

# Best practices to avoid the spread of coronavirus for seasonal workers on fruit and vegetable farms



These are exceptional circumstances and industry needs to comply with the latest government advice on coronavirus (COVID-19). This best-practice document is based on Public Health England (PHE) guidance; other restrictions and advice may apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This guidance does not change or amend the statutory duties of an employer under the health and safety legislation, including, in particular:

- **Section 2 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HSWA), which requires an employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of its employees**
- **Regulation 3 (1) (a) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWR), which requires an employer to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of its employees to which they are exposed while they are at work in order to identify the measures the employer must take to comply with the requirements of the health and safety legislation**

**This best-practice guide is intended to assist employers of agricultural seasonal workers in applying the PHE guidance in practical ways. The information and examples provided in this guide are illustrative only and may not be suitable for every business.**

**This guide was produced in collaboration with the National Farmers Union, The Association of Labour Providers, the Food Network for Ethical Trade, AHDB, G's Fresh and Defra.**

## Introduction

### Government guidance

The Government has introduced new measures to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). These social distancing requirements include requiring people to stay at home (except for buying food, one form of outdoor exercise, for health reasons, or for work that cannot be done from home) and keeping at least 2 metres away from other people.

Farms are a place of work, just like other essential businesses, and there will be a risk of spreading coronavirus while operating during the pandemic. As with any other business, agricultural employers must follow **government guidance for food businesses** in response to the pandemic. Employers must also ensure the safety of their workforce generally from other hazards.

Further guidance is available on the **[Government website here](#)**.

Sector-specific guidance in relation to social distancing in the workplace is available [here](#).

Workers from **defined extremely vulnerable groups** are strongly advised **to stay at home shielded and not go to work** as they are at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus.

Anyone, including key workers, who lives in a household with someone who is **shielding** from coronavirus infection should stringently follow guidance on **social distancing**.

### Symptoms of coronavirus

The most common symptoms of coronavirus are recent onset of a new continuous cough and/or high temperature.

**Anyone, including a key worker, who develops symptoms** of coronavirus (a new, continuous cough, a high temperature and/or a loss of, or change to, your sense of smell or taste) **must not go to work** and should stay off work for 7 days from the onset of symptoms.

Anyone, including key workers, living in a household where someone develops symptoms of coronavirus **must not go to work for 14 days** from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

### Government guidance on best practice for all businesses

- Keep everyone updated on actions being taken to reduce risks of exposure to coronavirus in the workplace
- Ensure employees who are in a vulnerable group are strongly advised to follow **social distancing guidance**
- Ensure employees who are in an extremely vulnerable group and should be **shielded** are supported to stay at home
- Make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date
- Make sure managers know how to spot symptoms of coronavirus and are clear on all relevant processes, for example sickness reporting and sick pay, and procedures in case someone in the workplace becomes unwell with potential coronavirus symptoms and needs to take the appropriate action
- Make sure there are places to wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, and encourage everyone to do so regularly
- Provide hand sanitiser and tissues for staff and encourage their use

### Context for farming businesses

There are some sector-specific operational challenges for farming businesses, such as on-site living accommodation, transporting of workers, on-site social and entertainment areas and the multilingual nature of the workforce.

On some farms, a large proportion of the workforce will travel to and from the farm every day and live off site. Many farms are set up to house seasonal workers on their sites. On most farms, the living accommodation is set up for groups of people using shared facilities, such as showers, toilets, kitchens, communal areas and laundry facilities. Accommodation could also be provided in static caravans with their own kitchens and showers but with access to other communal areas.

In these circumstances, groups of people are effectively living in the same household.

During the harvesting season, there may be a need to transport workers to fields separate from their accommodation or normal place of work, between different fields, or to and from shops to buy essential items.

Those working on farms are considered to be **key workers**. A key worker is someone who has been identified as critical for the continuation of essential public services, and includes 'those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery, as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example, hygienic and veterinary medicines)'. A full list of key worker sectors can be found [here](#).

### Best-practice examples for farming businesses

#### Importance of communication

Clear and regular communication between employers and employees is important to ensure that all workers understand the reasons for the measures being adopted in the workplace and is more likely to effect sustained behavioural change. Some examples of how to ensure good communication are outlined below.

- Ensure new workers are fully briefed, in the appropriate languages, on all the symptoms of coronavirus, what to do if they experience symptoms and the measures put in place to prevent the spread of the virus
  - The most common symptoms of coronavirus are recent onset of a new continuous cough and/or high temperature. If you have these symptoms, however mild, stay at home and do not leave your house for 7 days from when your symptoms started if you live alone, or 14 days if you live with someone who has symptoms. You do not need to call NHS 111 to go into self-isolation. If your symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after 7 days, visit **NHS 111 online**. If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111. For a medical emergency, dial 999
  - Wash your hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds, using soap and hot water, particularly after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose, or after being in public areas where other people are doing so. Use hand sanitiser if that's all you have access to
  - To reduce the spread of germs when you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, or your sleeve (not your hands) if you don't have a tissue, and throw the tissue in a bin immediately. Then wash your hands or use a hand-sanitising gel
  - Clean and disinfect regularly touched objects and surfaces using your regular cleaning products to reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people
- Translated versions of all guidance is available on [www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)



- Ensure communication channels are in place to encourage and enable ongoing engagement at all levels – good examples include using posters and signage (in all languages used on site) in communal areas and accommodation
- Remind workers on a daily basis and in the appropriate languages of the basic rules around hygiene and social distancing
- Wherever possible, make use of technology (see figure 1). Consider using a translated (in all relevant site languages) linked self-developed “service portal” for reporting any work, accommodation, HR or welfare-related issues while in the accommodation to mitigate person-to-person contact with front-line staff



Figure 1. Digital service portal

### Risk, hygiene and health management

- Undertake and document a formal risk assessment for each specific area or process in the business and implement measures accordingly to minimise the risks of spreading coronavirus. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published guidance on how to carry out risk assessments here: [www.hse.gov.uk/risk/](http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/)
- HSE has recommended the following hierarchy of control measures to reduce risks:
  - **ELIMINATE** – implement methods that are known to kill or remove the risk, such as increased handwashing, cleaning, etc.
  - **SUBSTITUTE** – change the process to reduce the risk with a lesser risk, for example touch points on doors. Example 1: replace handle with a sanitiser gel handle for ‘pull’, or push a door with the use of the elbow. Example 2: open all doors that can be left opened and introduce fire-safety release mechanisms so that in the event of a fire, the doors close
  - **ISOLATE** – examples include following the 2 metres social distancing guidance. Isolation can also be supported by time or shift management or people flow
  - **ADMINISTRATE** – this includes policing the rules, signage to communicate the rules and documents to change SOPs
  - **PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)** – besides wearing PPE already identified as appropriate for the job, PPE can make people feel safer, but PPE can also potentially have the biggest detrimental impact. If an employee wears gloves and then washes their hands less, the risk increases, but they feel safer!

- Employers may choose to regularly assess the health of their workforce. For example, this could involve the use of daily employee checking forms to confirm that workers are not suffering from any symptoms of coronavirus, such as a new continuous cough or a high temperature. You can download the form [here](#)
- Government guidance must be followed where symptoms are identified
- Employers should consider reviewing their absence policy, ensuring they have a robust system in place to identify workers that are absent and have a process to follow up on any absences that have not been reported or are suspected to be related to coronavirus

### Use of cohorts and social distancing

- The principles of social distancing should be used at all times
- If social distancing is not possible, consider using the [social distancing in the workplace during coronavirus \(COVID-19\): sector guidance](#)
- 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 social distancing measures would still apply in the workplace
- This practice is encouraged to minimise any potential spread of coronavirus, as well as to ensure maximum business continuity where symptoms are identified in an individual
- There is no set definition of a cohort in terms of group size (although there should preferably be as few people in a group as possible) or types of workers. Businesses may choose how best to apply cohorting in a proportionate way to accommodate risk factors relevant to their business

### Managing shared living arrangements

- Every effort should be made to secure single-occupancy accommodation for workers. If single-occupancy accommodation is not possible, occupancy in each shared space should be as low as possible and organised in cohorts. Such cohorts should be as small as possible and kept separate from other cohorts
- Face-to-face contact should be minimised as much as possible by introducing scheduled access, in cohorts, to shared facilities such as showers and kitchens
- Ventilation in all rooms and buildings should be maximised
- In addition to normal cleaning regimes, it is best practice to ensure frequent cleaning and disinfecting of objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using standard cleaning products, active against viruses and bacteria, particularly at the start and end of the day

- Employers should consider supporting workers with shopping by selling basic supplies on site or facilitating food deliveries. If workers need to travel off site to buy food and essentials, the Government guidance must be followed. It is best practice for employer-organised shopping trips to be managed in cohorts

### Managing new arrivals to stay in shared living accommodation

- Every effort should be made to secure single-occupancy accommodation for new workers. It is best practice for new arrivals to the accommodation to self-isolate for 14 days. They can start to work on site in accordance with social distancing guidance
- If single-occupancy accommodation is not possible, occupancy in each shared space should be as low as possible and organised in cohorts. Such cohorts should be as small as possible and kept separate from other cohorts
- New live-in worker cohorts should be kept separate from cohorts that are already on site
- Employers may choose to ask new workers to complete checking forms to confirm that they are not suffering from any symptoms of coronavirus. You can download the form [here](#)

### Managing new workers on site

Employers will need to plan how to integrate new workers to their existing workforce safely by applying social distancing measures and using cohorts to minimise contact between working groups. Best-practice approaches include:

- Businesses may choose to ask new workers to complete checking forms to confirm that they are not suffering from any symptoms of coronavirus before arrival. You can download the form [here](#)
- All new workers should receive health and safety training prior to starting work on site
- All new workers should receive training on **hand and respiratory hygiene**
- All new workers should receive training on the **social distancing guidance**
- All new workers should be clear on who to alert if they or a colleague start showing coronavirus symptoms
- All new workers should be clear on who to raise concerns with about health and safety provisions on site

### Managing the farm workplace

Government guidance on social distancing in the workplace can be found [here](#). The key principle is that workers should remain at least 2 metres apart from each other, wherever possible.

### Hygiene and social distancing

- Where practical, cohorts should work together at all times
- Consider people flow and ‘pinch points’ – one-way systems, staggered shifts, etc. are possible ways to minimise the risk of transmission.

- Consideration should be given to staff reception areas by screening, but still permitting, verbal communication with staff and employers
- Postage/document-transfer procedures should be considered, such as using transfer drawers to limit hand contact



Figure 2. Example screened reception area and transfer drawer

- Consider using floor and wall markers to indicate distances, including outside areas for social entertaining (eating, sport, recreation)



Figure 3. Social distancing in smoking area

- In enclosed spaces such as polytunnels, glasshouses and packhouses, increased ventilation should be considered, wherever possible
- Where it is not possible to follow the social distancing guidelines in full in relation to a particular activity, you should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to continue to operate, and, if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between staff

- If you decide work should continue, staff should work side by side or facing away from each other rather than face-to-face, if possible. Screens to divide workstations may also be used



Figure 4. Examples of methods used to screen workers with plastic sheeting. Other methods could include solid Plexiglas screens

- Employers may wish to use pictorial signage to communicate specific hygiene procedures. You can find an example [here](#)
- It is good practice to identify key ‘touch points’ (door handles, keypads, vending machines, etc.) and ensure these are regularly sanitised using sanitising agents that are certified as effective against enveloped viruses (EN 14476)
- Where practical, automatic door opening should be considered to prevent hand contact and contamination
- The use of additional PPE to any used in standard practice should be a last resort and guidance should be given to ensure colleagues are notified of the increasing risks with PPE if they use them at the expense of higher-risk control measures – “unwashed gloves are worse than regularly washed hands”
- Where possible, where social distancing cannot be maintained, essential, suitable PPE should be provided, with relevant training in its implementation, use and removal. Suitable systems should be put in place to keep the PPE clean and free of contamination

### Managing rest areas and canteens

It is very unlikely that coronavirus is transmitted through food. Workplace canteens may remain open, where there are no practical alternatives for staff to obtain food. It is best practice to risk-assess the use of canteen and rest areas. The following examples may be used to mitigate risks:

- Employers should ensure, as far as reasonably possible, a distance of 2 metres is maintained between users of rest areas and canteens. Consider removing some tables to enable social distancing in canteens
- Employers should, where possible, introduce staggered breaks for cohorts to minimise the amount of people using rest areas and canteens at the same time
- Employers should ensure that notices promoting hand hygiene and social distancing are placed visibly in rest areas and canteens

- Employers should, where possible, increase the number of hand-washing and sanitiser stations available in rest areas and canteens
- Where possible, promote the use of contactless technology for any payments and ensure that where canteen staff cannot maintain a 2 metres distance from workers (for example at serving hatches or tills) they are physically shielded (for example by a Perspex screen)
- Consider introducing a policy for the cleaning down of tables and collection of cutlery, condiments, etc. that takes account of social distancing. Consider removing shared condiments, e.g. salt and pepper holders

### Managing transport arrangements

Where employees are travelling to and from the workplace in private vehicles or using car pooling, employers are encouraged to remind them of **current government advice** (see section: ‘Use of private vehicles and car pooling’) on best practice.

Where employers are providing transport for employees between accommodation and the workplace, between different work settings, and for essential shopping purposes, please see the below best-practise suggestions:

- Where possible, daily self-reports of employees’ health should be undertaken before workers are transported to the site
- Within vehicles used for transport, ensure there is frequent cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces that are touched regularly, using standard cleaning products, ideally after each trip
- Where social distancing is not possible, and only where essential, cohorts may travel together
- Consider hand sanitiser or handwash stations being made available for use at the start and end of each journey
- Maximise ventilation
- Where shared transport is unavoidable, employers should minimise the number of workers in each vehicle by considering multiple trips with fewer persons and/or staggered starting and finishing times. Wherever possible, workers in shared transport should enter and exit the transport in a staggered way, not ‘squeezing past each other’, maintaining social distancing guidance
- If workers have to share enclosed spaces, such as the cabs of vehicles, wherever possible they should keep the window open for ventilation and they should be careful to avoid touching their faces at all times. On leaving the enclosed space, they should wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or more, or use hand sanitiser when they cannot wash their hands
- Anyone found to be unwell in transit should be taken off the shared transport, returned to their accommodation and supported to follow the stay-at-home guidance. If those travelling in the shared transport are also part of the symptomatic person’s cohort (household), they should also return and begin household isolation



- Posters can be put in the windows of minibuses, etc. to remind people of the hygiene rules
- Enabling contactless payment is recommended, wherever practical

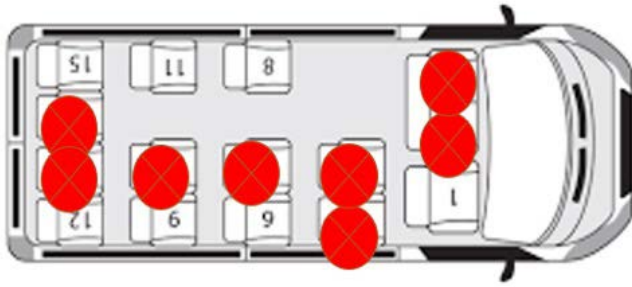


Figure 5. Example of a bus with reduced numbers of passengers – the seats coloured red should be left empty

### Minimising visitors

Actively minimise the number of external visitors to the workplace as far as possible. Social distancing and handwashing measures should be followed by any visitors, and employers may wish to use visitor checking forms to screen visitors before entry is granted. This is particularly important when external contractors and employees are picking up loads. You can find an example [here](#).

### Managing suspected symptoms

Workers that are suspected to have symptoms of coronavirus should self-isolate at home for least 7 days in a suitable environment, in line with government guidance.

If a worker with suspected symptoms lives on site and is part of a cohort that lives and works together, then the entire cohort will also need to self-isolate as a 'household' for a minimum of 14 days – for more information, visit: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance)

Employers will need to provide separate accommodation for workers that are self-isolating, recognising this decision will depend on the way that each farming business operates and whether they have cohorts in place.

It is best practice for employers who provide accommodation for their workers (either on or off-site) to have plans in place to support workers who are self-isolating with suspected symptoms of coronavirus. This should include ensuring regular contact is made and support provided with shopping, etc. where needed.

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