

SETTING UP YOUR WORKPLACE TO PROTECT VULNERABLE WORKERS

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This information is from the resource, 'COVID-19 in Agricultural Communities', prepared by the Farm Safety Technical Panel. Readers are encouraged to also refer to this resource.

People over about 60 and those with pre-existing health conditions are far more vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus. Protecting vulnerable people will vastly reduce the number of deaths whilst it runs its course, or until a vaccine is available.

Here are two practical examples of how you can set up your workplace to protect vulnerable workers. Preventing COVID-19 in your home, community or workplace falls into two camps – you must decide which option to take and stick to your decision. Any compromise can let the fox into the hen house.

STRICTLY ISOLATED PROPERTY	OR	SEPARATED WORKPLACE
<p>Stringent precautions are taken to ensure that everyone at the workplace is completely and strictly isolated from risk of infection in everything they do.</p> <p>Strict isolation means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No one on the isolated property can have had contact or physical proximity to any non-isolated people. ● Supplies are obtained by non-contact delivery and all surfaces of delivered goods are rigorously disinfected, using the COVID-19 hygiene precautions (prev. page). 		<p>Older and vulnerable people and members of their respective households isolate themselves, and do not go anywhere near clearly separated workplace areas on the farm.</p> <p>The workplace areas need to be managed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meticulously practicing all of the COVID-19 hygiene precautions (prev. page). ● Excluding all people who are vulnerable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All people over about 60 ○ People who are unwell for any reason ○ People with pre-existing health conditions or other health vulnerabilities ○ Pregnant women (so that their babies do not catch it if the COVID-19 lingers in their family until childbirth)

STRICTLY ISOLATED PROPERTY		SEPARATED WORKPLACE
<p>Example:</p> <p>Bob is 70 years of age and runs a farm with the help of his son in law, Paul, 35.</p> <p>Both Bob and Paul and everyone in their families strictly isolate themselves on their respective properties in order to prevent infection from the virus. This means zero contact or conversations in person with anyone off the farm, and carefully cleaning and disinfecting any supplies that are delivered to the farm. Bob and Paul plan tasks to keep a significant distance away from any service providers such as vets. This then creates a workplace environment in which Bob and Paul can continue to work without the risk of becoming infected, and even continue to socialise with the isolated grandkids.</p> <p>This strategy allows the farm to carry on and allows Bob to continue to see his extended family. It also recognizes the much higher risk to older people should they become infected with COVID-19.</p>	OR	<p>Example:</p> <p>George is 46 years of age with a disease that requires him to take drugs that compromise his immune system, he lives in a farmhouse on a dairy farm with his family.</p> <p>George runs the dairy farm with the help of up to 6 employees. While his employees follow COVID-19 hygiene precautions (above), they are not strictly isolated. If George was to catch COVID-19 he faces an unreasonably high chance of death.</p> <p>George decides that the safest management technique involves appointing his most experienced employee as an interim manager and not enter the dairy and other workplace areas.</p> <p>This allows George to live in strict isolation within the farmhouse. This means zero contact or conversations in person with anyone outside of his household, and carefully cleaning and disinfecting any supplies that are delivered to the farmhouse. Should an employee become infected, George is not working in proximity and cannot become infected.</p> <p>This strategy allows the farm to carry on, and recognises that George is at an unacceptably high risk of death should he be infected with COVID-19.</p>
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort in the knowledge that everyone on the farm is healthy and no-one can be unknowingly infected with COVID-19. • Everyone can still run the farm in their existing roles. • Physical socialising can happen between everyone in the isolated group – ie isolation is by everyone on the farm. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires full cooperation from all people involved, for a long time, strictly adhering to the isolation and hygiene principles. • No physical socialising can happen with people outside the isolated group (only via phone/online) 	OR	<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort in the knowledge that the most vulnerable people are protected and remain healthy as they cannot be infected with COVID-19. • Lower risk of infection with COVID-19 for the vulnerable people who are excluded from the workplace. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed roles and responsibilities in the farm business. • Requires full commitment to ‘staying away’ – i.e. isolation must be strictly adhered to by the vulnerable workers and the farm team. • Important to control any weak links, such as farm dogs that could visit other areas of the farm and become a contaminated surface.

COVID-19 hygiene precautions:

1. **No human contact** - no shaking hands, passing drinks, or touching common surfaces
2. **Physical distance as far apart as practicable.** The Health Department advises at least 1.5 metres, though more is better. This is about controlling the aerosols created by normal breath and droplets created by a cough or sneeze. This virus can live suspended in the air for several hours. Maximising fresh ventilation and avoiding shared enclosed spaces is also important.
3. **Disinfect everything** that is brought into your home or workplace:
 - a. *Time* - let it sit for a week or more in dry conditions.
 - b. *Alcohol* - a solution or wipes with at least 70% alcohol.
 - c. *Bleach* at 1000ppm or 0.1% solution
 - d. *Detergent* - thorough washing of surfaces with a generous quantity of water and detergent.
4. Surfaces at shops, groceries, handles, fuel pumps, animals and pets, vehicles etc. can all carry the virus. You cannot assume that regular cleaning in public places is enough to control this. After visiting the shops, wash or disinfect your hands, clothes, phone etc. before touching anything else.
5. Do not share equipment, tools, pens or pencils, vehicles, workstations etc. Have workers use their own equipment and separate vehicles, and plan to prevent touching any common surfaces.
6. If items are to be shared, they must be disinfected between use.
7. Do not touch your face - this is how infection occurs. Wearing gloves and/or a mask can help with this.
8. If available in the workshop, consider wearing a P2 face mask or if there are closer proximity situations that cannot be avoided. Afterwards the mask should be disinfected for re-use. A face mask does not offer 100% protection, therefore keeping a significant distance is a preferred control.