

***Guidelines for the Fresh Produce Industry***  
**COVID-19 and your Workforce**

## Disclaimer

This document has been developed by PMA Australia New Zealand to provide general guidance to assist producers of fresh produce to plan for and mitigate the risks posed by the virus causing COVID-19 to their employees, their business, and the supply of fresh produce to consumers. This includes:

- Protecting the health and safety of your employees, their families, and the broader community
- Ensuring the ongoing supply of fresh produce to Australian and New Zealand consumers, thereby supporting good nutrition and food security in this challenging time
- Facilitating, as far as possible, business continuity, thereby ensuring businesses survive and there is ongoing job security for your workforce.

Information found in this guide has been gathered from Commonwealth and State Government websites, industry and university sources, and international organisations including the World Health Organization and the US Food and Drug Administration. While care has been taken preparing this Guide it does not constitute legal advice or advice from public health officials. Always follow current government advice and announcements.

It is important to note that the situation is changing rapidly, and these guidelines may need to be revised in light of new developments and directions from Government. PMA A-NZ has a dedicated COVID-19 page on our website with new information loaded on a regular basis, plus we will continue to send out regular updates via email to all our members.

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## Keeping your workforce informed and engaged

Brief all your employees plus any contract staff, including cleaning staff, on the risks, preventative measures, and other information relevant to COVID-19.

Provide regular updates and reminders as to what they need to do to protect themselves and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

### About COVID-19

COVID-19 is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus which originated from Wuhan, China in late November 2019. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, responsible for various respiratory illnesses in humans, ranging from the common cold to much more severe illnesses such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

COVID-19 is most likely to be spread by:

- Direct contact with someone who is actively infected
- Close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes
- Touching objects or surfaces contaminated with mucous/droplets from a cough or sneeze from an infected person and then touching your mouth or face

### You get COVID-19 from people, it is not spread by food (including fresh produce).

During this COVID-19 pandemic it is essential that you keep your workforce intact and that means identifying strategies for minimising their risk of infection. This includes:

- Ensuring all staff have training on general hygiene specific to your product and production system
- Ensuring employees practice good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene both at work and at home, including:
  - Washing their hands frequently with soap and water, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
  - Covering their coughs and sneezes e.g. with a clean tissue, or into their elbow – always dispose of tissues hygienically and follow-up with an alcohol-based hand sanitiser
  - Avoiding touching their face, especially their mouth, nose, and eyes
- Emphasise all staff need to declare when they are unwell and not attend their place of work
- All food safety measures that you routinely practice to protect fresh produce from contamination (such as hand washing practices, gloves, clean laundered protective clothing) also help to prevent spread of COVID-19 between workmates.



## Staying informed and up to date

Ensure that you stay up to date with and follow the advice from your relevant health authority and keep your workforce informed with regular advice and updates.

The Federal government is continually updating information on COVID-19. Go to <https://www.australia.gov.au/> and [www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources](http://www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources). You may also connect with the Coronavirus Health Information Line (1800 020 080) which operates 24/7. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450. For NZ information go to [www.healthgovt.nz](http://www.healthgovt.nz) or call the Health Line 0800 611 116. There is also a Coronavirus Australia app which is available on both Apple and Android platforms. It provides a symptom checker, current status information, advice, and alerts.

***This is not a time for panic. It is a time for all of us to do our part to protect ourselves, our families and communities, your work colleagues and their jobs, and to ensure all Australians have access to a reliable and safe food supply.***



## Recommendations to prevent introduction and spread of COVID-19

Brief all your employees plus any contract staff, including cleaning staff, on the risks, preventative measures, and other information relevant to COVID-19.

Provide regular updates and reminders as to what they need to do to protect themselves and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

### Temperature Checks

**If practical, check the temperature of all staff entering and leaving your business using a laser thermometer calibrated to human skin.**

- Retain records of staff tested and have them wear a badge or sticker identifying them as having been tested that shift
- Temperature checks enable the business to identify any staff with an elevated temperature so they can be referred to public health authorities for further advice.

### Minimise close contacts in packing sheds and on process lines

**Consider ways of minimising the number of immediate close contacts each employee might be exposed to in the course of their working day.**

- Staff working in horticultural packing facilities often work in close proximity to co-workers, and packing shed layout, line design, and space constraints make it difficult to ensure all workers are more than 1.5 metres apart
- Explore ways that enable contact between different teams to be minimised – including reduction in the intermingling of members from different work groups
- Where feasible, divide the business into discrete zones e.g. reconfigure packing shed layouts and limit the number of staff working across more than a single zone
- Restrict employees to defined lunchrooms and amenities where possible
- Stagger break times to minimise intermingling of staff
- Remove excess chairs from lunchrooms to encourage staff to stay 1.5 metres apart
- Minimise the number and duration of face-to-face meetings and where possible, stop face-to-face meetings altogether – any essential meetings should be limited to a maximum of 15 minutes
- Identify staff and roles that may be able to work remotely/from home (e.g. office/admin staff) – but ensure that doing so will not compromise security or food safety
- Ask employees to avoid congregating in car parks, lunchrooms, offices, and especially in other areas outside the workplace.

## Personal protective equipment (PPE)

**It is recommended that you do not change company practices regarding the use of dust/face masks or gloves.**

- The Australian Government Department of Health says: “Masks are not currently recommended for use by healthy members of the public for the prevention of infections like coronavirus”. This advice may change
- The New Zealand government has issued similar information on masks but please note this advice may change
- Masks are already in short supply and you do not want to add to this
- Use of masks in areas where they are not normally seen may cause unnecessary alarm amongst the workforce.

## Advice for field harvest crews

**Consider ways of minimising close contacts and ensure good hygiene practices are followed.**

- Personnel in horticulture harvest roles work in close proximity to their co-workers, so it is important to consider measures to minimise periods when workers are not more than 1.5 metres apart – this may include reducing the size of harvest crews to enable more space
- Segregate different harvest crews from one another from the time they enter the site in the morning until they leave in the evening
- Consider changing harvest schedules in order to only have a single harvest crew in a given block at any one time
- Stagger break times such that the number of workers using meal facilities and toilet facilities at any one time are kept as small as possible
- Organise separate portable toilets for different harvest crews and increase the cleaning frequency for field-based portable toilets
- Install hand washing and sanitising stations on every harvest aid
- Increase the frequency of cleaning and sanitation for harvest aids, knives and any other tools used by pickers
- Consider providing pickers with their own tools where possible i.e. own knives.

## Employee transport

**Ensure transport arrangements for staff do not present a risk to their health.**

- Discourage car-pooling arrangements
- If car-pooling or ride-sharing is unavoidable, limit it to those sharing accommodation or those working in the same packing line teams or harvest crews.



## Accommodation of workforce

### Ensure workforce accommodation does not present a risk of COVID-19 infection for workers.

- Horticultural businesses and/or their labour providers often provide accommodation for seasonal staff, and this may present conditions where the virus may spread amongst workers
- A number of strategies can be adopted to minimise the likelihood of the virus being spread in accommodation facilities, including:
  - Decentralise the accommodation of your seasonal workforce as much as possible, the smaller the number of workers living together the better
  - Accommodate discrete workplace crews together, and minimise mingling between different crews working on your site
  - Limit those accessing staff accommodation to those living there, including those that are working for the company, but living in other accommodation
  - No parties or other social events
  - Minimise the use of shared cooking, laundry and toilet facilities as much as possible
  - If various groups do need to use shared facilities, create a roster for their use, to minimise the numbers of people using these facilities at any one time
  - Enhance cleaning and sanitation of cooking, laundry and toilet facilities
  - Ensure workers living in accommodation provided by the business or a labour provider observe government mandated personal hygiene and self-isolation protocols
  - Identify alternative accommodation facilities for workers who must self-isolate
  - Ensure workers practice physical distancing when outside in the community.

## Restrictions on site access and international travel

### Implement more stringent access requirements for those entering the site.

- Prohibit entry by non-essential visitors:
  - This may need to be extended to include auditors
  - Communicate with any auditors your intention to extend this to them and ask for their understanding
- Require confirmation from any essential visitors (including contractors) that they haven't been overseas in the past 14 days:
  - Enforce stand down periods for employees returning from overseas travel
  - Both the New Zealand and Australian Governments have imposed a 14-day period of self-isolation at home following international travel
  - Consider revoking access or personnel known to have travelled internationally, until such time as the 14-day period of self-isolation has been completed
- Consider asking staff to get a doctor's clearance before returning to work.



## Facilitate adoption of good hand hygiene practices

### Ensure good hand hygiene practices are promoted and practised.

- Conduct refresher training of staff in effective hand washing technique
- Provide and encourage the use of hand washing amenities (including alcohol-based hand sanitiser) by staff on entry and exit to the business, and in all common staff areas – change rooms, toilets, and lunchrooms
- Consider placing signs or posters at hand washing stations to remind staff of effective hand washing technique (See Appendix 1) .

## Cleaning and disinfection

### Ensure plant and equipment cleaning and sanitation practices are optimised and rigorously followed.

- The Australian Government has published [Environmental cleaning and disinfection principles for COVID-19](#) – review them and determine whether you need to revise the procedures for cleaning and sanitation of your premises
- Consider enhancing the cleaning and sanitation program between shifts or allocating time each day for cleaning common areas/facilities
- Increase the frequency of cleaning and sanitising staff common areas (lunchrooms, change areas, etc.)
- This may include fogging these areas, and thorough disinfection of surfaces in common areas and shared facilities
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and equipment on the premises, e.g. handrails, handles, door and gate handles, computer keyboards, touch screens, etc
- Pay particular attention to cleaning stainless steel and plastic surfaces, as virus can remain viable on these materials for 2-3 days
- Undertake a thorough review of your entire facility to identify areas, food contact surfaces, and equipment that may have been inadvertently overlooked in your existing cleaning program, or which have now become relevant in the context of COVID-19.

## Staff health and welfare

### *Ensure staff know the symptoms of COVID-19*

Symptoms are often seasonal flu-like and include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Unusual/unexplained fatigue
- Unusual/unexplained shortness of breath
- Other symptoms may include a runny nose, chills, and body aches

### Health

- Encourage all staff to get the seasonal flu vaccination (consider providing the vaccination to all staff)
- Health authorities are strongly advising all Australian to get the seasonal flu vaccine
- While the seasonal flu vaccination does not protect you from COVID-19, the symptoms of seasonal flu and COVID-19 can look the same, so protection against seasonal flu minimises the possibility of confusion and reduces alarm and disruption in the workplace.



## Staff responsibilities if they are, or think they could be, infected

- Advise staff of what they need to do if they experience symptoms that may indicate infection
- If you are experiencing cold or flu symptoms, you should not come to work
- If you develop any of the above symptoms, whether at home or at work, you must immediately isolate yourself and seek medical attention:
  - Call your doctor, local Emergency Department, or in Australia call Health direct on 1800 022 222 or in New Zealand call Health Line 0800 611 116
  - If you make an appointment with your GP, let them know your symptoms so they can prepare appropriate infection control measures before you attend their surgery or health clinic
- Advise your company as soon as possible after you develop symptoms, including when precisely you believe you may have started exhibiting symptoms
- If you experience these symptoms while at work, please report to your supervisor/manager immediately
- Do not travel on public transport or visit public places
- Advise your company of the outcome of any medical investigation of your condition (for example, the results if any test for COVID-19). You should do this as soon as possible
- Don't return to work until your situation has been resolved
- Don't come to work while you are waiting for a test result
- Provide evidence that you're OK to return to work, before reporting for work
- Don't come in to work if you are a close contact of someone outside the workplace, who has confirmed COVID-19
- Adhere to all instructions given by medical authorities
- If you have been required to be in home isolation (e.g. if you are a close contact of someone with COVID-19) and have completed your 14-day isolation period without showing signs or symptoms of being unwell, you are permitted to return to your daily activities including going to work
- You should ask your employees before the commencement of the shift if they are unwell or experiencing any of the above symptoms and seek their confirmation that they are not
- If a supervisor/manager identifies an employee that is exhibiting relevant symptoms, they should ask the employee to go home and follow the above guidelines
- Remember that your employees' medical records are confidential, and you must not disclose to co-workers the medical status of any individual.

## Protocols if an employee is found to be infected with COVID-19

If a member of your workforce is confirmed positive for COVID-19, PMA A-NZ recommends you following the following advice.

**Note: this does not constitute official advice, and you should heed any additional advice and directions provided by public health officials.**

**Close contacts of confirmed infections should self-isolate immediately.**

### What is a close contact?

A close contact is anyone who has been within 1.5 metres of an infected person for a cumulative period of at least 2 hours at any time in the 24 hours prior to that person first experiencing symptoms.

Close contact also includes face-to-face contact for a period of 15 minutes. This type of contact is more likely to occur in staff common areas e.g. lunchrooms

- Get in touch with your State or Territory health department for the latest official advice as to what self-isolation means in the context of ensuring food supply continuity, and what the contacted individuals need to do next
- Employees who feel they are at higher risk due to age (65 and over) or who have an underlying medical condition, such as diabetes, respiratory issues or heart disease, should be allowed (but not required) to stay home, as a precaution
- In the event of a confirmed case in your workforce, you will need to liaise with the local public health unit as well as your food safety regulator for advice and guidance.



## What if an employee reports sick with COVID-19 symptoms, but is not yet confirmed to be infected?

### Be prepared to quickly identify close contacts.

- Pull together records of who the employee had close contact with over the few days prior to developing symptoms
- Keep records of who has worked where, when and with whom, so that you can quickly identify who may or may not have had close contact with a potentially infected staff member
- Implement a system for recording who each employee has had close contact with (as defined above) in the course of each shift:
  - Electronic staffing records, supplemented by records captured by supervisors, may meet these requirements
  - Consider supplementary approaches, such as providing employees with a log book to be completed at home each night, or forms to be completed at the end of each shift and left on site, in which they record all personnel who they were in close contact with in the course of their shift
  - This should include who they had contact with during breaks or at the beginning and end of the shift.

## Preparing for return to work

### Someone who has completed official quarantine or has been released from isolation does not pose a risk of infection to other people.

- People who have been required to be in home isolation and have completed their 14-day period and are not showing signs or symptoms of being unwell are permitted to return to their daily activities – including going to work
- Where staff have been infected with COVID-19 but have recovered, it will be important to reassure their work colleagues that their reintroduction into the workplace is safe
- Encourage employees to continue good hygiene practices, both in the workplace and at home, to help stay free of illness.

## Contingency arrangements

### Suppliers and services

- Consider what supplies and services may be disrupted and identify options that may minimise disruption e.g. alternative suppliers
- Critical services and supplies include: personal protective equipment, sanitisers, cleaning agents, packaging materials, transport, auditors, etc
- Risk assess alternative suppliers of ingredients/packaging now for approval as part of your approved supplier program in order to avoid lengthy trial periods for approvals
- Minimise contact between service providers such as transporters and sales representatives and workers.

### Communication with your direct customers

#### Keep your customers informed about your preparedness and contingency plans.

- Let your customers know what you have done by way of preparedness – particularly if you deal directly with foodservice or consumers.
- Keep them regularly updated on developments within your business.

### Diminished workforce

#### Work out contingency arrangements in the event of a reduced workforce.

- Start planning now for how you will continue to operate if your workforce is significantly reduced through COVID-19 infections, or as a consequence of a large number of staff being in isolation due to contact with an infected person
- In the face of a serious shortage of labour, can the available workforce be used differently or up-skilled?

### Recruiting and training new staff

#### Consider how you may rapidly find and train replacement staff.

- With many people from other sectors out of work, there may be options to recruit them - start planning for how this could be achieved
- Identify opportunities to speed up and scale up training for new employees
- Approach existing supervisors to identify members of current teams who could step up to supervisory roles if needed - provide training/mentoring to help these individuals step into these roles.

## Support Your Workforce

Follow up with affected employees, to ensure they feel supported and have access to relevant information.

Encourage unaffected employees to provide support to their colleagues that may be in self isolation or recovering from infection.

### Key Messages:

- Many people will find self-isolation difficult
- Give your colleagues a call to make sure they are coping and feel supported.

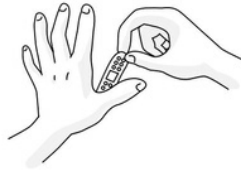




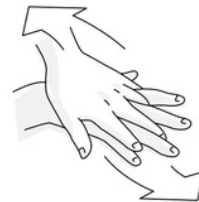
# How to wash and dry hands with soap and water



- Remove jewellery and cover abrasions



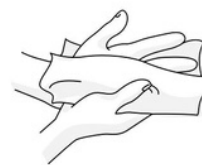
- Wet hands with warm water, then apply soap or liquid soap



- Lather for 15–20 seconds



- Rinse hands under running water



- Dry hands with clean towel

During the lather, pay particular attention to the backs of hands and fingers, fingernails, fingertips and the webbing between fingers.

Hand hygiene is crucial in reducing transmission of infections. It includes both hand washing with plain or antimicrobial soap and water, and use of alcohol-based products (gels, rinses, foams) containing an emollient that do not require the use of water.

If hands are visibly soiled or contaminated with respiratory secretions, wash hands with soap (either non-antimicrobial or antimicrobial) and water.

In the absence of visible soiling of hands, approved alcohol-based products for hand disinfection may be used. Ensure you have facilities for hand washing (i.e. sinks with warm and cold running water, plain or antimicrobial soap, and disposable paper towels) and hand disinfection (i.e. alcohol-based products) readily accessible.



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing





# 7 steps to safe shopping for fruit & vegetables

Actions for consumers



- 01 When you need to shop, identify and plan your purchases, reduce how often you undertake shopping trips, and ensure your time in store is kept to a minimum



- 02 Don't mix with people – keep your distance from other shoppers and the general public – the big threat isn't food or food packaging, it's other people



- 03 Where possible use hand sanitiser or disinfectant wipes in store



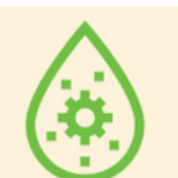
- 04 Wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling your groceries



- 05 Don't sanitise your groceries or their packages - there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19



- 06 Prepare and wash your fruit and vegetables as normal – wash them in cold running water, and peel and cook where appropriate – don't use soaps or detergents



- 07 Wash your hands frequently: when you come in, after handling your groceries, before preparing food, and before you eat – use warm water and soap and wash for 20 seconds



# 7 steps to reduce COVID-19 transmission

Actions for the food industry *pma*  
AUSTRALIA+NEW ZEALAND



01 Do not come to work if you are unwell



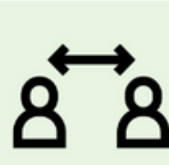
02 Upon arrival at your workplace, wash your hands thoroughly using warm water and soap, then sanitise your hands



03 Repeat step 2 on a regular basis



04 Avoid touching your mouth, nose, and eyes and practice good sneezing/coughing hygiene



05 Follow physical distancing recommendations (at least 2 metres) where feasible and limit close interactions with your fellow workers



06 Adhere to documented cleaning and sanitation programs throughout the entire production facility



07 If you develop a fever, cough, or shortness of breath, inform your supervisor and self-isolate immediately



# Checklist for fresh produce sector

Actions for your workforce



This checklist is for producers, packers, and processors in the fresh produce sector for use as part of their effort to contain the spread and limit the impact of the COVID-19 virus.

## Key considerations:

- Maintaining the health and wellbeing of you, your staff, and your family
- Ensuring you maintain work teams to keep your business functioning
- Identifying ways to work that are consistent with current best hygienic practice
- Retaining access to goods and services

No.	Question	Yes It is in place	Yes Needs improvement	No Needs action	No Not relevant
1	A safe working environment has been provided for all staff in your business				
2	Precautions are in place for your workers or family who are over 60 or in a high-risk group (underlying medical conditions)				
3	Ensure all workers are briefed on ways of working and can demonstrate them in practice – physical distancing, hygienic coughing/sneezing, etc				
4	Workers are provided with appropriate personal protective equipment – gloves, masks, etc as appropriate				
5	Hand washing facilities and hand sanitisers are provided and regularly maintained				
6	Workers who are sick understand the need to self-isolate				
7	Systems are in place to isolate work teams if a team member tests positive				
8	Visitors are not permitted on site				
9	Contractors are appropriately briefed and follow all hygiene protocols when on site				
10	Regularly check with Government and relevant industry websites on the latest precautions and measures designed to control the virus				
11	Retain a list of key contacts and phone numbers: Department of Health, local doctors and hospitals				





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