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HHS' CDC and DOL Release Interim Guidance for Agriculture Workers

The CDC and the U.S. Department of Labor has just released interim guidance for agricultural workers and employees. The interim guidance is meant for all agricultural workers and their employees.

In a joint press release, the CDC and Department of Labor said "farm operations vary across regions of the country. This guidance provides a template of action to protect agriculture workers from coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Agricultural employers can adapt these recommendations to protect workers at their particular work sites or in specific work operations."

The interim guidance covers exposure risk among agriculture workers and employers, screening and monitoring workers, creating a COVID-19 assessment and control plan, managing sick workers, Cleaning, disinfection, and sanitation, returning to work after worker exposure, Personal protective equipment (PPE), and special considerations for shared housing, transportation and children.

Key Points:

- Management in the agriculture industry should conduct work site assessments to identify coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) risks and infection prevention strategies to protect workers.
- Work site guidance for COVID-19 prevention and control should be taken into consideration in employer-furnished shared worker housing, transportation vehicles and work settings.
- Prevention practices should follow the hierarchy of controls, which includes using source control and a combination of engineering controls, administrative controls (especially proper sanitation, cleaning, and disinfection), and personal protective equipment.

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- Grouping workers together into cohorts may reduce the spread of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace by minimizing the number of different individuals who come into close contact with each other over the course of a week, and may also reduce the number of workers quarantined because of exposure to the virus.
- Owners/operators should maximize opportunities to place farmworkers residing together in the same vehicles for transportation and in the same cohorts to limit exposure.
- Basic information and training about infection prevention should be provided to all farmworkers in languages they can understand.
- Agriculture work sites developing plans for continuing operations where COVID-19 is spreading among workers or in the surrounding community should work directly with appropriate state and local public health officials and occupational safety and health professionals.

In their joint statement, the CDC and Department Labor said that Owners/operators can be flexible in the way that they respond to different levels of COVID transmission in their community. In the joint statement it notes that “A control plan should reflect the specific region, work site space, job tasks, and other features of each farm, ranch, orchard, or other agricultural operations and locations. Those involved in the work can best set priorities and assess how realistic these recommendations are for specific situations at their facilities.”

This interim guidance is based on what is currently known about COVID-19. CDC and the U.S. Department of Labor will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available. Please check the CDC COVID-19 website periodically for updated guidance.

Related People

Denise Bode

dabode@michaelbeststrategies.com

T 202.844.3804

David Crass

dacrass@michaelbest.com

T 202.595.7921

Charles Palmer

Partner

cbpalmer@michaelbest.com

T 262.956.6518

Leah Ziemba

Partner

lhziemba@michaelbest.com

T 608.283.4420