



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Cooperative Extension

COVID-19 AND FOOD SAFETY FAQ

IS CORONAVIRUS AN ISSUE IN PRODUCE PRODUCTION?

CDC, FDA and USDA have no reports at this time of human illnesses that suggest coronavirus can be transmitted by food or food packaging. Research on similar viruses, such as SARS and influenza, show risk of transmission from food is very low. While information on if or how long virus persists on surfaces is minimal, risk of foodborne transmission is low and should not be of concern.

WHAT STEPS DO I NEED TO TAKE TO CLEAN AND DISINFECT THE FACILITY/EQUIPMENT TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS?

- Disinfect high-touch surfaces-bins, baskets, harvesters, etc.-on a regular basis. CDC advises the use of disinfectants on the EPA recommended list found at: go.ncsu.edu/epacovid-19
 - (Note: this list is based on current data, but most compounds have not been validated for inactivation of the virus causing COVID-19)
 - Bleach may be used to disinfect surfaces after they have been cleaned. The recommended concentration is higher than for everyday sanitation: 5 tablespoons bleach per gallon of water (1,000 ppm)

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IF A WORKER TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19?

- Employers need to follow guidelines set by state and local authorities.
- If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but must adhere to HIPAA guidelines.
- Sick employees should follow the CDC recommendations and employers should consult with the local health department for additional guidance.

SHOULD PRODUCE BE RECALLED IF HANDLED OR HARVESTED WHEN A WORKER WAS POTENTIALLY SHEDDING VIRUS?

- At the time of this writing, FDA stated they did not anticipate that food products would need to be recalled or be withdrawn from the market because of an employee ill due to COVID-19, as there is no evidence of illnesses resulting from virus transmission on food or food packaging.

WHAT BEST PRACTICES SHOULD WORKERS FOLLOW TO PREVENT SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS?

- Workers should not report to work if they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or have come in contact with someone who is sick. Anyone displaying symptoms should be asked to leave.
- As much as possible, have workers six feet apart during work and while on break.
- Provide handwashing stations and hand sanitizer. Workers should wash hands and/or use sanitizer before and after handling produce and packaging.
- Encourage good hygiene practices, like covering mouth and nose with a bent elbow when coughing or sneezing.
- Surgical masks are not necessary, as they are not protective to healthy people. They may help prevent ill individuals from shedding virus, but such people should be excluded from the facility.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IF A WORKER IS EXPOSED TO COVID-19?

- Businesses should follow CDC and FDA guidance for screening employees who have been exposed to COVID-19.
- Pre-screen employees for symptoms or fever before starting work.
- Employees with fever and symptoms should be advised to see a doctor for evaluation and should be deferred to Human Resources for next steps.



For more info, visit: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov

Contact: Channah Rock, PhD

channah@cals.arizona.edu

Updated July 13, 2020



NC STATE
EXTENSION