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BCD 2022-13

To: Employers of migrant and seasonal workers, health care providers, local and tribal health officers

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Recommendations for COVID-19 Prevention and Mitigation Among Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers

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Background

During the last two years of COVID-19 pandemic, employers have taken measures to protect migrant and seasonal workers from COVID-19 through workplace safety enhancements and proactive testing. These measures have been critically important in reducing the risk of illness, particularly among migrant workers living in congregate housing. As migrant and seasonal workers arrive in Wisconsin this year, continuing these measures is important to ensuring the health and safety of the workforce.

This memo **updates and supersedes** recommendations outlined in DPH Numbered Memo BCD 2022-08 issued on June 3, 2022. The information below describes public health measures for employers to reduce the risk of COVID-19 among migrant and seasonal workers, including recommendations for prevention, screening, vaccination, and referral for treatment.

Recommendations

COVID-19 testing at arrival and departure

Any symptomatic employees should be immediately referred to a health care provider for COVID-19 testing. To further reduce risk, **employers should offer COVID-19 testing to all migrant and seasonal workers, regardless of symptoms, upon arrival to Wisconsin and prior to departure at the end of the season.** Migrant and seasonal workers who begin their employment mid-season should also receive COVID-19 testing before joining other workers. Testing is a critical tool that can identify workers who are minimally symptomatic or asymptomatic and prevent them from transmitting the virus to co-workers, people with whom they are traveling, and other community members. Employers are encouraged to partner with local health care providers for testing or refer workers to a [local community test site](#).

Employers who test all migrant and seasonal workers prior to departure are encouraged to work closely with medical providers and local health departments to assist in the management of workers diagnosed with COVID-19 and those with known exposures before leaving the work site. Accurate contact information that includes personal phone number and forwarding address for each employee should be collected and is essential for public health follow-up. Employers are encouraged to cover the costs associated with isolation in order to minimize public health risks. Individuals testing positive for COVID-19 should not use public or communal transportation such as vans, buses or airplanes during their isolation periods.

Recommended practices to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace

All employers should have a plan for:

- Notifying staff that have been exposed to COVID-19 so they may make their own risk assessments and take precautions such as mask-wearing and testing.
- Preventing COVID-19 transmission at the worksite, including implementing masking policies based on [CDC Community levels](#) in the county of business.
- Taking appropriate actions if any workers are diagnosed with COVID-19, including plans for isolation and reporting cases of COVID-19 to the local health department.

COVID-19 vaccination

Vaccination against COVID-19 is the most effective measure for preventing severe illness. Employers are encouraged to partner with healthcare providers or local health departments to ensure workers are [up to date](#) with recommended vaccines. **Note:** CDC may update vaccination guidance in 2022; employers are encouraged to work closely with healthcare providers to ensure workers remain up to date if recommendations change.

Connecting COVID-positive workers to treatment

Since March 2022, oral medications for the treatment of COVID-19 have become widely available. COVID-19 oral antivirals are pills taken by mouth at home after someone has tested positive for COVID-19. They help the body fight off the virus that causes COVID-19 and reduce serious symptoms that can lead to hospitalization and death. These treatments must be started within 5 days of symptom onset.

A prescription is required for COVID-19 oral antiviral pills, and they are widely available [throughout the state](#) at retail pharmacies, health systems, community health clinics and at Test to Treat sites. Employers are encouraged to work with healthcare providers and local public health departments to ensure any worker who tests positive for COVID-19 and is at [risk for severe illness](#) is promptly referred for clinical evaluation and treatment if appropriate.

Employer resources

In addition to local public health departments, employers can also contact the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Occupational Health and Safety Surveillance Program with questions. Employers wanting a confidential consultation can contact the WisCon program at the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene. Commit To Care is a national initiative with training resources for employers on reducing

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COVID-19 risks. [The National Center for Farmworker Health](#) has resources for both employers and workers.