

## **Horticulture, Fruit and Vegetable Industry Sector**

### **Social distancing advice to support stakeholders develop safe working practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19**

The Scottish Government's business and physical distancing guidance prioritises keeping citizens healthy (website link below). It advises that all business premises, sites and attractions not required by law to close should close now unless:

- essential to the health and welfare of the country during this crisis (as defined in the guidance); or
- supporting (or being repurposed to support) essential services; or
- wider public health, health and safety or other considerations apply and require a facility or service to continue to operate or a specific period of time for a safe shutdown process to be completed; and
- apart from in exceptional circumstances critical to lives and safety, capable of working in a way which is fully consistent with established physical distancing advice.

#### **Key considerations for employers that continue to operate:**

1. It is the responsibility of each business to put safe systems of work in place (including provision of adequate information, training, instruction and supervision) and demonstrate that they can operate in a manner that prevents or minimises risks to worker safety and wellbeing, including travel to and from work.
2. Businesses must be able to demonstrate that they are capable of working in a way that is consistent with established physical distancing guidance.
3. Businesses must ensure that their members/staff/contractors etc. are fully briefed on safe working/physical distancing practices and that they are supervised to ensure these are adhered to and have access to all relevant facilities/protective equipment. Records shall be maintained of training provided and understood by employees.
4. Businesses must undertake to monitor and keep abreast of the latest advice from the Chief Medical Officer/the First Minister and make the necessary changes to their business operation as required, should this advice change.
5. Businesses, where they are able, should endeavour to demonstrate to their customers, the public and other stakeholders that their operations are fully compliant with safe working/physical distancing procedures, through their website if applicable.

6. It is recommended that businesses provide workers with a letter documenting the nature of the business and details of how physical distancing measures have been met, which they may share with the police or interested parties if prompted.

7. Businesses must adequately protect workers considered high risk or living with an individual who falls within this category.

The following advice is aimed at supporting businesses work safely (for Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) activities) specifically around the issues of PPE, accommodation, transportation and field and packhouse operations where a 2-metre separation is not possible:

### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

- Individuals with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be self-isolating and **must not be at work** (other than working from home).
- The most effective methods to reduce transmission of COVID-19 is a physical separation of at least 2-metres; thorough regular hand washing for at least 20 seconds; workers refraining from touching their faces; and regularly disinfecting surfaces.
- Routine (business as usual) PPE must continue to be worn as required, in accordance with the existing health and safety risk assessments and method statements.
- If a risk assessment of the setting indicates that a higher level of contamination may be present (for example, where unwell individuals have slept) or there is visible contamination with body fluids (e.g. from cuts, sweat etc), then the need for additional PPE such as, an apron and gloves should be considered.
- After discussion with industry stakeholders, we are aware that many sector businesses are utilising face masks and other PPE, in addition to Health Protection Scotland (HPS) hygiene measures, on a precautionary basis to protect their workers and minimise the potential operational impact resulting from worker-sickness and self-isolation. In situations where a 2-metre distance cannot be maintained, the use of such PPE may provide reassurance to workers.
- For business employing the precautionary use of PPE this must be (i) as a supplement to HPS hygiene guidance (ii) used in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines, (iii) replaced as necessary or disinfected thoroughly (as applicable), and (iv) accompanied with appropriate training to ensure its correct use, as **incorrect use can increase the risk to workers** (for example, unwashed gloves are worse than regularly washed hands).
- Having considered sector working practices required for the production of fruit and vegetables, businesses' are advised to take a precautionary approach to safeguard their workers particularly for activities where (i) a 2-metre working distance cannot be achieved and (ii) close working is

required over a sustained period of time. This must include consideration of altered working patterns, physical screens, face coverings and other PPE and access to hygiene stations.

- Any **use of PPE is not a substitute for physical distancing practices**, which must be maintained wherever possible.
- Even if PPE is being used for work activities, disinfecting surfaces and adequate ventilation should also be maintained.
- PPE will not be effective if reused either without adequate disinfection (if reusable) or when intended to be single use and disposable.
- Regular checks must be made on the health status of each worker to ensure symptomatic workers are not at work and follow NHS advice. The use of PPE does not negate the need for self-isolation of symptomatic individuals.
- Suitable systems should be put in place to keep the PPE clean, disinfected and free of contamination.

### **Accommodation on farm**

- Workplace housing units, such as caravans, can be deemed equivalent of households, on the condition that workers do not reside in multiple households (for example on non-working days) with different household members.
- Workers who live alone, should be treated as independent households with social distancing requirements applied.
- All individuals within household unit (irrespective of whether they comprise workers from different shift patterns) are required to self-isolate if one member becomes symptomatic according to health guidance, so it is not advisable to house large number of workers in one household unit, due to the potential impact if one falls ill.
- If essential, organise as small a group of workers as possible who live and work on site into fixed groups that work and live together, known as 'cohorts', which then do not mix with other groups. Where a cohort lives and works together it can be considered as a 'household'. Workers who travel to the farm each day could also be grouped into cohorts that always work together, although physical distancing measures would still apply in the workplace.
- Employers should implement procedures to safely introduce new or seasonal workers into work-based accommodation, ideally with a defined period of segregation upon their arrival. For work activities, the 2-metre distance should be maintained for newly introduced workers.
- Businesses should consider the areas they provide for their workers to take breaks or consume food to ensure these comply with social distancing requirements i.e. allow workers to remain at a distance of 2-metres at all times.
- Businesses should identify and disinfect key touch points regularly, such as door handles, hand-rails, keypads, vending machines, etc.. Using a

disposable cloth, first clean hard surfaces with warm soapy water then disinfect these surfaces with the cleaning products you normally use.

- It is important to check with your suppliers that your cleaning and sanitising chemicals are certified as effective against enveloped viruses such as coronavirus. Products bearing the EN 14476:2013 standard should have been tested for efficacy against certain coronaviruses (although not specifically the virus responsible for COVID-19).
- Household bleach and other potent oxidisers are also known to kill similar viruses and can be effective for up to 24 hours.
- Make sure bins are provided for disposal of used paper towels / tissues, and instruct all staff that these must be used.
- Alcohol hand sanitizer must contain at least 70% alcohol.

### **Transportation of workers**

- Where possible, daily checks of employee's health status should be undertaken before workers are transported to the site.
- Anyone found to be unwell in transit or on site should be immediately returned to their accommodation and supported to follow the stay at home guidance on NHS Inform. Businesses should have plans in place to quickly transport sick workers to their accommodation and disinfect work areas or vehicles.
- It is essential that no workers with COVID-19 symptoms or those required to self-isolate travel to work.
- Workers from different households should adhere to social distancing requirements where possible. Businesses can support this by providing additional or larger vehicles to transport workers at the required safe distance from each other.
- Vehicles should offer good ventilation and must be regularly sanitised to reduce the chance of transmission, paying particular attention to surfaces that are touched regularly. This should be done after each trip.
- Where shared transport is unavoidable, the number of workers in each vehicle should be minimised by considering multiple trips with fewer persons and/or staggered starting and finishing times to reduce the need for close personal contact.
- Workers should space out as much as possible in the vehicle, not touch their faces and thoroughly wash their hands immediately before and after the journey.
- Where possible, employers should select workers from within one household to travel together, if a 2 metre cannot be maintained.
- Where a 2-metre separation cannot be met, alternative methods of transport should be considered, such as public transport, cycling, walking etc..
- Small vehicles, such as cars should ideally be single occupancy to prevent the spread of COVID-19, unless occupied by individuals from one household.

- Where a 2-metre separation cannot be met, employers should also consider face masks or physically separating seating areas, to shield workers during transportation, but ONLY if this can be employed safely for the specific vehicle being used and will not obscure the driver's visibility.

### **Field and Packhouse operations where 2m spacing is not possible.**

- For critical national infrastructure activities where a 2-metre distance cannot be adhered to, employers should consider reducing staffing levels and shift rotations. Whilst this will have an impact on productivity, it may be necessary to protect staff and maintain output.
- Businesses should also consider physical shielding mechanisms, such as perspex-type barriers. If used, these must be cleaned regularly with disinfectant.
- Nonetheless, workers must still be advised to keep 2 metres apart as much as possible and businesses must put practices in place to facilitate this.
- If installation of a physical barrier is not possible, employers should consider shift work or implementing equipment that could reduce the need for multiple workers operating in a confined area. The use of face masks should also be considered for enclosed spaces where close working is required.
- Where workers must work within 2 metres of one another, consider whether members of the same household can be utilised to do these tasks.
- To protect workers, employers must remind colleagues daily to only come into work if they are well and no one in their household is self-isolating.
- Employers must remind staff to wash their hands frequently for at least 20 seconds with soap and water and, in particular, before and after operating enclosed or shared machinery. If this is not possible, hand sanitiser should be used. Please note, hand sanitiser is only effective on visibly clean hands, so if no there is access to soap and water, hand wipes should be used first to clean the hands followed by an >70% alcohol-based hand rub. Hand washing must follow as soon as there is access to soap and water.
- Employers should consider installing pop-up handwashing facilities, with soap, water and hand sanitiser.
- All equipment being handled should be frequently cleaned and disinfected using standard cleaning products. Workers should be discouraged from sharing phones where possible.
- Non-essential visits from external parties should be prohibited wherever possible. In circumstances where essential visitors are required to spend time on site, take appropriate measures to separate them from employees wherever possible. Ensure the 2m physical (social) distancing requirements are adhered to during interactions with on-site staff and, where possible, designate separate waiting areas and toilet facilities, in order to minimise contact with employees.

- Wherever possible, re-design workflow to minimise contact with surfaces. For example, by keeping non-fire doors open to reduce the need for hand contact.
- Workers should be prevented from congregating in groups. Consider marking physical distancing spaces on the ground so they are clearly identifiable, moving certain tasks to different locations where practical, or staggering break times for staff to reduce congestion in communal areas.

## **Polytunnels**

- Workers should maintain a 2-metre working distance at all times, where possible, and businesses must consider revised working practices to facilitate this.
- Where a 2-metre distance cannot be maintained for specific CNI activities, businesses should consider the use of physical screens or shift working to reduce the need for social contact, even if that impacts on productivity.
- Where possible, all vents should be opened to ensure good airflow when workers are required to operate in close proximity.
- If the air-flow is poor, consider the use of face PPE as outlined above.
- Employers must consider installing pop-up handwashing facilities, with soap, water and hand sanitiser to allow workers to follow the required hygiene guidance.

## **Additional information**

### **Scottish Government social distancing guidance:**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-business-and-social-distancing-guidance/>

### **Food Standards Scotland's guidance for food businesses:**

<https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/publications-and-research/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-business-operators-and-their-employees>

### **Health Protection Scotland's guidance:**

<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/covid-19-guidance-for-non-healthcare-settings/>

### **NHS guidance:**

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>

### **COSLA guidance for non-healthcare settings:**

<https://www.cosla.gov.uk/news/2020/04/non-healthcare-setting-faqs-published>

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