



COVID-19: Staying Vigilant

Government plans to restart economic and social life across the country make it critical that egg farming businesses are prepared for the likelihood of an increase in COVID-19 infections.

As restrictions are eased across the country, medical experts are warning businesses to remain vigilant.

COVID-19 outbreaks in small clusters around Australia have demonstrated that new waves of infection are inevitable.

Incidents in Victoria at the Cedar Meats abattoir and a dozen McDonald's restaurants show the level of disruption that a single infected worker can cause. Meat industries in the US have also been crippled by COVID-19, with workers in 115 facilities across 19 states testing positive.

It is critical that egg farming businesses are not complacent. In short, egg farmers should run

their businesses as if there is still widespread community transmission of the virus occurring.

These guidelines are a practical resource for egg farms to check health and hygiene procedures, reconsider possibilities around space and close contact, and ask whether record keeping of staff movements is currently adequate.

It is intended as a point of reference for egg farmers and the suggested actions may need to be supplemented in some sites, or be challenging to implement in others.

Egg farming businesses are encouraged to use these guidelines to test the steps they have taken to prepare for the risk of broader community infection.

Health and hygiene

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It is very important that staff continue to frequently wash their hands with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds before and after activities such as changing tasks, going to the bathroom, and having morning tea. Doing this will kill the virus.

You should also encourage staff to practice other good hygiene measures such as sneezing or coughing into their sleeve or elbow, binning disposal tissues or cigarette butts immediately, and having no intentional physical contact such as shaking hands or patting backs.

The length of time the virus survives on surfaces will vary depending on factors such as the amount of contaminated body fluid (e.g. respiratory droplets) and temperature and humidity. Recent studies have shown the virus can survive for up to:

- 24 hours on cardboard
- 72 hours on stainless steel and plastic surfaces

Disinfectants such as chlorine-based products will kill the virus on most surfaces. However, in food or egg handling areas the recommendation is to use food grade disinfectants with properties suitable for killing *Salmonella* (see table on the next page).

Organic matter can inactivate detergents and will not always kill the virus effectively. It is therefore important to first remove any organic matter from a surface through mechanical cleaning, and then disinfect.



Routine environmental cleaning

Frequently touched surfaces

Including handles, doors, machinery, equipment and switches – should be cleaned whenever they are touched, or every 2 hours at a minimum.

Detergent wipes can be used but should not be substituted for the mechanical cleaning process.

Minimally touched surfaces

Including floors, walls, sinks, ceilings and fixtures – should be cleaned as soon as they become soiled.

Ideally, they would be cleaned at the end of each production day.

Use the table below as a guide for appropriate application of chemicals and concentrations.

The best advice from health authorities is that wearing gloves is only beneficial if they are used for a single task and discarded immediately after. A worker wearing the same pair of gloves for several hours is equivalent to wearing no gloves and not washing hands between tasks.

For floors, damp mopping is preferential to dry mopping.

Surface and/or Use	Conc. %	Rate of appl. L/m ²	Active Ingredients
General cleaning of surfaces <i>Note: Use products that 'foam'</i>	2% 2%	0.5-1.0 0.5-1.0	Benzalkonium chloride (10-30%) + Phosphoric acid (10-30%) Citric acid 10-15%, methansulphonic acids 2.5-5%, glycosides 2.5-5% <i>Detergents with disinfectant properties required for surfaces with Salmonella</i>
Egg handling areas; can be useful product for surfaces susceptible to corrosion	2%	0.5-1.0	Quaternary ammonium cpd. QUATs (100 g/L)
Footbaths, Shed entry			Quaternary ammonium cpd. QUATs (100 g/L) Oxidising disinfectants Iodine (16 g/L)
Poultry sheds, shed equipment and roadways	2%	0.4-1.0	Glutaraldehyde (150 g/L) + Quaternary ammonium cpd. QUATs (120 g/L) <i>Ensure workers have full face gas mask (similar to formaldehyde safety)</i>
Electrical leads/items			Alcohol wipe

Note: Ensure dilutions and application rates are according to labels for the inactivation of bacterium and virus.

* Higher application of GLUT is recommended on outside grounds and hard to clean areas, e.g. shed apron areas, drinker, feeders, side vents

Space and close contact

It is critical that physical distancing is enforced as much as possible. Maintain distances of 1.5m between workers, and avoid continuous contact or closeness between workers in an enclosed space wherever possible.

There remains some inconsistency in the definition of 'close contact', but it is generally anyone who has been within 1.5 meters of an infected person for a cumulative period of at least 2 hours at any time in the 24 hours prior to symptoms developing; and/or – an employee who has had face-to-face contact for a period of at least 15 minutes at any time in the 24 hours prior to symptoms developing.

In some egg grading facilities, it is simply not possible to follow physical distancing rules as the fixed lanes require workers to be in relatively close contact for long periods of time. In these situations, farms should consider alternative solutions to protect workers such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and protective screens used as dividers. If protective screens are installed, they should be:

- Clear for safety and visual communication
- Washable
- Durable enough to withstand regular cleaning
- Freestanding, or securely fixed to equipment
- Placed with consideration for WHS standards
- Tamper resistant



Source: Amco

In the event of a worker developing symptoms and getting tested for COVID-19, any close contacts will have to be quarantined until the test result is confirmed. For an egg grading floor, this would likely mean the farm would lose all close contacts of the infected worker in the previous 24-hour period.

Farms must consider their rosters and staff arrangements so key staff members are at lower risk of being stood down, and ideally, have reserve team members available who won't have had any exposure to keep the facility running.

Workplace awareness

Staff should be regularly updated on policies and procedures as they change. If physical meetings are required, hold these outdoors and maintain physical distancing where possible.

Have clear rules and procedures in place in the event of confirmed or suspected cases, and plan for the management of close contacts. To assist this, ensure staff report ANY signs, symptoms or close contacts with infected people outside of work.

Staff showing any COVID-19 symptoms are not to come to work until they have been tested and cleared by medical staff. Run drills and mock exercises to identify any gaps and reinforce processes to staff.

Display signs ([available here](#)) throughout all work areas and have information readily available for all staff.

Contact tracing

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If a worker tests positive to COVID-19, you will be asked by the state health authority to establish that worker's location during the period before they went into isolation. Importantly, an infected but pre-symptomatic person can be contagious for several days before anyone is aware.

You will have to work very quickly with health authorities to trace any close contacts of the infected person to minimise further risk of spread. Businesses will be asked to provide:

- A detailed list of personnel and contact information for each area or section, and different shifts (if there are multiple shifts)
- Previous rosters showing where the infected person may have been and who they had contact with
- An approximation of the level of contact that each person on the list had with the infected person e.g. 15 minutes face to face in the last 24 hours

The time frame for authorities to undertake contact tracing will depend on:

- The number of workers who have been in contact with the infected person
- How fast the business can provide the required information.

The level of disruption to your business will depend on the number of people who were in close contact with the infected person in the period prior to them testing positive, as well as your records of staff movements. This reinforces the need to enforce physical distancing wherever possible so exposure is minimised.

The Federal Government's COVIDSafe app helps find close contacts of COVID-19 cases. In the event of a worker testing positive, the app would allow health officials to quickly identify the people who may have been exposed.

However, this will not be possible for all egg farms as not all employees will be willing to install the app and not all employers allow staff to have their phones on them at work.



Cedar Meats

The cluster of COVID-19 cases linked to Melbourne abattoir Cedar Meats has grown to 100. Of those, two-thirds are staff and one-third are close contacts from the community.

While the original source of infection is still unknown and the business is the subject of a WorkSafe investigation, this much is understood:

- Two cases of COVID-19 were discovered at the facility in late April
- A risk assessment was undertaken and work was rapidly scaled back from 1 May, with only minimal staff allowed on site
- Two days later, the facility was then ordered to shut down, with all 350 staff considered close contacts and required to self-isolate
- Cedar Meats remained shut down for two weeks while deep cleaning was carried out

The COVID-19 prevention practices at Cedar Meats are still being investigated but VicHealth has not criticised their efforts. It is understood the facility had screening systems in place and was physically spacing workers apart as much as possible.

They also had twice daily disinfection procedures in place, as well as a policy to prevent staff turning up to work unwell.

The nature of the work means there is a limit on how far risks can be mitigated and some workers simply cannot avoid close contact. There is inevitably a higher risk of transmission in these situations.

The learnings for the egg industry are clear. People working on lines in a processing facility are difficult to protect because of the potential for close contact, so extra efforts are needed. Critically, teams have to be separated as much as possible to avoid a situation like this where 100 percent of the workforce is stood down.

McDonald's restaurants

12 McDonald's restaurants in the outer suburbs of Melbourne were forced to close because of their contact with a delivery driver from an external company.

The truck driver made deliveries to the 12 restaurants and interacted with a small number of restaurant employees on each occasion, while unaware that he had COVID-19.

Several hundred people who were on shift either when the driver made the delivery, or immediately after, were told to self-isolate and not return to work for 14-days. McDonald's was able to review CCTV footage to identify the restaurants that the delivery driver had visited while potentially asymptomatic. They also had detailed staffing records with the level of contact between workers and that allowed a very fast investigation.

The venues underwent thorough cleaning and were able to quickly reopen with staff from unaffected McDonald's restaurants.

The parallels between this case study and the egg industry are that workplace vigilance needs to extend beyond immediate employees. Contractors, delivery drivers and visitors can all transmit the virus and the collective risk to the egg industry is greatly increased in the case of companies that supply goods and services to multiple farms.

Whenever possible, delivery drivers should be asked to remain in the vehicle to minimise the risk of transmission. Farms should consider appointing a designated employee to deal with each contractor that comes on-site e.g. delivery drivers, maintenance workers, service providers.

Furthermore, entry on-farm should be limited to essential services only.

Hypothetical case study

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COVID-19 at an egg farm

Bob and Wendy run 40,000 free range hens on the NSW Mid North Coast and sell their eggs to a range of specialty grocers and cafes and restaurants. Their workers are a mix of permanent employees and temporary labour hire.

Some of the labour hire workers share a group house on the property. During a normal working day, one of the permanent employees, James, tells Wendy that he has a sore throat, feels feverish and lethargic, and suspects he could have COVID-19.

James assumed he had a cold until he was told that a friend he saw last weekend had been diagnosed with COVID-19. He decides to go and get tested and Wendy agrees that this is a good idea. She checks that he has his own transport to get him to a testing clinic in the nearest town and requests other staff to keep their distance while he collects his things and leaves.

Wendy calls her state health helpline for their advice.

Based on their advice, she decides to suspend all collection, grading and packing activities for the rest of the day, and after a staff briefing sends the labour workers back to the share house. Although the business is not required to suspend operations, Wendy is conscious that James worked in many different parts of the grading and packing facility prior to his symptoms emerging.

Because of his close contact with other workers, she decides to deep clean the facility and seek expert advice on how to handle the staff living in close quarters.

Wendy reviews her staff rosters to identify who worked with James in the previous 72 hours. She contacts those workers and follows the advice given to her by the health helpline to quarantine them.

Wendy uses food grade disinfectant to clean all areas of the grading floor, warehouse, office, kitchen and bathroom that James was likely in contact with. This includes machinery, equipment, door handles, taps, and cupboards. She wears gloves and a mask, and practices good hygiene while cleaning.

James' test result comes back negative, so it turns out he hadn't contracted the virus. The business experienced interruptions for a day but taking time to reset the workplace gave staff greater confidence to return the next day. The experience also gave Wendy time to review her WHS control measures and procedures.



Several states have produced detailed checklists to assist businesses prepare. This example checklist covers farms and collecting/grading/packing and is aimed at helping small to medium sized businesses document their protocols.

On-farm: administration

- **Keep staff informed** about coronavirus control strategies in place on the farm and update them as these change
- **Provide additional training** for employees in personal hygiene and food safety, including preventing the spread of disease
- **Keep detailed records** of all non-employee personnel coming onto the farm (visitors, service providers, truck drivers etc.)
- **Keep records** of employees in relation to their work team and roster and talk to them about travel to work and living arrangements. This information will enable traceback if necessary
- **Review the farm's access to supplies** and identify any supply chains that might be jeopardised due to national/state coronavirus restrictions
- Develop protocols:
 - In the event of a worker having a **confirmed or suspected case of coronavirus**
 - To social distance from truck drivers, service providers and any additional personnel allowed access onto the farm
 - To maintain social distance between customers and employees
 - To ensure tools, surfaces and equipment are adequately sanitised to prevent the spread of virus
 - for employees to safely and easily **report symptoms** to supervisors and managers

On-farm: production and common areas

- **There is signage** at the farm entrance that makes visitors aware of coronavirus requirements
- **Access to the farm is limited** so that only people/ service providers critical to business operation can come onto site
- **Handwashing facilities** are available, well stocked with soap and paper towel, and wastewater and towels are properly disposed of
- **Hand sanitiser** is available where handwashing facilities are not practical
- **Ample gloves and PPE** are on hand and made available to staff at every shift
 - Staff are made aware of the proper usage of gloves and facemasks
- Staff are provided with **refresher training** in personal hygiene and food safety, a record is kept of who received training
- **Posters** are put up in relevant locations reminding of **handwashing** technique and steps to be taken to **stop the spread of COVID-19**
- **Review**
 - **Cleaning regime** for sheds, shed entry areas and communal areas to ensure it is in keeping with COVID-19 advice
 - **How tools are used** in the sheds and on the farm, consider providing each employee with their own tools and ensure tools are properly cleaned after use
 - **How activities** inside the shed are carried out to ensure that employees can be at least 1.5m apart
 - **Shift and break schedules** to minimise the need for contact between employees at shift start, end and in break times
- Remove or move chairs in **common areas** to encourage employees to stay at least 1.5m apart

Grading & packing facilities

- ❑ **There is signage** at the entrance to the grading and packing facility that makes visitors aware of COVID-19 requirements
- ❑ **Handwashing facilities** are available and well stocked with soap and paper towel, and wastewater and towels are properly disposed of
- ❑ Hand sanitiser is available where handwashing facilities are not practical
- ❑ Ample gloves and PPE are on hand and made available to staff at every shift
- ❑ **Staff are made aware of the proper usage of gloves and facemasks**
- ❑ Staff are provided with **refresher training** in personal hygiene and food safety, a record is kept of who received training
- ❑ **Posters** are put up in relevant locations reminding of **handwashing** technique and steps to be taken to **stop the spread of COVID-19**
- ❑ **Activities and workflow are reviewed to:**
 - ➔ Minimise contact between employees
 - ➔ Minimise the need for employees to handle the same equipment
 - ➔ Maintain a distance between employees of 1.5m
- ❑ **Review shift and break schedules** to minimise the need for contact between employees at shift start, end and in break times
- ❑ **Review cleaning regime** for grading and packing facility to ensure it is in keeping with COVID-19 advice

STATE AND TERRITORY HEALTH DEPARTMENT HELPLINES

New South Wales
1300 066 055

Western Australia
(08) 6373 2222

Queensland
13 432 584

Tasmania
1800 671 738

Victoria
1800 675 398

Australian Capitol Territory
(02) 5124 9213

South Australia
1300 232 272

Northern Territory
(08) 8922 8044

