



Pandemic Preparedness

There are two things you need to know about the COVID-19 pandemic. One, you need to know how to protect yourself from COVID-19. And, two, you need to know your part in your farm's pandemic emergency plan.

COVID-19 has been declared a pandemic, which means it is expected to affect many people around the world. Of those who get sick, most will recover and business and services are likely to be disrupted.

There is the potential that your workers could contract COVID-19 and have to self-isolate, and you might need to fill in for them. If you are affected, you may need someone to fill in for you in order to keep crucial services and processes working on the farm.

Food and Agri-Food exemptions:

- Under the Public Health Order, food, agri-food, fisheries and other groups have been named as essential and therefore have certain exemptions from the directives.
- First, healthy people involved in the movement of goods for trade purposes are not required to self-isolate for 14 days when they cross the Nova Scotia border.
- Operations involved in food production, such as farms, fishing boats, aquaculture sites, and processing facilities for both agri-food and seafood are exempt from both the 5-person gathering and social distancing requirements. We recommend implementing all practical safety measures possible to ensure the health and safety all workers.
- Other businesses can continue to operate provided social distancing can be maintained. If the footprint of the business does not allow social distancing to be maintained, then they must limit the number of people in the business to less than 5 at any one time.
- Businesses should regularly clean and disinfect workspaces and high-touch areas at least twice a day or as required, and ensure employees are practicing good hygiene.

Protecting Yourself:

- Wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap or use hand sanitizer when soap and water are not readily available.
- Wash your hands after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- Wash up after touching common surfaces such as phones, steering wheels, hand controls, or hand tools.
- Clean those common surfaces as much as reasonably possible.
- If doing deliveries, wipe down food containers/boxes before leaving out for the customer, and suggest the customer wipe down containers/boxes before handling.
- Cover your cough with your upper shirt sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Practice "social distancing." Keep about 6 feet away from other people while you're out running necessary errands (groceries, prescriptions, fuel).



- Avoid or minimize contact with infected people. If caring for infected people, protect yourself by wearing mask, gloves, glasses and something to cover your clothing. Wash thoroughly after each exposure and dispose of masks and gloves. Clean glasses and wash clothing in hot soapy water.
- Stay away from crowds.
- Minimize group meetings to less than 5 people; use e-mails, phone conferences, web sessions and text messaging.
- Limit unnecessary visitors to the farm.
- Stay away from the farm if you have flu symptoms. These may include fever, runny nose, body aches, sore throat, cough, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle, get 7-9 hours of sleep, eat nutritious food, and exercise.
- Maintain good ventilation in farm buildings, if and where possible.
- Develop a pandemic and business continuity plan for the farm.
- Maintain good mental health for you and others by listening and giving reassurance, gaining information from reliable sources, and trying to maintain as much of a normal routine as possible.
- Get your flu shot.
- Ensure workers are cross-trained on farming operations.
- Maintain communication with all workers and keep them up to date on developments.

Employment Considerations:

- Where possible work from home. Is there any part of the farming operation that can be done remotely?
- Questions farmers can ask workers to ensure the health and safety of themselves and other workers on the farm:
 - Are you experiencing any symptoms or signs of illness?
 - Have you been in close personal contact with some who is showing signs and symptoms?
 - Have you travelled recently? If yes, was it from an infected area?
 - Have you been in close personal contact with a person who has travelled or visited the airport?
- In a pandemic situation, asking for proof of illness such as with a doctor's note is not permitted.
- Farmers are not obligated to pay their workers if they become ill. Employment insurance benefits have been set up for workers who may be suffering from the pandemic flu or are caring for others who are suffering.
- Workers are able to exercise their right to refuse unsafe work if they believe there is an inherent risk that doing so could endanger their health and safety or the health and safety of others on the farm or at home.
 - The farm owner must investigate the refusal and compensation will depend on the reconciliation of the work refusal.



- If workers are told not to come into work they should be paid. However, depending on economic conditions on the farm, a layoff may be necessary and employment insurance has provisions in place for workers who wouldn't normally qualify and for those who do qualify for compensation.
 - Notice or pay in lieu of notice is not required in a temporary layoff situation where there is a sudden and unexpected lack of work that could not be avoided.
- Can farm workers come to the farm and have limited access to other workers? Are there cleaning procedures in place to wipe down common equipment and machines between uses? Is PPE available? If yes, work may continue on the farm and workers are to be paid their normal wages.

References:

1. www.canada.ca/services/benefits/ei
2. www.ccohs.ca
3. <https://novascotia.ca/lae/employmentrights/employernowork.asp>
4. <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus>
5. www.cdha.nshealth.ca/occupational-health
6. www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx
7. <https://pinklarkin.com/covid-19-workplace-fact-sheet-1-when-may-an-employee-lawfully-refuse-to-work/>
8. [COVID-19 Fact Sheet -- Measures for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture Sectors, March 26, 2020](#)