

Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide for the  
Agricultural Work Environment – COVID-19

**OHS is everyone's business!**



The purpose of this guide is to support agricultural sector businesses for management of occupational health and safety (OHS) in their work environment. It seeks to guarantee that operations can resume or continue under the safest and healthiest possible conditions in the context of COVID-19.

In a crisis period, it is important that workers, employers and other players in the workplace collaborate to have healthy and safe work environments for all! Dialogue and cooperation are essential to achieve this.



### **Management of occupational health and safety**

Management means implementing the necessary measures to honour the employer's legal obligations, namely identify, correct and control the risks and encourage the workers' participation in this preventive approach.

Good cooperation between the employer and the staff is essential to encourage management of OHS.



### **Psychological health**

The COVID-19 context is a major stress factor that adds to the other risks already present in the agricultural sector. This additional stress causes concern for the owners and their families, the workers, the suppliers, the subcontractors, the partners, and the customers. COVID-19 is causing an unprecedented upheaval in the different spheres of society, including the entire agri-food sector. It profoundly affects the Québec agricultural sector. Special attention must therefore be paid to the psychosocial health of the people working in the business.



The employer must **proceed with identification of the risks of transmission of COVID-19 in the work environment**. If the risks of contamination cannot be eliminated, the employer must seek to reduce and control them. The employer must identify the tasks during which workers may be exposed to the virus. The suppliers, subcontractors, partners and customers have been informed of the measures implemented in the business to control the risks associated with COVID-19 and made aware of the importance of complying with these measures.

The preventive measures that may be applied are based on the principles of exclusion of symptomatic persons from the workplace, physical distancing, hand washing, respiratory etiquette and maintenance of hygiene measures for the tools, equipment and frequently touched surfaces.

Beware of fatigue caused by long working hours, because it contributes to increasing the accident risks. Respect a work schedule compliant with the labour standards and allowing workers to sleep full nights. Moreover, in the case of accommodated workers, the work schedule must provide them with enough time to comply with the sanitary and distancing instructions, particularly during meal preparation, and to maintain the dwelling as recommended for the prevention of COVID-19, unless another person is responsible for this

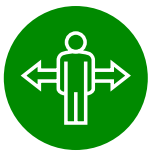


### **Exclusion of symptomatic workers from the workplace**

Persons exhibiting symptoms are part of the COVID-19 transmission chain in the workplace. Procedures accounting for the following factors can avoid transmission of the disease:

- A worker who returns to work after the isolation period must have had no symptoms for at least 24 h and no fever for at least 48 h;
- Identification of workers with COVID-19 symptoms before they enter the workplace, by means such as:
  - a [questionnaire](#),
  - [self-evaluation](#) by the workers;
- isolation in a room of a worker who starts feeling symptoms in the workplace, wearing a procedure mask, reporting to 1-877-644-4545, and application of the established response plan;
- Once the person with symptoms has left the premises, prohibit access to the isolation room until it has been cleaned and all surfaces and objects touched by the person have been disinfected;
- Information and raising awareness for workers, personnel placement or recruitment agencies, suppliers, subcontractors, partners and customers concerning the measures implemented in the business to control the risks associated with COVID-19 and the importance of compliance with them;
- Formation of stable teams to be in contact with the personnel coming from outside the business (e.g. daily arrivals of workers on the farm, delivery persons, truckers);
- Reception of the workers is organized to limit the interactions between groups of different origins (e.g. subcontractors, placement agencies, local workers);

- Workers who test positive for COVID-19 must notify their employer in accordance with Direction générale de la santé publique guidelines;
- The employer must collaborate in epidemiological investigations conducted by the Direction générale de la santé publique;
- The results of the investigation conducted by the Direction générale de la santé publique will make it possible to determine whether the people who came into contact with the symptomatic person should report for work or isolate.



### **Physical distancing**

- Whenever possible, a minimum of 2 metres of distancing between people must be maintained at work, from arrival to departure;
- This distance must also be maintained during breaks and lunch hour;
- Handshakes and hugs must be avoided;
- Traffic and interactions between workers is limited;
- Whenever possible, the workstations and work methods are revised to respect 2 metres of physical distancing;

**Adjustments that must be made to limit the risk of transmission** when the principles of physical distancing cannot be respected:

- Use of technological means (e.g. smartphone apps, telework for administrative tasks);
- Reorganization of work methods to limit the number of interactions between different persons. For example:
  - the smallest and most stable teams possible,
  - reduction of job rotation: The same position is retained for the entire shift, except in the case of risky physical, chemical or ergonomic constraints,
  - avoidance of meetings that require a physical gathering,
  - sharing of objects limited by assigning tools to the same people as much as possible,
  - outings and trips limited to what is strictly necessary;
- the merchandise receiving and shipping activities are reviewed to avoid comings and goings of workers from other businesses on the premises as much as possible;
- the tasks are organized so that delivery persons and suppliers can deposit merchandise at the entrance to the business;
- trucks are loaded and unloaded while limiting the number of handlers and ensuring the availability of mechanical aids;
- the merchandise received is deposited on a clean surface, while respecting 2 metres of distancing between individuals,
- the handling operations are conducted away from the enterprise's other areas of activity;

- Installation of physical barriers (transparent full partitions) between different workstations that are too close to each other or that cannot be spaced.

If physical barriers cannot be installed and if it is impossible to maintain 2-metre distancing and the tasks do not already require the use of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) for protection against aerosols or dust, personal protective equipment adapted to the risk is supplied [procedure mask and protective eyewear (protective glasses or visor covering the face down to the chin)].

- These accessories must be removed safely before leaving the production area;
  - single-use personal protective equipment is placed in a trash can or in reclosable containers or bags reserved for this purpose, and then discarded.
  - reusable personal protective equipment (e.g. protective glasses, visor) is disinfected with a product adapted to the equipment;

The following recommendations concern hand washing, respiratory etiquette and the hygiene measures for maintenance of the premises and equipment help protect the workers' health, particularly against COVID-19. But they are also part of the good practices concerning biosecurity in agriculture, both in plant production and in livestock production.



## Hand washing

Frequent hand washing with lukewarm water and soap or with a 60% hydroalcoholic solution for at least 20 seconds limits the risks of transmission in the work environment. Hand washing is necessary:

- before touching the face (eyes, nose, mouth);
- after coughing, sneezing or wiping the nose;
- before and after eating;
- after handling something that is frequently touched;
- when entering and exiting the premises and after each use of collective equipment.

If running water is unavailable for hand washing, use disinfectant wipes first to remove the visible dirt, and then a disinfectant gel (hydroalcoholic solution of at least 60%) on hands that are not visibly soiled. Wash hands in soap and water as soon as they are accessible.

- For tasks requiring handling of hand tools, such as a shovel, a spade or a hoe, or in similar situations in which the hands are heavily used, avoid wearing disposable gloves made of latex, nitrile or another material that doesn't breathe. The excessive moisture created by these gloves and the friction against the tool handle quickly cause blisters and hand injuries. Instead opt for work gloves;
- Work gloves must be identified in each worker's name and must not be shared;
- In the presence of unscarred hand wounds, apply occlusive dressings and wear gloves.



## Respiratory etiquette

Respecting respiratory etiquette consists of:

- covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and using tissues or the crook of your elbow;
- using single-use tissues;
- immediately discarding used tissues in the trash can;
- frequent hand washing;
- not touching your mouth or eyes with your gloved or bare hands.



## Maintenance of hygiene measures for tools, equipment and frequently touched surfaces

Given that the virus responsible for COVID-19 can survive on surfaces, application of hygiene measures is essential, both at work and in the workers' accommodation areas.

- Limit sharing of work accessories and equipment (e.g. pens, telephone, tablets, computer mouse);
- Clean and disinfect collective equipment (e.g. telephone, computer, mouse, photocopier, printer) regularly or as soon as more than one person uses it;
- Ensure efficient operation and maintenance of the ventilation systems, according to the regulatory requirements for the type of facility and the tasks performed;
- Clean the sanitary facilities at least every shift and disinfect them daily;
- Clean the meal areas before each meal and disinfect them daily. For example:
  - tables,
  - the refrigerator door handle,
  - chair backs,
  - microwaves;
- Clean the frequently touched surfaces at least every shift and when they are visibly soiled. For example:
  - tables,
  - work counters,
  - doorknobs,
  - faucets,
  - toilets,
  - telephones,
  - computer accessories;
- Remove the earth and debris and clean the tools and equipment used after every shift or when they must be shared (e.g. Handle, knob, controls);

- Clean and disinfect the driver stations of the vehicles (e.g. tractors, forklifts, trucks) and the operation stations (e.g. planters, harvesters) on each shift. For example:
  - door handles,
  - handrails,
  - the steering wheel,
  - the controls and any other surface regularly touched by the operator;
- Use the appropriate cleaning products or disinfectants (see the manufacturer's recommendations and do not mix cleansers);
- Remove non-essential objects (magazines, newspapers and knickknacks) from the common areas.

Resources are available online for more information concerning [cleaning of surfaces](#) or the [recommended disinfectants](#).



## Temporary foreign workers: work and accommodation

Most temporary foreign workers do not speak French. The posters and instructions must also be offered in their mother tongue.

The employers of these workers and those who have the same legal obligations in matters of occupational health and safety.

### Arriving in Canada

For information on accepted vaccines and for updates to quarantine obligations for workers arriving in Canada, visit the [Government of Canada's website](#).

### Accommodations

In the case of accommodations, the persons, employers or other organizations who have taken charge of these workers are responsible for ensuring that the rules established by the federal and provincial public health authorities can be respected at all times. These rules apply to all accommodations, whether or not located at an agricultural business. In particular, they concern

- where applicable, the **quarantine period** for workers arriving in Canada, among others:
  - safety of the dwelling and fire prevention (e.g. functional smoke detector and extinguishers),
  - layout of the common areas (e.g. bathrooms, kitchen, dining room) and the rooms, so that the workers can respect a minimum distance of 2 metres between them at all times,
  - posting of the main sanitary instructions and the information and instructions to be transmitted to the workers in isolation,

- cleaning and disinfection of the critical elements according to the recommended daily frequency and keeping of a maintenance register,
- a notice to the regional public health authorities of the arrival of workers from outside of Canada and preparation of a written response plan in case of suspected or reported COVID-19, for isolation and management of the workers exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms;
- Newcomers to Canada may not reside with other persons who are already in isolation:
  - if this occurs, the counter must be reset from the date of arrival of the last worker for all occupants;
- Accommodation **after the isolation period** of 14 days, in particular:
  - compliance with the physical distancing measures and other health measures in force in Québec,
  - daily verification of symptoms,
  - maintenance of housekeeping of the accommodations and cleaning and disinfection instructions for the critical elements,
  - application of the response plan established in the event of subsequent contamination by COVID-19 or an outbreak.

According to the recommendations of the public health authorities, the employer ideally should offer housing conditions that respect the recommended minimum distancing and favour housing of a minimal number of workers per room.

After the isolation period, at work or away from work, the temporary foreign workers must comply with the same rules as those that apply to the other agricultural workers and the Québec population. The employer must ensure that the workers are informed daily of the situation and the sanitary measures that must be applied at work and outside the workplace (e.g. transportation, religious and social events, if permitted).

As in the case of housing, the employer should also organize the work and other activities, if applicable, so that each group of workers is stable and includes the smallest possible number of people.

Indeed, whether during accommodation or work, the employer and the workers must be aware that if one of the workers develops COVID-19 symptoms, many of the occupants of a dwelling or the members of a work group might have to be placed in isolation. The employer should make sure to inform the workers of this contingency.

## **Notices**

The orders of the federal or provincial health authorities and the most restrictive recommendations that would be formulated directly to the temporary foreign workers concerned and their employer take precedence over this guide.

## Protocols and recommendations regarding temporary foreign workers and agricultural work

*Canada (criteria for employers, including housing)*

[Guidance for employers of temporary foreign workers regarding COVID-19](#)

*Québec (arrival, reception and accommodation of temporary foreign workers)*

[Temporary foreign workers in Preventive Isolation \(Quarantine\)](#)

[2021 Reminders About Temporary Foreign Workers in the Bio-food Industry Arriving in Québec in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

*Québec (general measures for workplaces after the isolation period)*

[COVID-19: Interim Recommendations for Agricultural Workers in Crop and Livestock Production](#)



## Legal obligations

Legal obligations with respect to occupational health and safety, for both the employer and for workers, must be applied in the context of COVID-19. They are summarized below.

### Employer

The employer has an obligation to protect the health, safety and physical well-being of their workers. *The Act respecting occupational health and safety* (AOHS) stipulates that the employer must take all the necessary measures to do so ([section 51](#)). This includes using methods to identify, correct and control risks.

In the context of COVID-19, the employer must ensure that the usual preventive measures are still appropriate. If not, they must modify them to protect workers against the risk of contamination.

The employer must also inform them about the risks associated with their work, including those associated with COVID-19. They must also provide workers with appropriate training, assistance and supervision so that everyone has the skill and knowledge required to safely perform the work assigned to them.

### Worker

Every worker has an obligation to take the necessary measures to protect their health, safety or physical well-being and to ensure that they do not endanger the health, safety or physical well-being of other people in the workplace ([section 49](#) of the AOHS). To do this, they must follow the rules and measures put in place in the context of COVID-19, just as they follow the other rules applied in the workplace. Workers must also participate in identifying and eliminating risks. If they see risks or have suggestions in this regard, they must inform the health and safety committee (if there is one), their superior or a representative of the employer.

## **Acknowledgements:**

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- Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre de la production agricole
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The guide and the kit result from a reflective process intended to support the work environments in management of occupational health and safety in the context of COVID-19. The project is scalable and will harmonize with the preventive measures order by the Direction de la santé publique (public health authorities).

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