

# Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Guideline for Food Processing Facilities

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April 28, 2020



# Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Guideline for Food Processing Facilities

We understand the importance of maintaining an ongoing food supply chain during the COVID-19 emergency. This document is independent of and does not negate Work Safe BC requirements. This document is also based upon current knowledge and it should be understood that guidance is subject to change as new data become available and new developments arise with this new virus; furthermore, unique situations may require some discretion in adjusting these guidelines which are meant to be supportive, not prescriptive.

## WHAT is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory infection caused by a newly identified virus. The infection has symptoms similar to other respiratory illnesses, including the flu and common cold: cough, sneezing, fever, sore throat and difficulty breathing. Other symptoms can include fatigue, muscle aches, diarrhea, headache or lost sense of smell. While most people infected with COVID-19 experience only mild illness, severe illness can occur in some people, especially in those with weaker immune systems, the elderly and those with chronic medical conditions.

## HOW is COVID-19 Spread?

COVID-19 is spread through liquid droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus in these droplets can enter through the eyes, nose or mouth of another person if they are in close contact with the person who coughed or sneezed. COVID-19 is not transmitted through particles in the air and is not something that can enter the body through the skin.

## HOW can Food Processing Facilities protect employees from COVID-19?

As we continue our efforts to manage and contain the COVID-19 pandemic, food processing plants hold an essential role in every community by continuing the safe and reliable operation of our food supply chain. This guide is intended to help food processing plants develop their own policies and procedures to continue operating while minimizing the risk COVID-19 poses to the health and safety of its employees, and to the continuity of its business operations.

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The province of British Columbia has created a phone service to provide non-medical information about COVID-19 which is available from 7:30 a.m. - 8 p.m. at 1-888-COVID19 (1-888-268-4319) or via text message at 604-630-0300.

More information on COVID-19 can also be found online:

Vancouver Coastal Health <http://www.vch.ca/covid-19>

BC Centre for Disease Control <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19>

## How to Use this Guideline

When developing your own COVID-19 policies and procedures consult the enclosed tip sheets and note the goals and considerations for each of the following areas of concern:

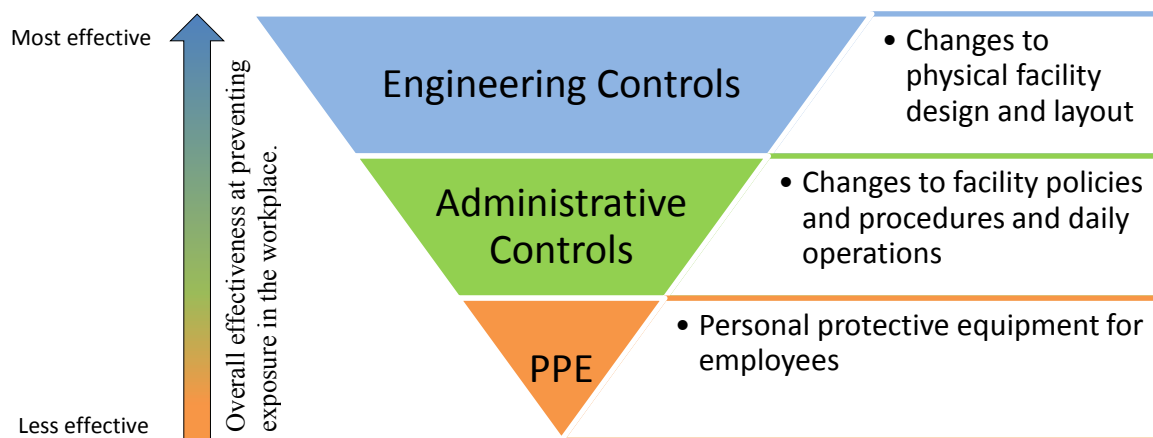


## Prioritizing Action

It may be helpful to understand the rationale behind the various recommendations contained in the following tip sheets, and the relative impacts each can have on controlling the spread of COVID-19 in your workplace. Some controls will be more difficult to implement but may have a greater overall impact, while other controls will be easier to implement but may have less overall impact.

## Levels of Control

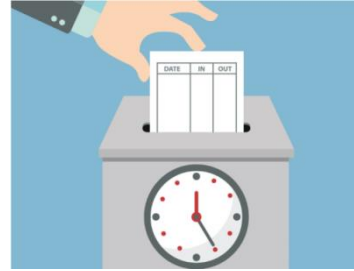
In the model shown below, control methods at the top of the pyramid are generally more effective and protective than those at the bottom. Following this model normally leads to the implementation of inherently safer systems, where the risk of illness exposure and/or transmission has been substantially reduced.



Typically, engineering controls are favored over administrative and personal protective equipment (PPE) for controlling exposures in the workplace. This is because most engineering controls are designed to prevent workers from coming into contact with an infectious person or contaminated surface in the first place.

# COVID-19

## Tip Sheet for Food Processing Plants



### Site Management

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**Goal: Modify the working environment and business operations to minimize the potential for COVID-19 to spread in the workplace.**

#### Engineering Controls

- Extend production lines and/or reduce production speeds to limit and/or space apart number of employees on production floor.
- Eliminate communal storage areas for employees' personal belongings, and instead provide separate sealable bins or lockers.
- Provide a supply of hand sanitizer at sign in and posters reminding of the importance of handwashing following contact with common touch surfaces.
- If possible, prop inside doors open so employees do not have to touch handles.
- Remove shared cutlery and tableware from lunchrooms. Consider providing single-use utensils.
- Provide hand sanitizing stations at entrances/exits and common spaces in the building.

#### Administrative Controls

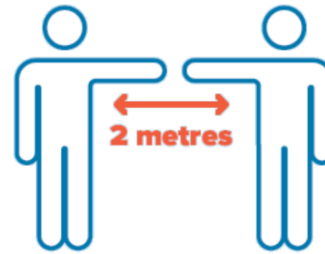
- Adjust production rates and schedules to minimize the number of personnel in the building at one time (e.g. longer or shorter working days/shifts) in order to maximize physical distancing.
- Wherever possible, production shifts should be staggered so nobody sees anyone from the next shift (i.e. 20 minutes between shift changes).
- No external visitors should be permitted in food processing plants, except for essential personnel required to run the business.
- Have employees declare they are symptom-free when signing in for the day. If employees have any symptoms, even mild symptoms they must go home.
- Avoid communal food / sharing of meals.
- Provide designated uniforms that are laundered by a service or encourage workers to wear clothes that can be washed frequently.
- Consider developing specialized checklists managers can use to evaluate measures being taken on production floor and any associated office/common spaces.

#### Resources:

- Poster: [Do Not Enter when Sick](#)
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# COVID-19

## Tip Sheet for Food Processing Plants



### Physical Distancing

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**Goal: To minimize in-person social interactions and increase the space between people to eliminate potential transmission of the virus.**

#### Engineering Controls

- Designate additional rooms for break areas, or new outdoor spaces.
- Where possible, employees should work more than 2 metres (6 feet) apart; use tape to delineate work areas.
- Install production line shields between close work stations (e.g. plexi-glass) where physical distancing requirements cannot be achieved.
- Increase floor space by removing unnecessary materials and/or equipment, especially in hallways and other high traffic areas.
- Control foot traffic patterns using cones and floor arrows to reduce gathering at meeting points, washrooms, and other shared spaces.
- Designate travel paths so workers do not have to pass each other closely (e.g., one set of stairs for up, another for down) or have workers call out before entering shared spaces.
- Mark 6 foot increments on floors where crowds normally form (e.g. line-up for washroom).
- Provide lunchroom table dividers to physically separate diners.

#### Administrative Controls

- Stagger break times, meetings and team talks to avoid large groups.
- Conduct virtual meetings.
- For necessary in-person meetings, hold outdoors or in a large area that allows for physical distancing.
- Appoint social distance safety monitors.
- Limit the number of employees allowed in the lunch room at one time.
- Discourage carpooling to/from the worksite.

#### Resources:

- Poster: [Physical Distancing](#)
- Video: [Why do we need to socially distance?](#)

# COVID-19

## Tip Sheet for Food Processing Plants



### Personal Hygiene & Personal Protective Equipment

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**Goal: Have all employees practice diligent personal hygiene, and use personal protective equipment where necessary to minimize their risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 in the workplace.**

#### Engineering Controls

- Washrooms must have liquid soap, paper towels and warm running water at all times.

#### Administrative Controls

- Frequent and proper handwashing is the best way of preventing all viral respiratory infections.
- Employees must wash their hands at the start of their shift, before eating or drinking, after touching shared items, after using the washroom, and before leaving the worksite.
- Employees must follow cough and sneeze etiquette.
- Employees must avoid touching their face without first cleaning their hands.
- There should be no sharing of cigarettes or vaping equipment.
- Employees must be encouraged to self-report if they are experiencing symptoms of illness.

#### Personal Protective Equipment

- Personal Protective Equipment (mask, face shield, gloves & goggles etc.) are not mandatory for COVID-19, unless normally required in the food processing areas or where physical distancing requirements cannot be met.

#### Resources:

- [Video: Cough & sneeze etiquette](#)
- [Video: Hand Washing](#)
- [Hand Washing Poster](#)
- [Coronavirus Prevention Poster](#)

# COVID-19

## Tip Sheet for Food Processing Plants



### Sanitation

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**Goal: Increase cleaning and disinfection of common touch points to prevent COVID-19 from spreading through contaminated surfaces.**

#### Engineering Controls

- Have separate cleaning and sanitizing equipment for different areas of the plant.
- Provide multiple plastic lined waste containers to dispose of used tissues, wipes, gloves, and other cleaning materials.
- Consider providing sanitizing wipes so employees can sanitize their own work stations.
- Provide bottles of sanitizing solution at each table in lunch rooms.

#### Administrative Controls

- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas (e.g. cooler, freezer and regular door handles, faucets, bathrooms, hand-held tools, switches, loading bay door handles, ladders, pallet jacks, control panels, plant machinery, etc.).
- Create a checklist of all surfaces that must be cleaned, determine the frequency of cleaning and disinfection based on your organization's needs.
- More frequent cleaning (every 2 to 3 hours) may be necessary.
- Record when cleaning and disinfection has occurred.
- Clean dirty surfaces with soap and water before disinfecting.
- Specialized disinfection products are not necessary, use regular disinfecting solutions found in your sanitation plan (bleach or quaternary ammonium is recommended).
- Follow manufacturer's instructions when using disinfectants.
- Make sure any person required to clean has received the appropriate training.

#### Personal Protective Equipment

- Ensure employees who are cleaning are equipped with any required personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves, goggles, apron and mask).

#### Resources:

- [Health Canada approved disinfectants for COVID-19](#)
- [BCCDC: Information on bleach concentrations to inactivate COVID-19](#)

# COVID-19

## Tip Sheet for Food Processing Plants



### Employee Sickness & Return to Work Policies

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**Goal: To maintain a healthy workforce by ensuring that sick employees remain home for at least 10 days from the onset of symptoms and do not return to work until safe to do so.**

#### Administrative Controls

- Develop an employee illness plan that is communicated to all staff.
- If while at work, an employee starts experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness consistent with COVID-19, even if symptoms are mild, ask the employee to don a mask and to leave work immediately, go straight home, and have them contact their family physician/primary care provider or 8-1-1 for further guidance.
- Ensure that objects and surfaces (e.g. tools, tables) touched by sick employees are disinfected before being used by others.
- Tell your employees that if they are sick with any symptoms of respiratory illness consistent with cold, influenza or COVID-19, even if symptoms are mild, they must not work, remain at home, and contact Health Link BC at 8-1-1.
- Sick employees should use the BC COVID-19 self-assessment tool.
- Anyone with symptoms can now be assessed and receive a COVID-19 test.
- Testing is not recommended for people who do not have symptoms.
- If an employee has a COVID-19 diagnosis, the local public health department will identify any co-workers who may have been exposed to the sick employee.
- The employer and employees should be reassured that if they haven't been contacted by public health then there is no issue or concern that was identified by public health.
- If temperature screening for employees is being conducted, use in conjunction with a broader daily screening program including a symptom check-list and clear policies for staff exclusions. Make sure thermometers are calibrated regularly. Anyone with a temperature over 37.5°C may have a fever and should consult with their family physician/primary health care provider.

#### Resources:

- [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- [Poster: COVID-19 Testing for all who Need It](#)



# COVID-19

## Tip Sheet for Food Processing Plants



### Signage and Training

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**Goal: Provide training and use signs to communicate how COVID-19 spreads, and to remind employees how to protect their own health and the health of others.**

#### Engineering Controls

- Place signs on front doors to tell anyone entering the plant not to enter if they are feeling ill.
- Post physical distancing signs in common areas, and in line of sight to workstations.
- Post hand washing and personal hygiene signs in washrooms and lunchrooms.
- Ensure signs contain clear language that is easy to understand, and
- When possible, use signs that include diagrams and pictures.

#### Administrative Controls

- Train employees about the virus so they know how to minimize its spread.
- Train administrative employees to disinfect high-touch work surfaces in offices.
- Staff training sessions should be done in small groups with adequate social distancing, or online.
- Consider providing electronic COVID-19 resources to all employees.
- Communicate information in multiple languages.

#### Resources:

- [VIDEO: Transmission of the COVID-19 coronavirus](#)
- [Translated training materials and signage](#)