

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Prevention and Management Dairy Farmer Handbook

Version 1 - Updated March 19, 2020



Overview

The U.S. is confronting an outbreak of a novel coronavirus that causes serious respiratory disease and may be especially deadly for older people and those with weakened immune systems. The World Health Organization has classified the outbreak as a global pandemic because it is affecting countries all over the world. Individuals and organizations can fight coronavirus by taking steps to prevent its transmission, which will lower the infection rate and prevent health care systems from being overwhelmed. The spread of the virus has raised concerns about how it may affect public health as well as our economy, including dairy production.

Dairy farms are 24-hour, 7-day per week business and operations must continue. Following U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) precautions will minimize the risk to dairy farmers, family, employees and essential professional and service providers to be on the farm.

Coronavirus Symptoms

Affected individuals have reported mild to severe respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath, and breathing difficulties. In severe cases, the virus has led to pneumonia and kidney failure, and, in some cases, death. The CDC believes symptoms may appear within two to fourteen days after exposure, although not everyone who is exposed to the virus will exhibit symptoms of being ill.



Dairy Farm Workforce Preventive Measures

While there is currently no vaccine to prevent this virus in humans, these simple steps can help minimize the spread of this and other respiratory viruses:

- Access to the dairy farm by non-essential persons should be limited.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Wash your hands before you eat after working in the milking parlor or other areas of the dairy.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, both on and off the dairy.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Always wear milking gloves.
- When you get home after working in the dairy, always take a shower and wash your work clothes.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces. Social distancing—reducing the number of close physical and social contacts we have with one another—should be practiced, such as when there is a need to get supplies from a farm and feed store.

Employer Action Steps

Employers should make sure that work environments are as clean as possible to prevent the spread of contagions. They should also make clear that employees who have symptoms of a potential contagious illness must not report to work while sick. Employers should check the CDC website regularly for coronavirus updates and have open and informed conversations with concerned employees about the virus and its potential impact.

The farm workforce is not immune to coronavirus. Please take steps to protect yourself and your employees.

1. Talk with your employees about coronavirus, how it spreads, and how to prevent getting infected.
2. Print the [CDC factsheets and posters](#), post in your workplace and employee housing facilities in their native languages.
3. Provide guidance to help employees clean and disinfect housing.
 - [CDC guidance for cleaning homes](#)
4. Clean and disinfect your workplace. The employee breakroom and bathroom are great places for virus to be transmitted. Clean and disinfect any areas where employees congregate or routinely touch items such as doorknobs and computer keyboards. Set up daily and weekly cleaning schedules.
5. Provide supplies such as cleaning solutions, buckets, mops, brushes, etc., for cleaning at work and for those living in employer-provided housing. ([CDC list of approved antimicrobial cleaning products](#))
6. Keep restrooms and other areas of the dairy stocked with disinfectants and soap.
7. All unnecessary people should not be on a dairy farm at this time.
 - Farm tours should be suspended until such time as the human-to-human transmission risk has abated.
 - Use teleconferences to talk with advisors who do not need to be on the farm such as nutritionist, banker/loan officer, extension personnel, etc.
8. For dairy farms with retail stores on-site, operate in accordance with the recommendations of federal, state and local health officials.
9. Review your sick-leave policy. People who are sick should stay home, only leaving to receive medical care. Do you provide paid sick leave for your employees? If not, will employees feel financially obligated to come to work even when sick?
 - Refer to the National Dairy FARM Program's [State Legal Fact Sheets](#) for awareness of the required state and federal laws around paid sick leave.
10. Communicate with employees that they should stay home if sick. Employees sometimes come to work believing they will face punishment or firing if they miss work. Be sure your employees understand that their health and that of their co-workers comes first. Communicate and plan to cover for sick employees.
11. Prepare your disaster contingency plan. What will you do if 50% of your employees become sick and unable to work? Could neighboring farms share resources in an emergency? Who will manage your operation if you or another key manager are unable to leave your house or are hospitalized?
 - The National Dairy FARM program has developed [Comprehensive Emergency Action Plan Guidance](#), which provides pertinent information and steps for a dairy to follow if an emergency should occur.
 - Cornell provides the [Extension Disaster Education Network](#) offering community education resources across the entire disaster cycle of preparedness, response, and recovery.
 - Penn State also provides [farm disaster preparedness resources](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

What should a dairy employer do if an employee exhibits symptoms of COVID-19?

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), sending home an employee who displays symptoms of a contagious illness does not violate the ADA because: (1) if the illness ultimately turns out to be relatively mild or routine (e.g., seasonal flu), it would not have constituted a covered disability in the first place; and (2) if the illness does turn out to be severe (so that it could constitute a disability under the ADA), then it would likely pose a “direct threat” supporting the employer’s decision. An employer should consider clearly communicating that it has the right to send home any employee exhibiting symptoms of a potentially contagious disease.

If a dairy employer or employee is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, how can that person be tested?

If you think you or an employee has been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms such as a cough or difficulty breathing, call a healthcare provider for medical advice.

What should be done if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?

If an employee or individual currently working, or recently present, within your facility is confirmed by a laboratory to be positive for COVID-19, immediately notify your local health department. Ensure that all sensitive surfaces and areas are immediately cleaned and disinfected.

Your local health department will be involved in monitoring the employee or individual while symptomatic and under isolation until they recover. The authorities may recommend additional testing of coworkers. It also will be involved in clearing fully recovered employees from isolation before they can return to work. The local health department may provide further guidance on monitoring and segregating employees who came into close contact with positive individuals.

If a person has been exposed to bovine coronavirus, does that person have any immunity to COVID-19?

A person exposed to bovine coronavirus is not expected to be immune to COVID-19 and should follow all recommendations from public health authorities to minimize contracting COVID-19. The bovine coronavirus and COVID-19 are two different and distinct viruses, each causing a different disease in different species. Bovine coronavirus specifically causes illness in cattle, while COVID-19 is only known to cause illness in humans.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “How to Protect Yourself” March 17, 2020. Accessed March 18, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>
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3. Cornell University Agricultural Workforce Development. “Novel Coronavirus Prevention & Control for Farms”. Accessed March 18, 2020. <http://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/2020/03/12/novel-coronavirus-prevention-control-for-farms>
4. Alltech On-Farm Support. “What You Need to Know About Coronavirus (COVID-19) On Your Dairy” March 17, 2020. Accessed March 18, 2020.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Testing for COVID-19” March 13, 2020. Accessed March 18, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/testing.html>