

OSHA and CDC Issue Interim Guidance on COVID-19 for Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers

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Meat processing and packing facilities around the United States have emerged as hotspots for COVID-19. While handling and processing meat and poultry does not expose workers to coronavirus, close contact with coworkers and supervisors may contribute to their potential exposures. A number of facilities have had to temporarily close down operations due to outbreaks of Coronavirus amongst the workforce which has led to several deaths. Many farms have reluctantly considered slaughtering their animals because of the lack of processing capacity. This has sounded the alarm of many in the industry that there could be a disruption to the meat supply.

To address these concerns, President Trump signed an [Executive Order](#) on April 28, 2020 invoking the Defense Production Act to classify meat processing plants as essential infrastructure that must remain open to avoid disruptions to the nation's food supply chains. The Order specifies that the government will determine and provide all necessary materials and services to keep such facilities open consistent with guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control ("CDC") and OSHA.

The [joint guidance](#) issued by CDC and OSHA on April 26, 2020 provides steps that meatpacking and meat processing workers and employers – including those involved in beef, pork and poultry operations – can take to provide a safe and healthy workplace for workers by reducing the risk of exposure to the coronavirus. While not creating new binding regulations that are enforceable against employers, it does provide helpful guidance for meat and poultry processors to limit the spread of COVID-19.

The interim guidance from OSHA and the CDC includes recommendations on the following:

- Cleaning of shared meatpacking and processing tools;
- Screening employees for the coronavirus before they enter work facilities;
- Managing workers who are showing symptoms of the coronavirus;
- Implementing appropriate engineering, administrative, and work practice controls;
- Using appropriate personal protective equipment; and

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- Practicing social distancing at the workplace.

The recommendations also call for designating a qualified workplace coordinator to be responsible for COVID-19 assessment and control planning. The coordinator should be identified as the contact person for any state/local health officials or OSHA/CDC. All workers in the facility should know how to contact the identified coordinator with any COVID-19 concerns. Facility management is encouraged to reach out to state and/or local public health officials and occupational safety and health professionals and establish ongoing communications to make sure they are getting relevant and up-to-date information concerning COVID-19.

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