

Interim COVID-19 Recommendations for Preparedness and Response for Farmworker Health Programs

Updated: March 13, 2020

As part of statewide prevention efforts related to COVID-19, the North Carolina Farmworker Health Program in the Office of Rural Health, NC DHHS, has prepared recommendations below for farmworker health programs to incorporate into their outreach strategy immediately. These strategies are focused on prevention and preparation for potential cases affecting farmworkers. Additional recommendations may be released as the situation changes.

To reduce the risk and spread of COVID-19, we recommend continuously consulting the NC [DHHS recommendations](#) as circumstances are changing. See the recent press release on [COVID-19 Mitigation Guidance here](#).

Farmworkers are a special population that may face additional risks due to their working and living conditions:

- Farmworkers often live in large groups and in close conditions
- Many farmworkers arrive by bus and can face increased risk due to close proximity with a sick passenger
- Lack of access to resources can include lack of access to soap, hand sanitizer, etc.
- Lack of access to information could mean that farmworkers have not yet received the latest recommendations around COVID-19 prevention and awareness

Here are some steps that you can take now to prepare:

1. Download the [CDC app](#) on your phone for the latest updates
2. Bookmark websites on your computer that can help you stay up to date with current facts about the infection and your local situation:
 - ✓ For national info from the CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>
 - ✓ For state info from DHHS (available in Spanish) <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-response-north-carolina> (this site also links directly to all the county health department websites).
3. Provide educational material (in Spanish) to all farmworkers on COVID-19 mitigation and incorporate proper hand washing technique demonstration into health ed:
 - ✓ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs-sp.pdf>
 - ✓ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/COVID19-symptoms-sp.pdf>
4. Practice self-care during this stressful time and remind farmworkers to do the same (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/coping.html>)
5. Learn your host agency's emergency plans, policies and procedures for patients who have either symptoms or exposure to COVID-19 and follow their directives to keep yourself healthy.
6. Find your counties' Emergency Management Agency phone numbers on this website and save them in your phone. They may be able to advise you on local resources for specific farmworker needs. <https://www.ncdps.gov/Emergency-Management/EM-Community/Directories/Counties>

7. Plan how you and your team will contact each of your farmworker patients if needed to provide them with information about closures, emergency healthcare/quarantine/isolation facilities that may be opened in your area if the need arises.
8. Make sure to document follow up to any potential cases in your case management system i.e. patient well and staying, leaving, ill but ok to stay, ill and seeking care, etc. (for NCFHP funded sites, this can be done in the notes section in FCHASES).
9. Help farmworkers with chronic diseases keep an adequate supply of their usual medications so that they don't run out if they need to be in quarantine.
10. Consider contacting the county health department of one of the counties where you have substantial farmworker patients and asking if you can be at the emergency planning meetings to advise on farmworker specific issues. (One pressing and unique issue will be how to isolate COVID-19 infected farmworkers who are not sick enough to be in the hospital but live in group housing, and how to quarantine exposed but well farmworkers.)
11. Know your Migrant Youth Program and Migrant Head Start colleagues phone numbers if there are programs in your regions. If youth or children are affected, they may be able to help.

**Please remember that outreach staff are not expected to meet all of the patients' needs alone, nor to be first responders. The federal and state agencies as well as county health departments are preparing quickly to meet this health concern.

Proposed simple educational message for farmworkers on COVID-19 mitigation:

The symptoms of this infection are similar to a common cold and include sore throat, cough or fever. For a few people it may become pneumonia and cause shortness of breath. People at highest risk of pneumonia include those with diabetes or another chronic disease and those over the age of 65 years old. Smoking can also increase your risk.

Washing your hands for 20 seconds frequently, but especially before you eat is the most effective way to prevent becoming infected. Separating people with symptoms from people without symptoms is also very important to prevent the spread of this infection. Please call your outreach worker if you or your coworker have symptoms of sore throat, cough or fever.