Introduction & Basic Information on the SARS-CoV-2 Virus that causes COVID-19

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Introduction

As New York State, municipalities and businesses start to consider reopening, greenhouse operations, retail greenhouses and landscape operations need to create plans to fulfill the requirements of safe operation to protect themselves, their employees and their customers.

This document provides some suggestions for recommended practices and strategies to protect your workers and customers. We know that NYS has a wide variety of sizes and types of ornamental greenhouse, nursery, garden center and landscape operations so not all practices listed here have to be tailored to each operation. We hope you can find helpful practices here to allow you to continue operations while staying safe.

These Best Management Practices (BMPs) are based on the New York Forward process and its requirements for reopening of businesses. For more information on how regions reopen and the phases of reopening, please see: NY Forward Plan.

As part of this process:

Each business and industry must have a plan to protect employees and consumers, make the physical work space safer and implement processes that lower risk of infection in the business.
In developing these plans, businesses will need to consider three main factors:

- protections for employees and customers.
- changes to the physical workspace
- implementing processes that meet changing public health obligations

**Basic Information on the SARS-CoV-2 Virus and COVID-19**

- Effects of the virus range from no observable symptoms to severe symptoms and everyone is at risk of contracting COVID-19
- Symptoms include: loss of taste or smell, sore throat, headache, fever, chills, muscle pain, cough, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, or diarrhea?
- It is primarily transmitted person-to-person through respiratory droplets that are released when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks, even if they show no symptoms.
- Droplets can also be deposited on surfaces and transferred by touching the nose, eyes or mouth after touching those surfaces
- The virus can persist on some types of surfaces for 24-72 hours (van Doremalen et al, 2020), although it is unstable outside of the host.
- The CDC has determined that staying 6 feet apart reduces the risk of person-to-person transmission.
- There is no evidence that the virus can be transmitted on plants or plant products
- The best methods of preventing infection are to distance yourself from others, wear a protective face covering that covers your nose and mouth, avoid touching your face, wash or sanitize your hands, and sanitize frequently touched surfaces.
  - Hand washing – soap and water for at least 20 seconds
  - Hand sanitizer – at least 60% alcohol or 70% isopropanol

**Resources**

- [Cornell Institute for Food Safety Background info on COVID-19](https://www.cornell.edu/extension/food-safety/coronavirus)
Communication

• Create a communication plan to keep all employees aware of changes in guidance and at your operation and identify personnel with responsibility to implement the plan
  - Determine which method of communication works best for your employees – text, email, phone, pictorial, etc.
  - Communication for employees must be in culturally appropriate languages (see Resources)
  - Encourage input from employees – concerns, ideas, and feedback
  - Create a plan for continued operation if employees become ill
  - Cross train employees for essential operations
  - Eliminate face-to-face meetings if possible, maintain distancing and use face coverings for any meeting that must occur
  - Create a plan for disinfection and contact tracing if a positive case is identified.
• Document the plan, how it is implemented, and any issues with compliance (employee or customer)
• Frequently review federal, state and local guidance for businesses in the time of COVID-19 (see Resources)
• Post the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) notice
• Train all employees in COVID-19 risk and spread, expectations and requirements (see Resources)
  - Importance of staying home if ill, distancing, use of face coverings, hand washing/sanitizing, and not touching the face
  - How to wear, handle and dispose of face coverings
  - Appropriate hand washing techniques
  - Appropriate use and disposal of gloves
  - Appropriate laundering of work clothes so as not to transfer the virus at home
  - Verify/document employee training
• Create and post a written standard operating procedure (SOP) for sanitizing surfaces and for employee behavior (see Resources)
• Determine your plan for customers that do not follow stated protocols and train employees in how to deal with these situations
Sanitizing Protocols

- Identify all surfaces in your operation that could be touched by employees or the public and create a plan for sanitizing them – how often, with what, and who is responsible
  - This includes easily forgotten surfaces like light switches, hose handles and faucets, vending machine, lockers
  - Remove any high touch surfaces that can be removed – for example, seating for customers
  - Exchange any with porous surfaces, like wood, with non-porous surfaces or coverings which are more easily sanitized, where possible
  - Frequency of sanitation should be relative to the use of the facilities and the number of people working/shopping there
  - Review checklist for frequently touched surfaces in Resources

- Maintain a log of cleaning/sanitizing – date, time, what was done, who.
- Know the difference between cleaning and sanitizing/disinfecting
  - Produce Safety Alliance: Cleaning vs. Sanitizing
- Sources of hand sanitizer are listed in Resources
- Place disinfectants like hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes or spray, etc. at entrances/exits, cart areas, checkout areas, workstations, restrooms, where equipment/tools might be shared, etc. to encourage public and employee use.
- If possible, assign tools to individual workers to limit cross-contact
- Equip all bathrooms with soap or touch-free soap dispensers, water, and paper towels or hand dryers (no cloth towels)
  - Encourage employees to use soap and water (washing for 20 seconds) instead of hand sanitizer
  - Consider installing hand washing stations in additional locations in the operation (see Resources)
- For disinfecting non-porous surfaces, use only products that are included on the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation approved list (or those specific to your state, or on the EPA N list if no state requirements exist)
  - New York State Registered Disinfectants Based on EPA List
  - EPA’s List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)
  - Remember! These products are for use on surfaces and NOT on humans or plants
- Install step-on or pedal trashcans to reduce handling of trash can lids
- Where doors can safely be left open, leave them open to reduce touching of handles/knobs
Employee Health and Safety Measures

• Check employees’ health at the beginning of every work day/shift

• Employers may:
  ◆ Ask an employee if they have fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, muscle pain, or other influenza-like symptoms. All information must be kept confidential.
  ◆ Send an employee home if they have any of these symptoms.
  ◆ Take an employee’s temperature with a no-contact thermometer. Information must be kept confidential.
  ◆ Require employees to wear personal protective equipment and adopt infection-control practices
  ◆ See Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) information and checklists in Resource list

• Inquire of employees that call in sick or leave work because of illness if they have COVID-19-like symptoms.

• Require all employees to wear face coverings when interacting with other employees or the public if not able to maintain the 6 foot distancing at all times. If wearing a face covering is not possible, the 6 foot distancing must be maintained.
  ◆ Executive Order 202.16 (effective 4.15.20) states: For all essential businesses or entities, any employees who are present in the workplace shall be provided and shall wear face coverings when in direct contact with customers or members of the public. Businesses must provide, at their expense, such face coverings for their employees.

• Evaluate and inventory personal protective equipment, sanitizers, and cleaning products so as not to run out (See Resources for information on face coverings and hand sanitizer)

• Evaluate employee jobs to determine which require more than one person to be in close proximity (i.e. distancing is not possible) and determine if anything can be done to limit interaction – if not, then wear face coverings

• If teams are necessary, group crews by social groups/family, common transportation, and/or common housing so that any potential virus spread is within a team rather than across all teams.

• Organize work areas, work hours and work shifts to minimize number of people in an area at one time, whenever possible

• Consider hiring additional employees or dedicating employees to take care of sanitizing and cleaning frequently touched surfaces between shifts

• If doing deliveries, consider having only one person in the vehicle, or wearing face coverings and/or installing clear removable barriers in vehicles (if possible to do so safely), use hand sanitizers, and sanitize frequently touched surfaces between trips.

• If transporting workers, limit number of people in the vehicle and run more frequently or more vehicles, wear face coverings and use hand sanitizers, and sanitize frequently touched surfaces between trips.
• Mark employee workstations with tape or install dividers to help them keep 6 feet apart
• Put up signs to remind employees of requirements (distancing, avoid touching face, face covering and glove use, handwashing protocols) and to announce changes in policy/guidance
  ◆ Signs should be in multiple places – entry/exit doors, bathroom doors, break rooms, information posting sites, etc.
  ◆ Other places where signage might be important – for delivery people coming in to the operation
  ◆ To limit access of visitors to production areas
• Put limits on areas where employees gather – such as break or lunch rooms
  ◆ remove and spread out tables and chairs to accommodate proper distancing
  ◆ consider opening outdoor spaces for this purpose
  ◆ divide up break times into multiple shifts
  ◆ institute rules as to how many can gather at one time, how they should distance themselves, etc.
• Any positive tests for COVID-19 must be reported to state and local health departments.
• Delivery – reduce number of people going in and out of trucks
• Employee housing information is found in Resources

For Landscape Operations

• Limit the number of employees in a vehicle or require face coverings if there is more than one employee in a vehicle
  ◆ Check insurance to see if employees are allowed to use personal vehicles to reach job sites if you are requiring limited numbers of employees in each vehicle
  ◆ Install clear removable barriers between employees in trucks, if possible to do so safely
• Keep sanitizing products in trucks and clean surfaces like steering wheels, shift levers, radio buttons, door handles and tools frequently
• Provide a closeable container for used tissues, gloves or other soiled items
• Do not go into stores, client facilities or homes while working at a job site
• See additional suggestions for Landscape Operations in Resources

Customer Health and Safety Measures

Making sure customers feel safe at your operation is essential to your business success. You can communicate how you will do this through your website, advertising and social media or signage once they arrive at your business.

• Communicate what your operation is doing relative to COVID 19 and the changes your customers should expect through social media, website, signage, and other means.
  ◆ Share your plans for disinfection, social distancing, and employee use of face coverings
  ◆ Clearly state hours of operation and any alternative sales methods (online ordering, curbside pickup, etc.)
• Cloth face coverings for customers are required:
  ◆ In NYS, anyone over age 2 who can medically tolerate a cloth face covering must cover their nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face covering when in a public place and unable to maintain social distance
- Will you provide face coverings for customers if needed? Will you turn away customers if they do not have face coverings? Decide in advance what your policies will be, and clearly communicate them.

- **Customer flow**
  - As much as possible, create one-way flow patterns around the operation, particularly where interaction of people going opposite directions is likely (for example, entry/exit)
  - Post signage or a map of the operation showing where different products are to make shopping faster for customers
  - Use things like moveable benches and tape/paint directions on floors to show the flow pattern
  - Remove or rearrange as many tables/benches as possible to allow customers to stay 6 feet apart, while still providing easy access to product
  - Determine if you will restrict public access to certain parts of the operation. This could include restrooms, production areas, etc.
  - Plan for extra employee time to manage customer flow

- Limit the number of customers allowed in operation at one time, based on the size and layout of your operation, so that social distancing can be maintained.
  - The number of people might be based on the number of aisles in the operation, how long/wide they are relative to the 6 foot distance requirement, the size of spaces where customers congregate, etc.
  - Your plan should include customers who are waiting to enter. Should they stay in their cars, can you label 6 foot spacing in outdoor waiting areas, etc.
  - Can you have shopping times by appointment?
  - Would you have specific hours for customers most vulnerable to infection? If so, how will you enforce?
  - If visitors are allowed in your production areas, consider allowing them in only by appointment or explain the distancing/face covering/sanitation requirements for their visits
  - Even if sales are outdoor, the 6 foot distancing rule still applies. Encourage customers not to gather or linger in any area.
• Post health and hygiene signage (see Resources for printable signage)
  ◆ On entry doors
  ◆ Throughout public areas
  ◆ At restrooms
  ◆ At checkout

• Provide hand sanitizing materials at entry and exit, at checkout, and any other place that surfaces may be frequently contacted (cart areas, etc.)

• Check out
  ◆ Use contactless payment methods (credit cards, tap to pay, electronic payments) or checks to limit handling cash.
  ◆ Sanitize payment machines, pens, check out surfaces frequently

• Mark 6 foot spacing at check out or other places that customers might gather. Install barriers or ‘sneeze guards’ to protect employees at check out. Evaluate how to limit employee and customer interaction when placing product at the checkout bench/table.

• Have clearly designated areas – and procedures - for pick-up
• Cancel/postpone any activities or events that involve groups of people at or in your operation
• Provide boxes, etc. to prevent use of reusable bags/boxes/totes brought in by customers
• Information on alternatives to opening retail operations is available in Resources

**For Landscape Operations**

• Arrange all communication, payment, etc. before going to a job to prevent interaction between employees and customers
• If turning on or off an irrigation system requires entering a home, consider teaching the homeowner to do it
• See additional suggestions for Landscape Operations in Resources
Resources & References

Resources

Governmental Information

New York State
- Information on Novel Coronavirus – updated frequently
- Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection for COVID-19 for Retail Stores
- NYS Registered Disinfectants Based on EPA List
- Empire State Development: ESD COVID-19 Related Resources
- NYS Interim Guidance Requiring Face Coverings in Public During the COVID-19 Outbreak
- County Health Office links
- Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019
- Interim Recommendations for Cleaning and Disinfecting Facilities with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019
- Prepare Your Small Business and Employees for the Effects of COVID-19
- Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019

OSHA
- Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19
- COVID-19 Guidance for Retail Workers
- COVID-19 Guidance for the Manufacturing Industry Workforce (for greenhouse and nursery production)

US Department of Labor
- Guidance for Preparing Workplaces for Coronavirus (wages and hours, unemployment flexibility, etc.)

US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Coronavirus and COVID-19 (ADA, Rehabilitation Act, EEO laws, etc.)

COVID-19 Requirements and Guidance for States other than New York
- Nursery and Landscape Association of North America
- National Association of Landscape Professionals

Dealing with Employees with COVID-19 Symptoms or Tested for COVID-19
- Institute for Food Safety at Cornell University: Cornell Developed Templates & Trainings
  - Decision Trees (English & Spanish) (for when an employee is tested for or develops symptoms of Covid-19)
  - Symptoms Checklist (English & Spanish) (for Screening Employees and Visitors)
  - Standard Operating Procedures (for actions when an worker is tested for and/or test positive for Covid-19)
- EEOC information on pandemic preparation in the workplace
Signage
- NYS Department of Health
- Center of Disease Control (CDC)

Protect yourself from COVID-19 and stop the spread of germs.

Simple steps help stop the spread of COVID-19 and other viruses:
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before eating.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Stay up to date by visiting www.ny.gov/coronavirus

Signage, Videos, and Other Resources in Spanish and Other Languages
- Recursos para Trabajadores Agrícolas (Face covering information in Spanish)
- Cornell Farmworker Program COVID-19 Resources
- CDC signage in a variety of languages

Personal Protective Equipment, Hand Sanitizer and Other Information on Health and Safety
- How to Remove Gloves
- Face Covering Do’s and Don’ts
- CDC Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19
- Resources for finding hand sanitizer from the American Craft Spirits Association and Distilled Spirits Council
  - Entities in Need of Hand Sanitizer (use this link if you need hand sanitizers and/or surface disinfectants)
  - Distilleries Making Hand Sanitizer to Fight COVID-19
- Institute for Food Safety at Cornell University: Cornell Developed Templates & Trainings, Frequently Touched Surfaces Checklist (English & Spanish)
  - Safely Transporting Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic
  - Build Your Own Portable Handwashing Station for Under $20
  - Cornell Cooperative Extension Offices by County (may have hand sanitizer or face coverings to donate)
Employee Housing

- Virtual Housing Inspection
- Alternative Housing
- Guidelines from North Carolina

Additional Information for Landscape Operations

- NYS Nursery and Landscape Association
- Long Island Nursery and Landscape Association

Information on Alternatives to Retail Marketing

- Cornell Small Farms Program – Using On-line Marketing to Build Resistance
- Setting Up Online Sales with Touchless Transactions (platforms, considerations, etc.)
- Consumer Messaging and Online Sales in Response to COVID 19
- GreenProfit articles
  - A Checklist of Ideas for Retail
  - Marketing Munchies from Dr. Bridget Behe
- e-GRO Webinar on Retail Strategies
- Tips on Managing Your Brand and Your Team in a Crisis
- On-line Plant Education and Sales
- A Guide for Local Producers to Navigate the COVID-19 Outbreak
- MSU Garden Center Retail Survival Strategy Series
  - Overcoming Challenges with a Holistic Approach
  - Communicating in Extraordinary Times
  - Marketing and Merchandizing
  - Thinking Through the Shopping Experience
  - Garden Retail Strategies to Sell in the Current Environment
- No-contact Sales Webinar
- Creating an On-line Business
- On-line Ordering
- Mobile Payment Options
  - Top 7 Mobile Payment Options You Should Provide
  - 14 Ways to Accept Mobile Payments

References

1. **Purpose:** Describes how food contact surfaces, tools, and equipment are to be cleaned and sanitized.

2. **Scope:** Applies to farm and packinghouse personnel including farm owners and workers.

3. **Responsibility:** Workers are responsible for following the SOPs to properly clean and sanitize food contact surfaces.

   Farm owners and food safety managers are responsible for training the workers on proper technique, providing necessary resources such as tools, detergents and sanitizers, and making sure the cleaning and sanitizing steps are followed correctly.

4. **Materials**
   - Detergent name, brand, and concentration (labeled for use on food contact surfaces) *Provide name here*
   - Sanitizer name, brand, and concentration *Provide name here*
   - Container(s) as needed for mixing and using detergent(s) and sanitizer(s) or for washing tools
   - Brushes, sponges, or towels for scrubbing tools and equipment
   - Clean water (microbial equivalent to drinking water)

5. **Procedure**
   - The surface should be brushed or rinsed to remove visible dirt and debris.
   - Prepare the detergent *Add detergent mixing or preparation instructions here*.
   - Apply the prepared detergent solution and scrub the surfaces moving in the direction top to bottom for large pieces of equipment. Detergent should be mixed according to the product instructions.
   - Rinse the surface with clean water until all soap suds are rinsed away moving in the direction top to bottom for large pieces of equipment.
   - Prepare the sanitizer. *Add sanitizer mixing or preparation instructions here*.
   - Apply the prepared sanitizer solution. Allow it to sit for *Enter number of minutes according to product instructions* minutes.
   - Rinse with clean water.
   - Let the surface air dry.
Appendix 2

Sample SOP: For Employee Safety, Distancing, and Personal Protective Equipment Usage

Adapted from NYS Nursery Landscape Association, Covid-19 Re-Opening Horticulture & Landscape Construction Business Guidelines & BMPs

Employees Must:

• Avoid touching their face, especially their eyes, nose, and mouth
• Find alternatives to physical greetings; no shaking hands or hugging
• Frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before and after eating or using the restroom, or if working in areas with frequent contact with others, like check-out areas
• If soap and water are not available, use approved alcohol-based hand sanitizer
• Wear face coverings whenever possible especially when interacting with others
• Sneeze or cough into a tissue and discard it into a closed container, then wash or sanitize hands
• Maintain a safe distance of at least 6 feet from other people
• Monitor themselves for symptoms (fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat or other influenza-like symptoms) and not come to work, or leave work, if they feel ill

This document last updated June 10, 2020.