

COVID -19 and the Food Production Industry

This public health guidance provides general operational advice that can reduce the spread of COVID-19 in a food production environment. You may decide to incorporate these practices in detailed COVID-19 control plans, specific to the needs of your own production facility.

Organizational Measures

Appoint a COVID-19 point-person within the organization to handle communication and coordination.

Keep staff updated on COVID-19 control strategies. Ensure your staff understand it's important to maintain confidentiality about illness, COVID-19 test results, or close contacts. This is needed to ensure people continue to seek testing and treatment and self-isolate when they are ill.

Use texting, chats, and conference calling to bring teams together remotely.

Develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) that explains what everyone will do if an employee is tested for COVID-19, or tests positive.

Ban non-essential visitors.

Limit interaction with truck drivers.

Identify supplies that may be jeopardized in the current supply chain, and plan accordingly.

If there is a change in formulation or packaging, review your food safety plan. The change may lead to the need for a review with your licencing agency. For example, product formulation changes may impact shelf stability and labelling requirements.

Masks and Physical Distancing

Section 16 (m) of the NS Health Protection Act Order exempts food production plants from the requirement to physical distance. However, if physical distancing cannot be maintained, non-medical masks are required.

Section 18.1 & 18.2 requires all persons to wear a mask in a public place, including an indoor workspace where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

It is likely that in your production facility physical distance cannot be maintained among workers. Ensure non-medical masks are worn properly and consistently by your workers.

Non-medical Masks

It may not be practical for workers to wear the same cloth non-medical mask for the full duration of a work shift (for example, eight or more hours), particularly in humid workplaces, hot and cold environments or in areas where the non-medical masks will easily become wet or dirty. Employers should provide readily available clean cloth non-medical masks for workers to use when the coverings become wet, soiled, or otherwise visibly contaminated.

Non-medical masks are not PPE. They are not appropriate substitutes for PPE such as respirators (like N95 masks) or medical masks in workplaces where respirators or masks are recommended or required to protect the wearer.

Masks should

- fit over the nose and mouth, from the bridge of nose to the chin, and fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- allow for breathing without restriction
- not be shared with others
- not be used if they become wet or contaminated
- be exchanged throughout the day with clean replacements, as needed
- be handled as little as possible to prevent transferring infectious materials to the cloth and/or face

Non-medical masks are intended to protect other people—not the wearer.

It is also important to stress [hand hygiene](#) before and after putting on and removing masks.

Wearing a mask alone will not prevent the spread of COVID-19. Consistently and strictly adhering to good hygiene and public health measures, including frequent hand washing and physical distancing where possible is always necessary.

All food and animal production/processing businesses should consider:

- Increasing cleaning frequency in areas where people have frequent contact with each other, or share spaces or objects
- Changing operations where possible to increase the distance between people, such as in line-ups, workstations and production lines

Personal Hygiene

Frequent and proper handwashing is the best way of preventing COVID-19, and other respiratory infections or foodborne illnesses. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before and after preparing food, after handling waste, using the washroom, and whenever hands look dirty. Consider placing alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers at all entrances into work areas.

Wearing gloves does not reduce the need for handwashing.

Even while wearing gloves, employees must avoid touching their faces. If gloves are worn, employees must wash their hands thoroughly before putting on the gloves and must change them regularly.

Employees should cover their mouths when they cough, either with a tissue or by coughing into their arm. Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

Wash linens, clothing and uniforms regularly.

If you have recently travelled outside of Nova Scotia, self-isolation is required for 14 days upon arrival in the province. For more information on the Chief Medical Officer of Health's order, visit <https://novascotia.ca/CoronaVirus/alerts-notices/#travel> .

If you're sick, stay home.

If an employee develops COVID-19 symptoms, the following public health measures must be followed:

- employees who have COVID-19 symptoms must advise their manager immediately, go directly home and use the self-assessment tool to determine next steps. The self-assessment tool can be found at <https://when-to-call-about-covid19.novascotia.ca/en>
- employees who are at home and who may have COVID-19 are to follow the advice of their local public health authority regarding self-isolation to reduce the spread of COVID-19
- do not return to work until you are well

Cleaning and Sanitizing/Disinfecting

Frequent cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces and objects is important in controlling the spread of COVID-19. Any surface that people's hands touch frequently should be cleaned and disinfected at minimum twice a day, and when visibly dirty.

Disinfectants should be used to eliminate the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Use products with a drug identification number (DIN) and labelled as a broad-spectrum virucide. A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms the disinfectant product is approved and safe for use in Canada. Click for a list of [approved disinfectants](#).

Facility Specific Measures

Food manufacturing facilities have potential for close contact to occur on or near production lines, receiving and packaging areas, sampling and quality rooms, and in common facility areas such as conference rooms, lunchrooms, locker rooms, restrooms, hallways, and entryways. Avoid close contact where possible.

Entrances, Hallways, Common Spaces and Personnel Movement in the Facility

Minimize hallway conversations and interactions and limit the number of people in these areas at a time to maintain social distancing.

Find ways to minimize common surfaces employees need to touch:

- use auto-open doors, or encourage bumping doors open with hip or using foot on kick plate
- remove door closures where possible and keep doors open to allow employees to move between doorways without touching knobs where it does not impact food safety zoning
- add foot pulls to doors with frequent traffic
- prop interior office doors open whenever possible to improve air turnover in the building, and decrease touching of knobs/handles

Employee Clocking In/ Out

Many timeclocks have web-based features that can be operated through phone apps. Consider other apps or methods employees can use to track time and submit to supervisors.

Use phones to clock in and out or provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer near the timeclock.

Consider if a supervisor can use a camera from another room to clock employees in and out.

Consider if clocking in and out can be handled by journal entry afterwards by one identified person or supervisor.

Locker Rooms and Entering/Exiting Production Floor

Clean and laundered clothing is not considered a risk to spread COVID-19.

Employees should enter the uniform area with clean hands.

Only touch uniform clothing you are going to wear. Once selected, place the now-empty clothes hanger on a “used” rack to avoid the hanger touching clean uniforms and from other employees handling the previously touched hanger.

Clean and disinfect hangers on the “used” rack after every shift.

Keep soiled uniforms separate from clean uniforms. Launder uniforms regularly.

Common Tools

Items that people touch frequently, such as keyboards, buttons, etc. should be cleaned and disinfected between users.

Identify high touch surfaces (e.g., touch screens) in maintenance and receiving areas. Clean and disinfect these surfaces on a separate cleaning schedule than those surfaces in food production areas to limit the chance of contamination through cleaning.

Common tools like brooms, rakes, scrapers, or hand tools should be cleaned and disinfected, especially between users.

Provide personal pens or markers or disinfect them at least once per shift.

Identify areas where employees frequently interact and develop cleaning and disinfecting procedures specific to those areas.

Shift Change/Delivery Risks and Break Room Activities

Identify people that do not need go into production restrooms and do not need to be using the same resources as the main group of employees (i.e., maintenance crew, delivery personnel). Make sure they are aware that they need to avoid those areas.

- Drivers should use their own pens to sign. If this is not possible, sanitize pens after use.
- Make sure to include outdoor areas, porta-potties, and tables in the cleaning schedule. Stagger days, shifts, shift changes, breaks and lunches.

Use video applications or phone calls to prevent face-to-face contact during shift change. Use common bin receptacles to transfer product samples.

Consider separating teams into smaller groups and have them use separate bathrooms and break areas.

Consider using office spaces or conference rooms to distance employees, or to create separate lunch or changing areas.

Clean refrigerator handles, sinks and faucets, microwave buttons and handles and other kitchenette areas more often.

Have soap and disinfecting wipes easily available in lunch and breakrooms. Clean facilities after each break.

Office/Clerical Work

Limit exchange of files and paperwork to a minimum and avoid close contact, designate one person to get and scan documents.

Separate office staff, ideally limiting offices to only one person per office space. Consider having as many people work from home as possible if they are not required on-site.

Consider offering an alcohol-based hand sanitizer for people who go to the post office or bank.

If you are delivering items to self-isolated employees at home, make sure you set up a system. Leave items on a doorstep or put the items into an already opened trunk.

Streamline Monitoring Activities

Food safety versus quality: Consider whether there is a food safety risk versus an incidental quality risk when dealing with monitoring activities that involve human to human interaction.

Know what data is nice to have, versus what is truly necessary. Streamline and minimize where you can.

Consider what checks can be done less frequently to reduce person-to-person contact. For example, consider doing checks every four hours instead of hourly, or monitor remotely.

Federally inspected meat slaughter and food processing establishments are required to have documentation which clearly explains how your facility is addressing COVID-19 exposure risks.

Examples include:

- Stop the line to reduce the noise level when you need to communicate a critical issue and eliminate the need for people to stand close to each other to hear.
- Require the operator to have an employee closer to the inspector on viscera to enable regular communication without moving through the kill floor.
- Adjust on-site inspection practices and frequencies to increase the distance between inspection staff and plant staff.
- Adjust travel patterns through the plant to avoid congested areas.
- Discourage non-essential communication between employees on the kill floor, to reduce close contact. Encourage the use of phone and email for essential communication.
- Restrict access to certain areas in the plant by employees. Adjust sanitation schedules.
- Install an in/out box outside of the office for exchanging documentation and other important materials.

Livestock producers should follow normal biosecurity measures, particularly if they have COVID-19 symptoms or are a close contact of a COVID-19 case.

Exclude visitors or workers who:

- have travelled outside NS in the last 14 days
- are ill, especially with symptoms of COVID-19
- have been in contact with a confirmed or suspected case in the last 14 days.

For more information on farm disease prevention, producers are encouraged to consult the National Biosecurity Standards and Biosecurity Principles and the National Farm-Level Biosecurity Planning Guide.

Additional Resources

1. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - Information for industry

Contains a Q&A on Resources and recommendations for the agriculture and agri-food sector, Food Safety, Temporary Foreign Workers, Trade, Food Supply, Financial Programs and Animal Health

<http://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-information-forindustry/?id=1584732749543>

2. Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): CFIA information for industry

Contains a Q&A for Industry and Trade as well as information on SFCR Requirements, CFIA inspection activities during the pandemic and current measures for industry <https://inspection.gc.ca/covid-19/cfia-information-for-industry/eng/1584462704366/1584462704709#a7>

3. Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Guidance to Meat Slaughter and Processing Establishments on Prevention and Response to Suspect and Confirmed COVID-19 Plant Employees

Contains information on Establishment Requirements and Procedures for Operators <https://www.inspection.gc.ca/covid-19/cfia-information-for-industry/guidance-to-meatslaughter-and-processing-establis/eng/1585620151816/1585620617343>

4. Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Resources on COVID-19

Contains a list of resources from the federal government, Employer Resources, Animal and Livestock Resources, Supply Chain impact, and Province Specific information <https://www.cfa-fca.ca/resources/resources-on-covid-19/>

5. Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Latest CFIA information for consumers on food and animal health – COVID-19

Contains information on Food Safety and COVID-19 and Animal Health and COVID-19 for consumers <https://inspection.canada.ca/covid-19/information-for-consumers-about-food-safety-and-an/eng/1584648921808/1584648922156>

6. Government of Canada, Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Prevention and risks

Contains general information on the coronavirus <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html>