Keystone Agricultural Worker Program Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidelines for Agricultural Workers and Their Employers

Note: Much of this information was taken from the NC Department of Health and Human Service
March 20, 2020

COVID-19 can spread easily in settings with many people living in close proximity, including living facilities for migrant farm workers. Farm owners and managers who provide housing for migrant workers should implement plans to prevent exposure to the virus that causes COVID- 19, care for individuals with COVID-19, and prevent the spread of the disease.

Individuals above the age of 65 and people with pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes, chronic lung disease and chronic heart disease, or a compromised immune system (e.g., cancer, cancer treatment, or other immunosuppressant treatments) have a greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19. This could include agricultural workers with lung problems associated with exposure to common hazards such as pesticides and fungi found in crops. The following recommendations from Keystone Agricultural Worker Program are intended to prevent exposure to COVID-19, if possible, and protect the public health of the state.

The key components of a prevention plan for migrant farm workers include 1) minimizing the risk for exposure to the virus, 2) early detection of people with symptoms of COVID-19, and 3) caring for individuals with COVID-19 while ensuring that they do not give the infection to anyone else.

Be Prepared
Determine where you will house workers with symptoms of COVID-19.
- ❑ People with symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath) should be housed in a separate room with a separate bathroom from people who are not sick.
- ❑ Provide surgical facemasks and store them near the room for people with COVID-19. Facemasks should be worn by sick people when they are outside of their room or when other people are in their room, and by people who are taking care of sick people.
- ❑ Ventilate the room where persons with COVID-19 are housed on regular intervals, if possible.

Identify the nearest healthcare facility that provides free or low-cost care to uninsured people.
- ❑ To search for a list of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) that providing care for uninsured patients, click here.
- ❑ To search a directory of free and affordable health clinics, click here.
- ❑ If you cannot find a FQHC or low-cost facility in your area, contact your county or municipal health department or local health department for advice.

Promote Healthy Habits
Educate workers about hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- ❑ Provide signs in English and Spanish with information about washing hands and protecting yourself and others from germs.
- ❑ The CDC has educational materials available in both English and Spanish.

Provide supplies to fight COVID-19 like alcohol-based hand sanitizer, tissues, and lined trash cans.
- ❑ Make sure that workers have access to these supplies at the worksite, in common areas, where they sleep, and where they eat.
- ❑ Use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- ❑ Provide a disinfectant that is active against coronaviruses (for example, bleach) to sanitize counters, bathrooms, and other areas.

Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

Ask incoming workers if they have symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath.
- ❑ If they have these symptoms, house them in the area designated for sick people and arrange for them to see a medical provider. Call the medical provider in advance so healthcare workers can take appropriate precautionary measures.
- ❑ Workers with symptoms of respiratory illness should take a private vehicle to get to the medical provider. If they do not have their own vehicle, please assist with transportation. Circulate air outside by partially lowering windowpanes (weather permitting) and have the patient wear a mask.

If a worker starts having symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath:
- ❑ Have the worker stop working immediately and isolate the person from other workers. People with these symptoms should not be working.
  - • If the room for sick people is not in use, workers with symptoms of COVID-19 can rest there.
  - • If there are people with COVID-19 in the room, find a different place for people who have respiratory symptoms but have not been tested for COVID-19 to rest.
- ❑ Follow the instructions above to arrange for them to see a medical provider.

Let workers who have symptoms of respiratory illness rest until they feel better.
- ❑ Make sure they have enough food and water as they will not be able to go to the store and may not have any funds to buy their own.
- ❑ Monitor for worsening symptoms. About 20% of infected people will need hospitalization.
- ❑ Public health officials (i.e. local health department staff) will provide further instructions about isolation and release from isolation.
- ❑ Create a plan for what to do if many workers are sick at the same time.

If a worker is diagnosed with COVID-19:
- ❑ Notify your local health department.
- ❑ Instruct workers who had close contact with the COVID-19 patient to self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 (fever and onset of respiratory symptoms such as cough or shortness of breath) for 14 days. These exposed workers should be separated from non-exposed workers for 14 days (e.g., sleep in a separate room, work in a separate area). If they develop symptoms of COVID-19, contact your local health department.
- ❑ No infected or exposed farmworker should be allowed or forced to return home prior to being cleared by the health department for travel.

For additional information, please see the following resources:
- ❑ Keystone Health Center Coronavirus (COVID-19) Website
- ❑ CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19) Website
- ❑ National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc. Coronavirus (COVID-19) Website
- ❑ Migrant Clinicians Network COVID-19 Website