

Infection Control Recommendations for Seasonal Farm Worker Housing Post-Isolation

In light of recent outbreaks on farms in Ontario, the HNHU would like to offer some additional recommendations to help prevent transmission of COVID-19 amongst seasonal farm workers after they complete their 14 day isolation. In addition, all farmers and their employees are to adhere to the applicable legislation, Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development requirements, as well as provincial health and safety guidance documents specific to business sectors and business settings found at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/resources-prevent-covid-19-workplace>

Please note, this is not an exhaustive list of recommendations as each task and situation requires its own assessment and plan to address infection control against communicable diseases and other hazards.

1. Screen all individuals

- a. Post signage (i.e. passive screening) at entrances to prompt anyone (e.g. door-to-door sales persons) to not enter if they feel unwell, have symptoms of COVID-19, have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days, or been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.
- b. Post signage at property entrances advising visitors not to enter without preapproval.
- c. Regularly monitor the health of workers. Such monitoring (i.e. wellness checks) should be conducted in-person with direct observation of the worker and include a temperature check. Disposable thermometers are preferred however if thermometers are shared, they must not be used orally and they must be disinfected between users.
 - i. Screeners should take appropriate precautions when screening, including maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from those being screened, or being separated by a physical barrier (such as a plexiglass barrier), and wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) (i.e., surgical/procedure mask; gown; gloves; eye protection (goggles or face shield))
- d. Keep a log (including the date, names and contact information) of all visitors and service providers accessing the property.

2. Cohort (i.e. group) workers

- a. Try to limit workers' exposure to others. Those living in the same accommodation should work together and avoid working with other cohorts. This could mean organizing where workers stay so that the cohort they live and work with have the skill set needed to complete certain tasks as a team.
 - i. Consider cohorting vulnerable workers at higher risk for severe illness (including older adults and people of all ages with certain underlying medical conditions) to accommodation and work areas or duties where risk of exposure is lowest.

- b. Limit the number of locations where a cohort works. If a cohort works in the same building space (e.g. packaging room) previously occupied by another cohort, the area should be cleaned and disinfected prior to use and between cohorts.
- c. Different cohorts should not use the same room/space at the same time. This includes, use of washrooms and outdoor spaces.
- d. Contractors and other external workers should not work with seasonal farm workers. If workers must interact with external parties, they should wear a mask and practice hand hygiene when entering and leaving the same space.
- e. Each cohort should have designated equipment. Where unable to do so, ensure that equipment is cleaned and disinfected before and after each cohort use.

3. Ensure physical and social distancing.

- a. Maintain physical distancing of at least 2 metres at all times. Considerations should be made for occupancy and layout of both indoor and outdoor areas to address this (e.g. spread out where working in the field).
- b. Keep beds and other furniture (e.g. couches, chairs) 2 metres apart from each other to better ensure physical distancing in the bunkhouse. Where beds cannot be 2 metres apart, have workers sleep so that the distance from each other's heads is maximized (e.g. 'toe to toe'). Additionally, install barriers (e.g. curtains) around beds.
- c. Place signage and markers to notify workers and others attending of physical distancing requirements. Consider using signage/markings on the ground to direct workers into one-way flow in confined areas (e.g. hallways).
- d. Personal belongings (e.g. clothing) should be kept separate from those of others.
- e. Limit the amount of face-to-face contact. Where people are talking, standing 2 metres apart but also not facing each other can further help prevent potential exposure to COVID-19 droplets.
- f. Set and post occupancy limits for indoor areas. Smaller areas within the building (e.g. washrooms) should also have occupancy limits that are posted.
- g. Avoid shared transportation as much as possible.
 - i. Where sharing vehicles (e.g. work truck) is required, passengers should sit in back seats (if available), wear masks and open windows if possible.
 - ii. Where transported by bus, passengers should be separated by two rows, wear masks and open windows if possible. Increasing the number of trips to reduce the amount of passenger occupying the bus at one time is recommended.
 - iii. Special arrangements for transport to a healthcare facility (e.g. hospital, doctor's offices) where EMS is not required should be planned for.

4. Provide easy access to handwashing or hand sanitizer (alcohol based hand rub).

- a. Post signage to encourage proper handwashing at entrances, in washrooms and food handling areas.

- b. Have all workers, contractors and visitors wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub before entering the workplace, bunkhouse and after contact with surfaces others have touched.
- c. Ensure workers also have access to hand sanitizer or handwashing while working in the field.
- d. Ensure handwash stations are adequately supplied at all times.

5. Enhance environmental cleaning.

- a. Ensure workers are adequately supplied with cleaning and disinfection products.
- b. Ensure staff are trained in proper use of cleaning and disinfection products (e.g. contact times, if PPE needs to be worn).
- c. Develop a schedule and permit time for increased, routine cleaning and disinfection of work areas as well as daily 'complete' cleaning of accommodations.
- d. Washrooms are to be cleaned and disinfected at least twice per day and when visibly soiled.
- e. Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces such as door knobs/handles, phones, railings, faucets, and toilets frequently. Clean and disinfect shared objects (e.g., work equipment) between each use. Surfaces should be immediately cleaned following spills or where someone displays respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough or sneeze) in the area. Remove items that cannot be properly cleaned or disinfected after becoming contaminated.
- f. Disinfectants used should have a DIN and virucidal claim.
- g. Wash, rinse, disinfect, and then sanitize food contact surfaces, food preparation surfaces, and food preparation equipment.
- h. Ensure that cleaning or disinfecting product residues are not left on table surfaces. Residues could cause allergic reactions or cause someone to ingest the chemicals.
- i. Ensure safe and correct use and storage of disinfectants to avoid food contamination and harm to workers other individuals.
- j. Use gloves when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash. Wash hands after removing gloves.

6. Avoid shared items where you can. Clean and disinfect where you cannot.

- a. Avoid or limit any sharing of food, tools, equipment, or supplies by workers.
- b. Ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing of high-touch materials (e.g., serving spoons, cutting boards) to the extent possible.
- c. Consider using disposable dishware where possible (e.g., utensils, dishes, napkins, tablecloths). If disposable items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all non-disposable food service items are handled with gloves and washed with dish soap and hot water, or in a dishwasher. Employees should wash their hands after removing their gloves or after handling used dishware.
- d. Thermometers must not be used between workers without single-use protective covers or disinfecting between use.

- e. Linens must be laundered between workers.
- f. Discourage sharing of items that are difficult to clean, sanitize, or disinfect. Shared spaces and equipment that cannot be cleaned and disinfected between cohorts should not be used

7. Provide personal protective equipment and physical barriers where applicable.

- a. Where workers cannot maintain physical distancing, install barriers (e.g. plexiglass) or provide appropriate PPE (e.g. masks for workers who may need to be within 2 metres of others).
- b. Appropriate PPE should be determined based on the task being completed
- c. Ensure staff are trained as to how to don (i.e. put on) and doff (i.e. take off) PPE

8. Increase ventilation

- a. Where possible, increase the ventilation system's air intake or open doors and windows. Avoid central recirculation where possible. Change HVAC system filters regularly.
- b. Similarly, open windows when in vehicles with others where possible.

9. Provide alternative service delivery where possible

- a. Organize a schedule for work shifts, meals, showers, and laundry times to avoid crowding common spaces.
 - i. Where possible, consider setting work shifts for those sharing same accommodation so that some are working while others can use the accommodation's facilities (e.g. showers, kitchen).
- b. Limit the number of workers going into town. If possible, make arrangements for direct deposit of wages as well as the delivery of food and other supplies to the farm to reduce contact with others.
- c. Hold meetings so that everyone is 2 metres or more apart.
- d. Offer options for vulnerable workers at higher risk for severe illness (including older adults and people of all ages with certain underlying medical conditions) that limits their exposure risk (e.g., modified job responsibilities).
- e. Avoid events that can result in large gatherings (e.g. soccer matches, parties/BBQs).

10. Manage Ill Workers (Post-Isolation)

- a. Ensure plans are in place to isolate a worker or workers that might become ill.
- b. Should a worker become ill, they should be removed from others in their housing unit and provided other accommodations for self-isolation. The local public health unit should then be notified to provide specific advice on what control measures should be implemented to prevent the potential spread and how to monitor for other possible infected workers (e.g. those living with ill worker).
- c. Anyone who is providing care to the symptomatic worker should maintain a distance of 2 metres.
- d. Have the worker and person caring for them wear a surgical mask and any other PPE appropriate for the circumstance.

- e. Environmental cleaning of the space where the ill worker was housed should take place following their relocation to an isolation unit. Additionally, all spaces and items attended and handled by the worker should be cleaned and disinfected. All items that cannot be cleaned should be removed and stored in a sealed container for a minimum of 7 days.
- f. The following persons should also be isolated while awaiting public health unit direction:
 - i. Those who occupied the same accommodation as the ill worker;
 - ii. Those who were exposed to the ill worker's body fluids;
 - iii. Those who provided care for the ill worker; and/or
 - iv. Those who were within 2 metres for a prolonged period of time (usually 15 minutes or more but may be less as later determined by public health based on exposure situation)
- g. The HNHU will conduct further assessments of the ill worker and those exposed. While the course of action may differ based on the HNHU's assessment, generally,
 - i. Those who have been exposed to the ill worker and who become symptomatic should be excluded from work for 14 days starting from the last day of exposure to the ill worker; and
 - ii. Those who have been exposed to the ill worker and who remain asymptomatic may continue to work but are to otherwise remain in self-isolation when not working. Should the ill worker receive negative test results, asymptomatic workers who were exposed to the ill worker may come out of isolation, after consultation and clearance from public health
- h. Symptomatic workers should be referred for testing. Testing of asymptomatic persons should only be performed as directed by the local public health unit as part of outbreak management.
- i. Consultation with the local public health unit is required in order to determine when the worker(s) can return to work.

11. Keep workers up-to-date on the evolving situation, regulatory requirements and applicable health and safety issues.

- a. All communication must be in a language that the worker understands.
- b. Ensure workers know how to report an illness in a timely manner, and take action to protect themselves and others when at work or in their accommodation.
- c. Review signs, symptoms, and methods of transmission of COVID-19.
- d. Ensure workers know proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and use of masks.
- e. Consider having a point person for each shift and/or in each accommodation that can address COVID-19 concerns.
- f. Ensure workers are aware of their rights and regulatory requirements.
- g. Notify workers of actions taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (e.g. physical distancing and wearing masks)

As with all workplaces, the Occupational Health and Safety Act must be applied. Safety is everyone's responsibility under the act and thus all staff should assess and plan to address their tasks with infection control in mind. Application of R.A.C.E. is recommended:

R – recognize the hazard

A – assess the risk associated with the hazard

C – control the risk associated with the hazard (e.g. Hierarchy of Controls)

E – evaluate the controls

Please be advised, the HNHU is not responsible to address health and safety complaints issued by employees against their employers. Employees and employers seeking further direction on occupational health and safety measures should consult the Ministry of Labour.