

GUIDANCE FOR FARMERS TO USE WITH EMPLOYEES

Issue overview

The world is confronting a novel coronavirus pandemic that causes serious respiratory disease and may be especially deadly for older people and those with weakened immune systems. The spread of the virus has raised concerns about how it may affect public health as well as the agricultural industry. Virginia's farmers are busy readying the soil for spring planting, feeding and milking cows, and looking after their cattle, chickens and pigs all in order to fill grocery store shelves with safe, affordable food. As farmers rise to address the challenges posed by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must all do our part to not only protect our food supply, but also protect our families and farm workers.

What is coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus.

Have there been cases of COVID-19 in Virginia?

Yes. The first case of COVID-19 in the United States was reported on January 21, and the first case identified in Virginia was on March 7, 2020. As of this writing there are nearly 300 cases in Virginia. The current count of cases of COVID-19 in the United States is available on CDC's webpage at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Some patients have pneumonia in both lungs, multi-organ failure, and in some cases death.

Can I get COVID-19 from livestock animals or pets?

There is no reason at this time to think that any animals, including pets, in the United States might be a source of infection with this new coronavirus that causes COVID-19. To date, CDC has not received any reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19 in the United States.¹

How can farmers and farm workers protect themselves?

There is currently no vaccine or specific antiviral treatment for COVID-19. People can help protect themselves from respiratory illness with everyday preventive actions:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available in a field environment
- Access to the farm by non-essential persons should be limited
- Stay home when you are sick, and do not require/allow sick workers to come to the farm
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects, surfaces, and equipment

¹ Source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\), Division of Viral Diseases](#) (March 24, 2020)

Farm Manager & Employer Actions Steps²

Your farm workforce is not immune to coronavirus, please begin taking steps to protect yourself and your employees. The CDC resources found below are available in English, Spanish, and many other languages commonly spoken on Virginia farms.

1. Talk with your employees about coronavirus, how it spreads, and how to prevent getting infected.
2. Print the [CDC factsheets and posters](#), post in your workplace and employee housing facilities.
3. Provide guidance to help employees clean and disinfect employer-provided housing. Follow up with employees and manage the process to be sure that this happens. Set up a regular weekly and daily schedule for cleaning.
 - CDC guidance for cleaning homes: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/cleaning-disinfection.html>
4. Clean and disinfect your workplace. The employee breakroom and bathroom are great places for virus to be transmitted. Clean and disinfect any areas where employees congregate or routinely touch items such as doorknobs and computer keyboards. Set up daily and weekly cleaning schedules.
5. Provide cleaning supplies such as cleaning solutions, buckets, mops, brushes, etc for cleaning at work and for those living in employer-provided housing. (CDC list of approved antimicrobial cleaning products: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/sars-cov-2-list_03-03-2020.pdf)
6. Review your sick leave policy. The first advice for people who are sick is to stay home except to get medical care. Do you provide paid sick leave for your employees? If you do not, will employees feel financially obligated to come to work even if they are sick?
7. Communicate with employees that they should stay home if they are sick. Employees sometimes come to work believing they will face punishment or firing if they miss work. Be sure your employees understand that their health and that of their co-workers' comes first. Communicate and make a plan to cover for sick employees. CDC provides posters in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) covering symptoms of novel coronavirus.
8. Prepare your disaster contingency plan. What will you do if 50% of your employees become sick and unable to work? Are there neighboring farms who might be able to share resources in an emergency? Who will manage for a few weeks if you or another key manager are unable to leave your house or are hospitalized?
 - Virginia Cooperative Extension has provided [a page of farm-specific resources](#) for addressing COVID-19
 - Cornell provides the [Extension Disaster Education Network \(EDEN\)](#) to provide community education resources across the entire disaster cycle of preparedness, response, and recovery
 - Penn State also provides farm [disaster preparedness resources](#)

² Stup, R., 2020, Novel Coronavirus Prevention & Control for Farms, *Cornell Workforce Agricultural Development*, <https://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/2020/03/12/novel-coronavirus-prevention-control-for-farms/>, (March 24, 2020)