

COVID-19 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS



Guidance for the Manitoba Food Processing Sector

Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development (ARD) is aware of the concerns and challenges our food industry is facing to continue delivering a critical service to Manitobans for uninterrupted access to safe food.

The following information aims to provide guidance and answer questions food processors (including abattoirs) may have regarding COVID-19.

Food Safety

How is food safety affected by COVID-19?

There is currently no evidence that food is a source or route of virus transmission. Food safety authorities do not anticipate any food product recalls due to COVID-19 contamination.

Provincial Food Inspection Services

Are provincial inspections continuing?

ARD continues to deliver the following inspection services to ensure the safety and security of Manitoba's food supply:

- **Meat Inspection:** On-going as usual with ante-mortem and post-mortem inspections.
- **Food Processing Inspection:** On-going as usual with current processing inspection activities. However, while inspections are unannounced under normal operating circumstances, inspections are announced during the COVID-19 response to allow operators to raise any concerns and for ARD to address them appropriately.

As the COVID-19 situation evolves, ARD will re-evaluate the above approach to ensure that food remains safe while prioritizing the safety of the food processors and inspectors.

Am I required to let provincial inspectors access my facility when we are not allowing visitors?

ARD officials are not present at facilities as "visitors" but as inspectors under [The Public Health Act](#) legislation. The Public Health Act allows inspectors to enter any place in which they have reasonable grounds to determine compliance with the act and the [Food and Food Handling Establishments Regulation](#).

How is ARD ensuring inspection activities don't cause risk to facilities?

ARD has implemented an employee self-assessment protocol to determine inspectors' health status prior to each work day. ARD takes the COVID-19 risk seriously when fulfilling inspection requirements. ARD will also comply with protocols implemented in an inspected facility, if appropriate.

What will ARD do if an inspector tests positive for COVID-19?

In the event of an inspector testing positive for COVID-19 ARD, ARD will work with public health officials to determine the appropriate response.

Protecting Workers and Your Food Processing Operation

How can I help workers at my facility?

Following current food safety guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic could help protect your workers from COVID-19, reduce lost working days due to illness and help prevent facility closures. This includes social distancing of at least two metres/six feet between people and frequent handwashing.

Should my employees wear masks to reduce COVID-19 risk?

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is recommending that wearing a facial covering/non-medical mask has not been proven to protect the person wearing it. However, masks such as cloth masks may serve as a mitigation step in areas where physical distancing is not possible.

- Wearing a non-medical mask is an additional measure you can take to protect others around you (in situations where physical distancing is difficult to maintain given recent evidence related to transmission from persons who are pre-symptomatic or have no symptoms).
- Masks alone will not prevent the spread of COVID-19. You must consistently and strictly adhere to good hygiene and public health measures, including frequent hand washing and physical (social) distancing.
- Medical masks, including surgical, medical procedure face masks and respirators (like N95 masks), must be prioritized for health care workers and others providing direct care to COVID-19 patients.

For more guidance you can review the following information from PHAC:

www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/medical-devices/activities/announcements/covid19-notice-home-made-masks.html

What do I do if a worker tests positive for COVID-19?

In the event that an employee develops COVID-19 symptoms, facilities are required to follow public health measures put in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

- Employees who have COVID-19 symptoms must advise their manager immediately and contact Health Links-Info Santé at **204-788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** (toll free).

Do I need to do extra cleaning if a worker at my facility tests positive for COVID-19?

Facilities should enhance their cleaning and sanitation efforts to control any risks that might be associated with workers who are ill, regardless of the type of virus or bacteria. This is in addition to regular cleaning and sanitation.

However, the same sanitary procedures that facilities are already following to protect food safety will also help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses like COVID-19.

Will my facility be shut down if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?

If an employee tests positive for COVID-19. Health officials will provide guidance to the facility to help them make decisions to best address the risks to employees and the business.

Preparing for COVID-19 and having plans in place to mitigate risk may improve the chances of stopping/controlling transmission in the workplace should an employee get COVID-19 infection. This could prevent an outbreak among the staff, which could trigger a facility shutdown if control measures are not adequate to address the outbreak.

How can my facility prepare for COVID-19?

Facilities are encouraged to have COVID-19 plans which clearly identify mitigation measures intended to address exposure risks and actions that will be taken if there is an employee with COVID-19. It is recognized that certain public health measures may not be possible in all operations. Facilities should recognize their challenges and outline the mitigation measures they have in place to address risks. These plans should include:

- approach taken regarding social distancing
- outline policies for your staff indicating when the need to stay home due to illness
- take measures that encourage staff to stay home when ill (e.g., not requiring sick notes)

Preventative Measures for COVID-19 in Your Food Processing Facility

How do I prevent COVID-19 in my food processing facility?

Help protect your employees and reduce lost working days by:

- ensuring that employees report any symptoms of respiratory illness before or during work
- telling employees to stay home if they have any COVID-19 symptoms such as fever, cough, respiratory problems, or are required to be in mandatory isolation
- taking measures to encourage employees to stay at home if they have COVID-19 (e.g., not requiring sick notes)
- ensuring that facilities are available for hand washing (running water, soap, paper towels, etc.) and encouraging frequent hand washing
- provide hand sanitizer (greater than or equal to 60% alcohol) if soap and water are not readily available (e.g., for shipping and receiving, or in office areas) keeping in mind that hand washing facilities are a mandatory requirement in food processing facilities
- promoting proper sneezing and coughing etiquette (into their bent elbow or in a tissue that is immediately discarded, then washing hands as soon as possible)
- following social distancing guidelines

How can I achieve social distancing in my facility?

Respect social distancing guidelines (at least 2m or 6 feet apart for interactions over 10 minutes), where possible:

- Avoid line-ups (e.g., entry to production areas, hand wash stations, time clocks, etc.).
- Make sure that social distancing measures are applied during breaks/meals (e.g., avoid gatherings).
 - Arrange break/meal schedules to have a limited number of workers in the same room at any given time.
 - Remove non-essential objects (e.g., newspapers, magazines) from common areas.
- Identify employees who travel together (e.g., carpools) and discourage this practice as much as possible.

What do I do if social distancing is not possible at my facility?

Social distancing and physical separation must be put in place, if possible. However, for tasks where it is impossible to maintain a distance of two metres at all times, try to make adjustments which may include:

- keeping teams on the production line as small as possible and consistently having the same people work together
- maintaining, as much as possible, the same position on the production line throughout a shift, unless there are physical, chemical or ergonomic constraints or risks
- staggering workstations on either side of processing lines so that food workers are not facing one another
- spacing out workstations
- reducing the speed of production lines
- installing physical barriers between workers when two metre distance cannot be respected (e.g., Plexiglas)
- avoiding sharing of equipment (e.g., knives, scoops, etc.)
- wearing a non-medical mask and protective eye wear or a visor to cover the face (only if wearing glasses or a visor does not present a risk to workers' safety, such as fogging or if the work increases the risk of dusts, a higher protective level mask is required)
 - ensuring that disposable protective equipment is disposed of in a sanitary manner and make sure employees wash their hands after removing equipment.
 - *disinfecting reusable equipment with a suitable product

For more guidance on how to properly wear and remove non-medical masks see:

www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/instructions-sew-no-sew-cloth-face-covering.html

How should my facility address shipping/receiving concerns?

- Ideally, arrange for shipments to be received in a manner that minimizes the access of visitors (e.g., truck drivers) to your building. If possible:
 - truck drivers should not leave their vehicles during delivery.
 - use technology (e.g., cell phones, tablets, or radios) to avoid face to face contact
- Unload materials to a designated area, while respecting a two metre distance between individuals.
- Where possible, limit the exchange of physical documents. Do not share pens.

What role does my food safety program play in COVID-19 prevention?

Following all of your company's food safety programs including Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), adherence to good food hygiene, safety practices and safe cooking generally minimizes the risk of transmission of any foodborne contamination or illness.

Can I continue business related travel?

All non-essential business related travel is discouraged. It is important to review current public health orders at www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/soe.html to determine how they impact travel plans.

Sanitation Practices in Food Processing Facilities During COVID-19

Should my facility be doing any extra sanitation?

Sanitize or disinfect frequently touched areas (tables, counters, doorknobs, phones, computer accessories, pens, etc.) on every work shift or whenever someone leaves the area and before someone else enters the area.

***What is the difference between a sanitizer and a disinfectant?**

Sanitizers are used after cleaning to reduce the level of bacteria to a safe level when following the manufacturer's instruction for concentration and contact time. When sanitizers are used at the no-rinse concentration level they do not need to be rinsed off.

Disinfectants have a greater ability to destroy bacteria, viruses and molds. Disinfectants are used at a higher concentration and require a longer contact time than sanitizers.

Some disinfectant/sanitizer products are the same chemical and are considered a disinfectant when used at a higher concentration and longer contact time, or as a sanitizer when used at a lower concentration and shorter contact time. For example, "bleach" is a disinfectant when used at 1000 to 5000 ppm with a 10 minute contact time, but is considered a no rinse sanitizer when used at 100 to 200 ppm with a two minute contact time.

Ensure that the disinfectant you use is approved for use in a food processing application. Some disinfectants can be toxic and are unsuitable for food premises or food contact surfaces. They can constitute a chemical hazard.

Follow the label or manufacturer's directions for proper use of the sanitizer/disinfectant.

What can I do if I have difficulty accessing cleaning or sanitizing chemicals?

If your facility is having difficulty accessing cleaning chemicals from your sanitation chemical supplier, contact your ARD inspector to discuss suitable alternatives.

Health Canada has also published a [list of hard surface disinfectants](#) that may have suitable alternatives as well. However, remember to ensure the product is suitable for use in a food processing environment.

Where can I get more information?

Contact the Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development, Food Safety and Inspection branch at: foodsafety@gov.mb.ca or call **204 795-8418** in Winnipeg.

Useful links

- CFIA: [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): CFIA information for industry](#)
- CFIA: [Guidance to Meat Slaughter and Processing Establishments on Prevention and Response to Suspect and Confirmed COVID-19 Plant Employees](#)