COVID-19 Guidelines for Small Minnesota Meat Processing Plants

The information in this document is based on recommendations from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These strategies should be part of your COVID-19 Preparedness Plan.

See the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) for COVID-19 Preparedness Plan templates: www.dli.mn.gov/updates

In order to minimize the risk from COVID-19 in the workplace, consider the following:

Employee and Visitor Screening

Comprehensive employee and visitor screening is important to limiting the introduction and further spread of COVID-19. Maintain a single point of entry at your facility and conduct screenings each day prior to employees or visitors entering the facility.

- Initial screening: This involves verbally asking a series of basic yes/no questions covering common COVID-19 symptoms.

- Individuals who answer "Yes" to any screening question or have a measured temperature reading above 100.0° F should be advised to contact their health care provider and seek testing. They should go home, wait for test results, and stay away from other people.

- The employer should confirm that the employee can self-isolate (separate from others living in the same household). Local emergency management and local public health agencies can assist the employee if they cannot self-isolate.

- Consider providing a release form to the employee, medical clinic, or wherever sampling will occur to specifically allow the plant to receive test results in real time for those employees who choose to sign it. (**Authorization for Disclosure of Protected Health Information to Employer** – Request from the MDA). This allows plant management to perform their own workplace follow-up, if necessary, to exclude co-worker contacts of COVID-positive employees as quickly as possible.

Distancing and Barriers

Implement proper barriers and distancing measures at your facility, including operational changes, that allow for employees' physical distancing of 6 feet.

- Install partitions of a smooth, non-porous, durable, and easy-to-clean material, such as plexiglass or stretched plastic on a suitable frame, to provide barrier protection between employees where physical distancing of 6 feet cannot be consistently maintained.

- Create additional space for breaks, lunch, or lockers to allow more distance between employees. For example, set up picnic tables outdoors.

- Form employee teams specific to each shift or task to limit potential virus spread from any individual to one small group.
- Mark out 6 feet from cash registers, time clocks, and throughout customer areas to create a visual reminder of what 6 feet is.

Personal Hygiene

Remind employees to consistently practice good personal hygiene at your facility.

- Maintain ample supplies of soap and single-use towels; provide additional handwashing stations where needed.
- At each handwashing location, post handwashing instructions that are quickly and easily understood, with pictures or visual aids. Here is an example of an illustrated, printable poster: www.health.state.mn.us/people/handhygiene/wash/dontforget.pdf
- Provide hand sanitizer and sanitizer wipes at other work areas throughout the facility, particularly at the entrance, exits, cash registers, and transition areas.
- Remind employees to avoid touching their face, including eyes, nose, and mouth, and to wash their hands before and after touching these areas of the body.
- Reinforce good cough and sneeze etiquette. Here is an example of an illustrated, printable poster: www.health.state.mn.us/people/cyc/hcpposter.html

Workplace Building and Ventilation Protocols

Consider the operational capacity, and increase, improve, and maintain ventilation throughout the building.

- Increase the outdoor air percentage.
- For systems that recirculate air, improve central air filtrations.
- Replace and upgrade filters.
- Run on full economizer as outside air conditions allow.
- Consult with a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) expert to improve and ensure proper ventilation is maintained.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Facial Coverings

COVID-19 is spread person-to-person through droplets propelled into the air when a person coughs, sneezes, or talks. Examples of appropriate facial covering and PPE protocols include:

- Require all employees and visitors to routinely wear cotton face masks, face coverings, or disposable masks while at your facility along with the standard PPE, such as latex or leather gloves, needed to perform regular job duties.
- Provide the required PPE and facial coverings, along with training on proper usage, to employees at no cost.
- Remind employees to wash their hands after putting on, touching, or removing any facial coverings.
- Refer to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidance "Use of Respirators, Facemasks, and Cloth Face Coverings in the Food and Agriculture Sector During Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic": www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/use-respirators-facemasks-and-cloth-face-coverings-food-and-agriculture-sector-during-coronavirus.

Communication

Provide an orientation for employees about your facility's required COVID-19 Preparedness Plan and the measures you are taking to minimize risks.

- Institute a process for employees to report COVID-19 symptoms in themselves or household members to plant management.

- Communicate clearly that there are no adverse consequences for staying home when sick.
- Provide information in languages understood by employees, and prominently post instructions and reminders about illness symptoms, handwashing and hygiene etiquette, and procedures for reporting illness. Click here for key coronavirus messages translated into multiple languages: www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/keymessages.html

Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting

Implement enhanced cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfection of common contact areas throughout the facility. Create a checklist to ensure consistency.

- Fully clean and use sanitizing and/or disinfecting products on work area equipment and in common areas such as break areas, lunchrooms, and bathrooms at least daily, preferably at every shift change. Pay special attention to high touch areas such as stair railings, tools, guards, doorknobs, microwave handles, computers, or light switches, as well as any partitions installed for maintaining distancing.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered disinfectant products to disinfect surfaces. A list of these products can be found at: www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2
- Be sure to check product label guidelines for whether and where these disinfectant and/or sanitizing products are safe and recommended for use in food establishments.
- Ensure that employees are following label directions and observing contact times for effective cleaning and disinfecting.
- If an employee becomes ill at work, their work and shared areas must be cleaned and disinfected immediately and before another employee is assigned to the ill employee's work area.
- Refer to the CDC issued guidance "Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility" for more information: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building-facility.html

Visitors, Shared Building and Grounds Spaces

- Limit visitors to those essential for business operations and restrict where visitors can go within the facility.
- Require non-employees entering the facility, such as cleaning crews, pest control contractors, and delivery or distribution drivers to follow your COVID-19 guidelines.
- Identify other activities or tenants that share space in the same building or grounds, even if it is occasional or seasonal, such as shared storage, loading docks, leased manufacturing space, etc. Your COVID-19 Preparedness Plan training should include these areas and people as appropriate.

Drop-off, Pick-up, and Delivery Practices

- Receive deliveries via contactless method whenever possible.
- Maintain a 6-foot distance when receiving or exchanging deliveries.
- Minimize or eliminate exchanging of shared scanners, pens, or other tools for delivery.
- Minimizing Customer and Client Transmission
- Limit the number of people accompanying the customer.
- Post signage that if customers don't feel well or have any symptoms of COVID-19, they should stay home. They should also stay home if they have a household member experiencing symptoms.
- Have clients complete a screening checklist such as the one used for employees.
- Encourage customers to sanitize their hands.

- Require customers to wear facial coverings. Cloth face coverings are NOT a substitute for maintaining physical distancing of 6 feet.
- Wipe down equipment used after each client.

Protocols for Receiving and Exchanging Payment

- Mark off a 6-foot line in front of the cash register and 6-foot marks for additional customers waiting in line for those who are making a payment in the business.
- Install barriers at the payment counter.
- Use contactless payment when possible such as an electronic fund transfer or credit card payment that allows the customer to initiate and complete the payment transaction remotely or while separated from the employee.

Reducing and Managing Occupancy

- Reduce capacity to the allowed percentage to maintain social distancing (currently 50% capacity).
- Advertise your business protocols so customers are prepared and aware of changes. Use websites, social media, pre-appointment phone calls, etc.
- Post signage at the entrance of the facility outlining your protocols and procedures.
- Decline service and advise a customer to leave the facility if they are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.

Responding to a COVID-19 Positive Test Result

The Minnesota Department of Health recommends ongoing testing of symptomatic employees (even those with very mild symptoms), who are identified through intensive employee screening at the beginning of every shift. However, there may be situations when testing all employees (symptomatic and asymptomatic) should be considered. A key factor for making this decision is a sharp increase in positive cases within a short period of time, proportionate to the size of the workforce.

What you can you expect if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?
- The MDH will call the ill employee to interview them about their illness history and household and workplace contacts.
- It can be several days before a representative from the MDH is able to call and interview the ill employee. Thus, we recommend encouraging your employees to sign the "Authorization for Disclosure of Protected Health Information to Employer" form. Access to real-time results can give you an opportunity to conduct your own contact tracing to determine which other employees may have been exposed.
- Have a team assembled, including representatives from the plant, the MDA, local public health, and the local medical clinic, to review best practices and create a plan for testing symptomatic employees.

When can a COVID-positive employee return to work?
- Any employee who tests positive, as well as ill employees without a positive test, should stay home and, whenever possible, have their own room and bathroom to reduce spread to other household members. They need to stay isolated at home until their symptoms have resolved and all three of these conditions are met:
  » Symptoms have improved (this can take up to 14 days) AND,
  » At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared AND,
  » At least three days have passed with no fever (without use of fever reducing medications).
- What about workplace and household contacts of COVID-positive employees?

- Meat processing facilities are considered critical infrastructure and can ask asymptomatic workplace contacts with concerning exposures to continue working in the event they would be unable to operate without these employees. However, the MDH recommends that workplace contacts in critical infrastructure industries self-quarantine at home for 10 days whenever possible.
- Household contacts must stay home and self-quarantine for 14 days.

How can you help your employees?

- Provide assistance to the employee while sick and recovering.
- If an employee tests positive for COVID-19 and lacks access to critical, essential items that would prevent them from self-isolating at home, contact local public health. (www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ practice/connect/findlph.html)
- If the employee is at greater risk of developing a severe illness (e.g. aged 65 years or older or with an underlying condition such as chronic lung disease, chronic heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or weakened immune system), consult a health care provider.
- If the employee's symptoms are getting worse, help them seek health care by providing resources such as access to a phone, transportation, or other resources necessary to get needed care.
- If the employee has trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, bluish lips, or other emergency signs, call 911.

More Information and Resources

Keep up to date on the latest information for businesses and employees and update your COVID-19 Preparedness Plan, as needed.

- Stay Safe MN: https://staysafe.mn.gov/
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture: www.mda.state.mn.us/covid-19-agriculture
- MDA COVID-19 Question Line: mdaresponds@state.mn.us
- Dairy and Meat Inspection Main Line: 651-201-6300 or email MDA.MeatPoultryEgg@state.mn.us
- Minnesota.gov statewide COVID-19 Response: https://mn.gov/covid19
- Minnesota Department of Health: www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html
- For links to additional guidance, please visit: www.health.state.mn.us/people/foodsafety/emergency/covid. html.
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development: https://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/ covid/
- Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry: www.dli.mn.gov/updates
- CDC's Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers Responding to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html
- Additional suggestions can be found at: General Business Frequently Asked Questions: www.cdc.gov/ coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/general-business-faq.html
- CDC's guidance on Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/ community/disinfecting-building-facility.html
- FDA's Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19
- FDA's Use of Respirators, Facemasks, and Cloth Face Coverings in the Food and Agriculture Sector During Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic: www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/use-respirators-facemasks-and-cloth-face-coverings-food-and-agriculture-sector-during-coronavirus

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this information is available in alternative forms of communication upon request by calling 651-201-6000. TTY users can call the Minnesota Relay Service at 711. The MDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

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