

Guidance for Agricultural Employers in Maine for Addressing COVID-19

The spread of COVID-19 presents hardships across all industries, but growers in Maine will face unique challenges when managing the health of their workforce during the upcoming season. Agricultural workers are designated as one of Maine's Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforces. To keep employees and farmworkers healthy and productive and Maine's farms running, employers will need facts about the spread of the virus and precautions for limiting the spread among the workforce. Maine Employers need a plan to support sick workers.

The following is information from the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.maine.gov/DHHS/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/coronavirus.shtml>):

What is COVID-19?

[COVID-19](#) is a novel (new) coronavirus. For some, the respiratory virus causes mild symptoms like the common cold or influenza (flu), for others it can cause severe pneumonia that requires medical care or hospitalization and in severe cases, death can result.

What are the Symptoms?

[Symptoms of COVID-19](#) may include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat (in some patients). *Symptoms may appear **2-14 days after exposure**.* Most patients experience mild symptoms and can recuperate at home, but others, particularly those with underlying medical conditions, may experience more severe respiratory illness.

How does it spread?

The [virus appears to spread](#) in similar ways to influenza (flu) and the common cold. This may include spreading through:

- The air by coughing and sneezing
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes

The virus can spread from person-to-person and in some locations there is apparent community spread, meaning some people are infected and are not sure how or where they became infected.

How can I help to prevent the spread?

There are simple steps you can take [to reduce the possible spread](#) of COVID-19 and other illnesses such as influenza and the common cold:

1. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
4. Practice physical distancing by staying 6 feet apart at all times. If physical distancing isn't practical, consider wearing a cloth face covering per CDC guidance.
5. Stay home while you're sick and avoid close contact with others.

Currently there is no vaccine available to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

<https://www.maine.gov/DHHS/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/coronavirus.shtml>

Best Practices for Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 and Supporting Sick Workers

The impact of an outbreak that could spread to the entire workforce of a farm would have devastating financial impacts for the business and could lead to serious health outcomes, including death, for those most vulnerable to the virus (those over 60 and with underlying health conditions). Such an outbreak also increases the risk that the virus spreads to the surrounding community. In order to prevent the spread of the virus among farmworkers, employers need to take the following steps:

Housing

- Housing for farmworkers should allow for 6 feet between beds.
- Housing and work sites must have hand washing supplies (soap and hot water). It is also helpful to provide hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol.
- Employers should designate an individual responsible for a plan to obtain supplies (such as bleach) and conduct frequent sanitization of worker housing at no cost to the farmworkers.
- Housing areas should have CDC best health practices in the languages of the farmworkers posted (attached).
- Workers over 60 or with underlying health conditions should be provided a separate living space as they are more vulnerable to the impacts of the virus (which could lead to hospitalization or death).

Transportation

- Transportation to the work site or community should allow for space and ventilation in the vehicle, taking into account CDC recommendations for physical distancing (6 feet) so that workers are not sitting immediately next to one another. Also consider the use of cloth face coverings.
- Employers should designate an individual responsible for a plan to obtain supplies and conduct frequent sanitization of vehicles.

Worksite Distancing

- Work should be conducted in a manner that accounts for CDC-recommended physical distancing (6 feet).
- There must be bathroom and sanitizing stations at the worksite to ensure opportunities for proper hygiene.
- Employers should designate an individual responsible for a plan to obtain supplies and conduct daily sanitization of bathrooms and facilities.

If Workers Become Sick

- Employers must notify farmworkers of their right to paid sick leave as guaranteed by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act so that farmworkers can disclose their symptoms and seek appropriate care instead of continuing to work. Immediately identifying illness will be the best chance at preventing spread to the entire workforce.
- Farmworkers need to know their medical treatment and expenses related to COVID-19 will be fully covered during the time they are working and residing in Maine and regardless of their immigration status. This should include assurances that any worker who is tested for COVID-19 will have those costs covered even if the result is negative.
- Employers should designate an individual to whom workers can disclose symptoms in their own language. This individual must be responsible for coordinating access to medical care including providing transportation to health facilities or to COVID-19 testing centers.
- As soon as workers arrive, ask them if they have a fever, cough or shortness of breath.
- If a farmworker has symptoms, they should immediately be isolated from other workers, provided with a mask or a cloth face covering, and a medical professional should be called for guidance before transporting the farmworker to any medical facility (the Maine Mobile Health Program is available to provide support).
- Workers who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 need to be in separate living quarters. Workers who have had direct contact with those who are diagnosed will need to be in quarantine and should be self-monitoring for symptoms. They need to be in separate housing from those who are diagnosed and those who are healthy.
- There must be a separate housing area and separate cooking and bathing facilities for quarantined workers, including a designated individual responsible for coordinating these provisions. A health professional will provide guidance about when workers are ready to leave quarantine.
- Workers who contract COVID-19 or who must be in quarantine must receive food, water and essential supplies at no charge and ensured access to medical care.
- If, at any point, it is necessary to transport a worker with symptoms, the worker should sit at a distance in the vehicle from the driver, wear a cloth face covering or a mask and windows should be rolled down to increase ventilation.
- If a worker experiences severe symptoms, such as struggling to breathe, signs of confusion or inability to walk along, this constitutes an emergency and 9-1-1 should be called.
- No sick worker should be forcibly removed from housing or have their contract terminated prior to the end of their contract period, quarantine period or restrictive movement period.

Per **OSHA 1910.142 Temporary Labor Camps: (1910.142 (I) and (I)(2) Reporting Communicable Disease**. Agricultural employers are to report immediately to local health officer the name and address of any individual in their labor camp known to have or suspected of having a communicable disease.

Resources to Employers:

The Maine Mobile Health Program is a statewide program whose mission is “To Improve the Health Status of Seasonal Workers and Their Families by Providing Culturally Appropriate Care and Services.” We support growers by helping to make a plan for healthy conditions and by providing guidance when a worker becomes sick. Office: 207-622-9252 X2; Web page: <http://www.mainemobile.org/>

The Maine Department of Labor Monitor Advocate is available to assist agricultural workers and employers with employment law concerns, farm labor housing, worker recruitment, and referrals to service provider agencies. Contact Jorge Acero Jorge.a.acero@maine.gov or phone 207 623-7928.