. Farm owners, managers, and all who provide housing for migrant workers should implement plans to prevent exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19, care for individuals with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection and prevent the spread of the disease among their workers.

Who can get COVID-19?

No one has immunity to the new coronavirus. Individuals who are ≥65 years of age and people with pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes, chronic lung or heart disease, or who have a compromised immune system (e.g. cancer or taking immunosuppressant medications) have a greater risk of severe illness due to COVID-19. Complications of COVID-19 infection include the need to be hospitalized, receive mechanical ventilation and death. Agricultural workers with chronic lung problems associated with exposure to common farming hazards such as pesticides and fungi found in crops may also be at higher risk of severe illness.

Using this document:

The following guidance document has been developed to assist orchardists in Wasco and Hood River Counties in preventing the spread of COVID-19 within the farmworker population. Farmworkers are a uniquely vulnerable population given the many barriers to healthcare access they experience such as language barriers, lack of independent transportation, lack of insurance, fear regarding immigration status, and unfamiliarity with local resources and systems. The key components of a prevention plan for migrant farmworkers include 1) minimizing the risk for exposure to the virus, 2) early detection of people with symptoms of COVID-19, and 3) caring for individuals with COVID-19 while ensuring that they do not give the infection to anyone else. This document contains a checklist of items to better prepare orchardists for the arrival of farmworkers during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Helpful definitions:

- **A COVID-19 case** is a person with a laboratory confirmed COVID-19 infection.
- **A suspect COVID-19 case** is a person with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection, but without a laboratory confirmed diagnosis.
- **Quarantine** is keeping workers who have been exposed to a confirmed or suspect COVID-19 case, but have no symptoms of infection, away from non-exposed workers (as much as possible) for the duration of the virus' incubation period (incubation period is 14 days after last exposure to a confirmed or suspect COVID-19 case).
- **Isolation** is the separation of sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick.
- **A significant exposure** is defined as being within 6 feet of a confirmed or suspect COVID-19 case for at least 10 minutes.

Be Prepared, Have a Plan

Have an emergency plan for how you will care for and isolate COVID-19 infected workers.

- Screen all employees and visitors for COVID-19 symptoms at the beginning of every shift or when they visit your farm (see screening tool).
- Make sure that you have emergency contact numbers for each of your workers that are willing to provide it.
- Make sure that you have the phone number of your local health department. In Wasco County, call North Central Public Health at (541) 506-2600 and in Hood River County; call Hood River Public Health at (541) 386-1115. OSHA requires “camp superintendents” to report immediately to the local health officer the name and address of any individual in the camp known or suspected of having a communicable disease. The health department will help to guide you on your specific situation, including how, if and when to test farmworkers with symptoms.
- Establish separate isolation cabins or areas. This area should have separate bathroom, cooking and eating facilities from people who are not sick.
- People with symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g. fever, cough, shortness of breath), but not yet tested, are considered suspect cases and must be housed in a separate area with a separate bathroom from people who are not sick. They should not share cooking or eating facilities.
- If a worker tests positive for COVID-19 immediately perform enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of the worker’s area, and any tools or equipment the worker used.
- If a worker tests positive for COVID-19, you should also thoroughly disinfect communal areas and restrooms.
- If a worker has compatible symptoms for COVID-19 but tests negative, they are still considered a suspect case.
- Confirmed COVID-19 cases should only be housed with other confirmed cases. They should have separate bathroom, cooking and eating facilities from people who are not sick.
- Ventilate the room where persons with COVID-19 are housed on regular intervals, as much as possible. When available, provide surgical facemasks and store them near the doors for people with suspected and confirmed COVID-19 infections. Facemasks should be worn by both groups when they are outside of their room, when people are in their rooms, and by the people who enter their rooms to care for them.
- Your plan should outline how and who will pay for and provide food, water, and medical supplies to symptomatic workers in isolation or exposed but asymptomatic workers in isolation as they may be unable to provide for themselves during this time.
- Your plan should outline by whom and how transportation will be provided for ill workers who need medical evaluation or treatment. You must consider how the person doing the transporting is to be protected, where the closest facilities are located and how testing and/or care will be paid for.
- Create a plan for what to do if many workers are sick at the same time.

Identify the nearest healthcare facility that provides free or low-cost care to uninsured people.

- Most Migrant and Community Health Centers are able to provide telehealth evaluation, and some can provide COVID-19 testing at sliding scale fees. Check with your local public health department for more information.
- H2A workers have 60 days from entry into the country to sign up for heavily subsidized and thus affordable health insurance on the national marketplace. Migrant and Community Health

Centers have bilingual patient navigators that can assist them in signing up. Contact your closest center to get your H2A farmworkers enrolled in health insurance plans when they first arrive and before anyone becomes ill.

- Oregon Health Plan (OHP) covers COVID-19 testing and hospitalization.
- Citizen Alien Waived Emergency Medical (CAWEM) program will only cover COVID-19 testing and hospitalization if it is an emergency.

Promote Healthy Habits

Educate workers about hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and emergency response to reduce the spread of COVID-19

- Hold multiple training sessions about COVID-19 symptoms, and how workers can protect themselves through social distancing, hand washing, and hygiene procedures. This guidance should be repeated often!
- Provide signs in English and Spanish with information about when and how to properly wash hands, physical distancing of at least 6 feet, need to cough and sneeze into an elbow instead of a hand to protect themselves and others from germs. Hang signs in restrooms, cabins, and common areas.
- Clean and disinfect farmworker housing, bathrooms and transportation vehicles daily. Give special attention to high-touch surfaces, such as door handles, faucet, toilet handles, light switches, countertops, chairs and tables.
- Transport farmworkers in ways that allow them to stay at least 6 feet apart on the bus even though this may mean multiple trips are required. Disinfect the bus between trips.
- Arrange beds in farmworker housing at least six feet apart, if possible.
- Post the address and phone number of your local health department centrally where your workers can find it.
- Post your camp address centrally so workers will be able to give to 911 operator if needed.
- Post all documents centrally in both English and Spanish where your workers can read them.

Provide weekly supplies to each farmworker to fight COVID-19 like alcohol-based hand sanitizer (if available), tissues, disinfectants and lined trashcans

- Make sure that workers have access to these supplies at the worksite, in common areas, where they sleep, and where they eat.
- Use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Provide a disinfectant that is active against coronaviruses to sanitize counters, bathrooms and other areas. Create a daily schedule for this to be done.
- Ensure that field sanitation supplies of soap, single-use paper towels, and water are well stocked in each field location.
- Provide disposable or single-use cups at drinking stations.
- Require farmworkers to wash hands **before and after** work, meals and bathroom breaks. Remind them to wash hands upon entering and exiting high-density areas such as stores, laundromats, buses and vans.
- Make sure that trashcans are emptied whenever full and at least weekly.

Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

Screen workers for symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath upon arrival and daily

- Workers with symptoms should be housed in the area designated for suspect COVID-19 cases and arrange for them to consult with a medical provider. If the worker needs to be seen at a healthcare facility, call the medical provider in advance so healthcare workers can take appropriate precautionary measures. Be sure that the medical provider knows that this patient lives in a congregate living situation.
- Workers with symptoms of respiratory illness should take a private vehicle to get to the medical provider. If they do not have their own vehicle, you must assist with transportation. Circulate air by partially lowering windows (weather permitting) and have all people in the vehicle, including the patient, wear a surgical mask.

If a worker starts having symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath:

- Have the worker stop working immediately and isolate the person from other workers. People with these symptoms should not be working.
- If there is an onsite room designated for ill workers, suspect COVID-19 cases should be directed to that room at the time of symptom onset until appropriate isolation plans can be enacted. Follow the instructions above to arrange for ill workers to be evaluated by a medical provider.

Let workers who have symptoms of respiratory illness rest until they feel better.

- Make sure they have enough food and water as they will not be able to go to the store and may not have the funds to buy their own.
- Check frequently on the ill worker in isolation to monitor for worsening symptoms. About 20% of infected people will develop severe respiratory symptoms that may require hospitalization.

If a worker is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 infection:

- Contact your local health department as required by OSHA (see health department phone numbers listed above).
- Workers with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should remain in isolation until 72 hours after their symptoms have resolved.
- Instruct workers who have had close contact* with a COVID-19 patient to self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, or shortness of breath) for 14 days. These exposed workers should be separated from non-exposed workers for 14 days (e.g. sleep in a separate room, work in a separate area, use a separate bathroom and cooking facility). If they develop symptoms of COVID-19, contact your local health department.

**close contact per the CDC is greater than 10 minutes face to face contact in less than 6 feet proximity without personal protective equipment (mask)*