

Protecting Workers in Meatpacking, Food Processing and Poultry Plants

Most Covid-19 is transmitted by respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People can transmit the virus even if they are not showing any symptoms.

Some transmission is from the virus on surfaces. It can be transferred when people touch contaminated surfaces and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes.

The CDC recommends a safe distance of 6 feet from another individual.

We can use these facts to prioritize the ways we protect workers.

Reduce contact among people

- Allow sick workers, or workers who are caring for sick family members to stay home with pay.
 - Be wary of well-intentioned efforts to reward workers for good attendance. These can have the unintended effect of discouraging workers from staying home when they should. Keep in mind – a worker who is caring for a sick family member could be infected without showing signs of illness.
- Allow vulnerable workers to stay home with pay.
 - Older workers, pregnant workers, workers with compromised immune systems or underlying heart or lung disease are most vulnerable to severe cases of covid-19. These are the workers who will need to be hospitalized. We do not have a cure for this disease yet.
- Increase distance among workers
 - Stagger lunch and break times; make training rooms or additional areas available for lunches and breaks so workers can keep safe distances;
 - Address transport options so that workers are not packed into vans or buses to get to and from work.
 - Reduce staffing levels on lines so workers can be spaced more safely – this may require reduced line speeds.
 - Redesign work spaces, tables, processing tables to increase distance between workers to 6 feet if possible.
 - Reduce meeting sizes, including orientation.

Protecting Workers in Meatpacking, Food Processing and Poultry Plants

- No more than 10 people should be in a meeting room at any time. Everyone should be spaced as far apart as possible – 6 feet is the recommended distance.
- Identify **places workers tend to congregate** such as by the time clock, getting frocks or PPE, in cafeteria lines
 - Design ways to introduce distancing in these places.
 - Consult with workers for ways to maintain distance between workers in these places.

Reduce Surface Contamination

- Every meatpacking, poultry and food processing company has qualified management people who develop sanitation protocols for food safety. These people should develop **the cleaning and disinfecting protocols** for shared spaces such as break areas, bathrooms, locker rooms, lunchrooms and training rooms. They should also address commonly touched surfaces such as vending machines, railings, doors, and microwaves.
 - Do NOT rely on protocols developed by local management unless they are qualified. Ask what their qualifications are.
 - One meatpacking employer developed a cleaning protocol based on anti-bacterial cleaners. This was inadequate because the virus that causes covid-19 is not a bacterium – it is a virus.
 - Request a copy of the written protocol. It should specify EPA-registered disinfectants and should include separate cleaning and disinfection steps.
- If PSSI/QSI are contracted to do the cleaning and sanitation of common spaces and frequently touched surfaces, ask to see the protocol.
 - Be sure they are provided enough time to fulfill all the additional tasks.
 - Find out if they will be in the plant to clean lunchrooms, break areas, training rooms and bathrooms at appropriate frequencies.
 - Note: once per day is not adequate
- Lunchrooms and breakrooms should be cleaned and disinfected between groups.
 - Once a day is not enough.

Protecting Workers in Meatpacking, Food Processing and Poultry Plants

- Staffing of cleaning personnel should be enough to meet all new assignments.
- Liberal Provision of gloves. Gloves should be replaced as needed, at least after break and shift, after using the restroom, and after meal. Information about proper etiquette of gloves use should be posted. Workers should be instructed not to touch face, nose, mouth or eyes with gloves on, as this could be a way to transmit the virus and become infected.

Post Information about COVID-19 for Workers

Post information about symptoms of COVID-19 in all areas of the plant where workers are likely to see the information. This information should be in all languages understood by workers in the plant.

Post information about how COVID-19 is transmitted.

Additional Information

Prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a critical step in protecting workers, customers, visitors, and others at a worksite. ■ Employers should inform and encourage employees to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 if they suspect possible exposure. ■ Employers should develop policies and procedures for employees to report when they are sick or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. ■ There should be no retaliation or discipline for reporting illness or symptoms of illness.