

COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS OF TEMPORARY FOREIGN FARM WORKERS

Last revised: March 11, 2021

The following document highlights public health guidance and resources to support employers of temporary foreign farm workers in Ontario to effectively respond to COVID-19 and protect these workers from becoming ill.

This information complements the Ministry of Health's guidance document: [Guidance for Temporary Foreign Workers, version 1 – March 31, 2020](#).

NEW: On June 24, 2020, SMDHU issued a local [Section 22 Class Order](#) under the Health Protection and Promotion Act requiring that all owners and operators of farms in the region who employ farm workers, including Temporary Foreign Workers, local workers and temporary help agency workers, take actions to protect their labour force. A [FAQ document](#) is posted to our website to support implementation.

Effective Monday July 13, 2020, owners or operators of all businesses, organizations and public transit services in Simcoe and Muskoka must have policies in place to restrict people from entering these **indoor** premises if they are not wearing a non-medical mask or face covering. Face coverings are **not** required in employee housing or any location that is not open to the public as long as physical distancing is maintained. The [letter of instruction](#) to businesses and organizations with this instruction as well as guidance to support implementation is posted to our website, along with [public signage](#) for printing and displaying.

Transportation

To reduce the risk of disease transmission amongst temporary foreign workers during transportation between one location to another (i.e. between airport and accommodation, or between accommodation and work):

- Ensure workers do not come into contact with the general population and avoid public transportation (i.e. buses, trains etc.).
- In **private** transportation, passengers and driver must wear a non-medical mask or face covering when not able to maintain physical distance.
- Minimize the number of people in one vehicle. Ensure individuals do not travel with people who are unfamiliar with each other (i.e. people who live in different accommodations or work in separate areas, and strangers).
- Maintain as much distance between people in the vehicle as possible (i.e. passenger should sit on the passenger side in the back seat).
- Have an alcohol-based hand sanitizer for drivers and passengers.
- Regularly [disinfect](#) vehicle.

Transporting passengers to a COVID-19 assessment centre, healthcare facility, or any person who is sick

- If an individual needs immediate medical attention, call 911. If it is not an emergency the ill person can be driven using a personal vehicle. Avoid public transportation.
- If the individual is unable to drive themselves, minimize the number of people in the vehicle (i.e. one driver and one passenger being transported).
- Maintain as much distance between people in the vehicle as possible (i.e. passenger should sit on the passenger side in the back seat).
- Avoid using the recirculated air option for the car's ventilation during passenger transport; use the car's vents to bring in fresh outside air and/or lower the vehicle windows.

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- To reduce the risk of transmission, the passenger should [wear a mask](#) (preferably medical) that covers their nose and mouth.
- Once the trip is completed, thoroughly disinfect the vehicle. [Wash hands](#) with soap and water for at least 15 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.

Quarantine

Quarantine (self-isolation) means that a person without symptoms of COVID-19 (asymptomatic) but at risk for having the virus must stay separate from others in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Temporary foreign workers must quarantine for 14-days if:

- They have [traveled to Canada from another country](#). All temporary foreign workers are [mandated to quarantine for 14 days](#) upon arrival in Canada.
- They had a close contact with someone who has, or is suspected to have COVID-19. This means if one employee of the farm has symptoms of COVID-19, individuals in close contact with the sick person must quarantine for 14-days.
- They have been told by public health authorities that they may have been exposed and need to quarantine.

Quarantined individuals must:

- Stay at their accommodation and self-monitor for symptoms.
- Avoid contact with other people.
- Practice physical distancing and other infection prevention control practices within the accommodation.
- For more information on quarantine (self-isolation) review the following resources:
 - [How to self-isolate](#)
 - [How to quarantine at home when you may have been exposed and have no symptoms](#)
 - [Self-isolation: Guide for caregivers, household members and close contacts](#)

Additional recommendations for quarantine of temporary foreign workers

- Temporary foreign workers who arrive in Canada at the same time should be quarantined away from other workers who arrived at a different time.

If an individual develops symptoms during the mandatory 14-day quarantine period they must:

- First complete the Ministry of Health [COVID-19 Self-Assessment](#) for guidance on whether it is appropriate to visit an [assessment centre](#).
- Call Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit for further guidance (1-877-721-7520 x: 8809).
- Practice good infection prevention and control practices to help reduce the risk of COVID-19.
- Individuals living and quarantining together when one individual developed symptoms, may have their 14-day quarantine extended.

Isolation

Isolation means that people with symptoms of COVID-19 (even if mild) must stay away from others to reduce the spread of the virus. The difference between isolation and quarantine is that **quarantine** is for asymptomatic people at risk for COVID-19 versus **isolation** which is

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for symptomatic people. Isolation requires a more comprehensive response than quarantine which is outlined below.

Isolation is necessary when:

- An individual has any symptoms of COVID-19 (even if mild) and may have been exposed to the virus (i.e. has been in contact with a suspected, probable, or confirmed case and/or has been told by public health or through a self-assessment tool).
- An individual has arrived in Canada with symptoms of COVID-19. The Government of Canada will have provided specific direction to the individual upon arrival into Canada.

If a worker has symptoms of COVID-19 they must:

- Stop working immediately.
- Isolate to accommodations separate from others.
 - If possible isolate the individual in an entirely separate building with appropriate utilities (i.e. bathroom, kitchen, etc.).
 - If an entirely separate accommodation away from others is not possible, the individual must stay in a separate room and use a separate bathroom when possible.
- Call Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit for further guidance (1-877-721-7520 x: 8809).
- Limit contact with others. They are not to leave the isolated accommodations unless it is to seek medical care.
- If sick individuals must be in contact with others:
 - the sick individual must:
 - Practice physical distancing
 - Wear a medical mask, or if unavailable a non-medical mask that covers nose and mouth
 - Those within 2 m (6ft) of ill individual must:
 - Wear a medical mask, or if unavailable a non-medical mask that covers nose and mouth
 - If any care of the individual is required, others must wear a medical mask, eye protection, gloves and gown (if available)
- Wash hands with soap and water often.
- Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.
- Practice sneeze/cough hygiene.
- Avoid touching common items and surfaces.
- Monitor symptoms. If symptoms get worse, contact a healthcare provider or SMDHU and follow instructions.
- Rest, eat a balanced diet and stay in touch with others using communication devices.
- Review the following resources:
 - [How to isolate at home when you may have COVID-19](#)
 - [Take Care of yourself and each other](#)

Additional recommendations to support workers in isolation

- Thoroughly clean and sanitize all premises (housing accommodations, worksites, work equipment, etc.) .
- Keep any interactions with person isolating brief. Use personal protective equipment when caring for ill individuals or in close contact. This includes wearing face masks (medical-mask preferred), disposable gloves, and eye protection.

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- Arrange for groceries, food, cleaning supplies and other necessities to be dropped off for the individual in isolation.
- Ensure others in close contact with the sick individual monitor symptoms and practice [quarantine](#).
- Continue to practice good infection prevention and control practices to help reduce the risk of COVID-19.

Practice good infection prevention practices to help reduce the risk of COVID-19.

Employers must consider how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during work activities (i.e. farm and greenhouse work, equipment operator, maintenance workers, drivers, etc.) and outside of work hours (i.e. within living accommodations, in shared spaces, and during leisure time). The following highlight public health prevention practices can reduce the risk of infection or spreading infection to others.

Hand hygiene

- All workers should practice regular [hand washing](#) using soap and water for at least 15 seconds, or if their hands are not visibly dirty or soiled use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol solution.
- Hands should be washed:
 - Before and after entering workspaces and living accommodations
 - After making or receiving deliveries
 - After sneezing, coughing or touching the face
 - Before and after removing personal protective equipment (i.e. face-masks, eye protection etc.)
- Employers must supply and ensure there are adequate hand washing facilities and alcohol-based hand sanitizers for both living accommodations and worksites (i.e. soap, water, 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer).

Employers must provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer where soap and water are not easily accessible (i.e. in vehicles, in work spaces or fields). Consider placing hand-sanitizer dispensaries in entrances of living accommodations, worksites and shared spaces.

Cough hygiene

- [Everyone should cough and sneeze](#) into their sleeve to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Immediately wash or sanitize hands.
- If using a tissue, discard in the garbage immediately.

Physical distancing

- Physical distancing is the best way to reduce the spread of COVID-19. [Physical distancing](#) means keeping a distance from one another and limiting the number of activities outside of the home (or accommodations). When outside the home (accommodations) individuals should keep 2 meters (6 feet) away from other people as much as possible.
- Recommendations for practicing [physical distancing in the workplace](#):
 - Reduce the number of staff on job sites to support physical distancing measures:
 - Stagger start times, shift, breaks and lunch times
 - Restrict the number of people working on one job/task or space at a time
 - Minimize the number of people using the same piece of equipment when sharing equipment cannot be avoided
 - Have meetings outside, or in large, well ventilated spaces (i.e. keep windows open)
 - Limit unnecessary on-site interactions between workers and outside service providers

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- Establish rules for any work that requires workers within 2 meters of each other. This should include the use of personal protective equipment.

Post signs as reminders of infection prevention and control practices

- Ensure signs are clear and visible. Post signs in highly used and visible locations (i.e. entrances to living accommodations, shared spaces and work spaces).
- Ensure signs can be read by everyone. This means signs may need to be posted in languages that are accessible to all temporary foreign workers, other employees and visitors (i.e. may require signs in English and Spanish, or any other appropriate language).
- The following type of signs/posters should be posted:
 - Screening signs & symptoms
 - [How to self-monitor](#)
 - [About COVID-19](#)
 - Hand washing and hand sanitation signs
 - [How to wash your hands & how to use hand sanitizer](#)
 - Cleaning practices
 - [Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, \(in Spanish\)](#)
 - Cough hygiene
 - [Cover your cough](#)
 - How and when to wear a mask
 - [Stop You Must Wear A Face Covering at this Site](#)
 - [When and how to wear a mask](#)
 - [Mask Use of Non=healthcare workers](#)
 - Physical distancing reminders
 - [Stay 2 metres apart while working](#)
 - [Maintain space between crew members during transport](#)
 - [Physical Distancing](#)
 - [Physical Distancing, \(In Spanish\)](#)
 - [Physical distancing: how to slow the spread of COVID-19, \(in Spanish\)](#)
 - Isolation reminders
 - [How to Isolate, \(In Spanish\)](#)
 - Quarantine reminders
 - [How to quarantine at home when you may have been exposed and have no symptoms \(in Spanish\)](#)

Recommendations for routine cleaning and disinfecting of living accommodations and workplace

- Employers are required to maintain cleaning practices for living accommodations and worksites.
- Please reference the following information sheets:
 - [Cleaning and Disinfection Information Sheet.](#)
 - [COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting](#)
- Employees should be educated on all cleaning procedures and expectations.
- All surfaces that are frequently touched should be cleaned and disinfected:
 - At least two times a day
 - When visibly dirty
 - After a sick individual has potentially come into contact with a surface or item
 - After an individual has sneezed or coughed on a surface or item

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Cleaning products

- Employers must supply employees with appropriate cleaners, disinfectants, hand sanitizer and hand soap. These items must be available to employees at all times.
- Commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19 when they are used according to the label. Please reference the [List of Disinfectants for Use against COVID-19](#) for appropriate products.
- Use only disinfectants that have a drug identification number (DIN). A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms it is approved for use in Canada. Use according to manufacture's instructions.
- Disinfectant wipes have combined cleaners and disinfectants in one solution. Disinfectant wipes should be discarded in the garbage if they become dry, and they are not recommended for visibly dirty surfaces.

Additional tips for employers to maintain clean, safe living accommodations and worksites:

- Ensure all workers and visitors wash their hands before entering and when leaving the workplace or living accommodations, at the beginning and end of shifts or breaks, and after contact with surfaces they have touched (i.e. equipment).
- Ensure a safe disposal area and bin for workers to dispose of used sanitation wipes, personal protective equipment and facial tissues.
- Clean and sanitize shared work spaces and high touch surfaces regularly - at least twice a day (i.e. washrooms, lunch rooms, kitchens, shared equipment, counters, door handles, etc.).
- Sanitize shared equipment and work vehicles. Remove dirt and organic matter from surface of tools before cleaning and disinfecting.
- Put up posters to remind workers of infection prevention and control practices.

Daily Screening

Workers and visitors of farms should be screened for risk factors or symptoms of COVID-19 to reduce the likelihood of spreading the virus. Screening activities should be done regularly throughout the day. Screening activities include both active screening and passive screening.

Active screening

- Active screening involves directly asking all workers the same set of questions each day before they start work.
- Options for active screening:
 - Have all workers complete the self-assessment [screening tool each day](#).
 - Have a person (screener) who screens each employee at the start of each work day . See Active Screening section in [Guidance for temporary foreign workers](#) for more information.
 - Keep a written (or electronic) record of the results of daily active screening activities.

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Passive screening

- Passive screening involves employees and visitors self-monitoring themselves. Place [How to self-monitor](#) posters around living accommodations and workspaces to remind employees and visitors to self-monitor throughout the day.

Failed screening tests

- If an individual answers yes to any of the conditions identified in active or passive screening, they have not passed the screening test.
- Employees are obligated to disclose a failed test to the employer. This includes a failed test to passive (self-monitoring) screening.
- Individuals who have failed the screening test must immediately Isolate. See instructions for Isolation.
- Contact Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit at 1-877-721-7520 X 8809 immediately for further instructions and guidance.

Additional Resources

[Workplace safety & prevention services: health and safety guidance for agricultural workers during COVID-10](#)

[Agricultural health and safety during COVID-19](#)

[Preventing COVID-19 in the workplace: Employers, employees and essential service workers](#)

[Public Health Ontario: COVID-19 Public Resources](#)

[Government of Canada: Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

Please contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit if you have any questions at 1-877-721-7520, Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.