

# Interim Recommendations for the Food Processing Industry

April 3, 2020

## COVID-19 preventive measures in the workplace

These measures will be adapted according to the epidemiologic situation in each region

In order to protect the health of employees and of those who come into contact with the workplace, employers and workers are asked to:

1. Respect the guidelines given to workers who are in mandatory isolation.
2. Advise workers that they **must not show up to work** if they present symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, respiratory problems or other symptoms that may eventually be added to the list at the following website: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/answers-questions-coronavirus-covid19/#c46790>. Screen workers before their entry into the factory in order to exclude those presenting symptoms from the workplace.
  - a. If a worker starts experiencing symptoms at work, have a procedure that allows for them to be isolated in a separate room or have them wear a procedural (or surgical) mask. Call 1-877-644-4545.
3. Promote **hand hygiene** by making necessary material available to workers (running water, soap, hydro-alcoholic solutions, contact-free garbage bins, disposable towels or paper, etc.).
4. Promote proper **respiratory etiquette** (cough in the bent elbow or in a tissue that is immediately discarded after use, then wash hands as soon as possible).
5. Respect **social distancing** guidelines (e.g. telecommuting, physical barriers), and where possible, avoid direct physical contacts (e.g. doorknobs, hugs, handshakes). Coming across someone for a few minutes does not represent a risk (e.g. in the staircase or in the hallway).

### Pay particular attention to the following situations:

- a. Areas conducive to creating **bottlenecks** (e.g. entry to production areas, to the cafeteria, areas housing timestamping devices, etc.):
  - Avoid line-ups in these areas;
  - If needed, slightly displace shift schedules and work breaks.
- b. **Meal periods:**
  - Ensure rigorous handwashing before and after meals;
  - Have workers eat in rooms that are large enough so that individuals can sit more than two meters apart or plan to add more rooms;
  - If no other room is available, arrange meal period schedules so as to have a limited number of workers in the same room at any given time.

- Do not share cups, glasses, plates, utensils; wash dishes in hot water, with soap.

c. **Breaks:**

- Make sure that social distancing measures are applied during breaks (e.g. avoid gatherings);
- Avoid the sharing of objects (e.g. cigarettes, pencils, pens, coins, bills);
- Remove non-essential objects (newspapers, magazines, ornaments, trinkets) from common areas.

6. For tasks where it is impossible to maintain a distance of two meters at all times, **adjustments** must be made:

- Strictly enforce the exclusion of individuals from the workplace if they present cough or fever or respiratory problems or other symptoms that may eventually be added to the list at the following website:  
<https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/answers-questions-coronavirus-covid19/#c46790>;
- Work teams on the same production line should be kept as small and as stable as possible (reduce the number of workers and reduce task rotation) to avoid multiplying worker interactions;
- Maintain, as much as possible, the same position on the production line throughout a shift, unless there are physical, chemical or ergonomic constraints or risks;
- Avoid the sharing of material and equipment (knives, tablets, pencils, cellphones, etc.).

**In addition, for production lines**

- Make the necessary arrangements to respect the **mandatory distance of two meters** between workers:
  - Decrease production
  - Redesign spaces
  - Modify work methods<sup>1</sup>
- Install physical barriers between workers when the two-meter distance cannot be respected (e.g. Plexiglas).
- Until aforementioned measures are in place or if it is impossible to implement them,
  - Procedural masks and protective glasses (protective eyewear) are recommended in addition to the gloves usually worn, when possible. Visors covering the face including the chin could be an alternative replacement to procedural masks and protective glasses (protective eyewear).
    - This measure is only recommended if wearing glasses or a visor does not present a safety risk (e.g. problems with diffraction of light)
  - The use of individual protective equipment is only a temporary measure, pending the implementation of permanent measures of social distancing and physical separation, which should be put in place as rapidly as possible.
  - Before exiting the production zone:
    - Safely<sup>2</sup> remove gloves, protective glasses (protective eyewear) and the procedural (surgical) mask and put them in the garbage or other bins or resealable bags reserved for this purpose, then throw them away.

---

<sup>1</sup> Modifications should not create new physical, chemical or ergonomic risks.

<sup>2</sup> Remove gloves, wash hands with a hydro-alcoholic solution, remove protective eyewear, wash hands with a hydro-alcoholic solution, remove mask handling it only by its elastics or straps, and finish by washing hands with soap and water or with a hydro-alcoholic solution.

- Disinfect reusable equipment (e.g. protective eyewear or visor, if reusable) with a product suitable for that equipment.
- Ensure that hands are washed or that a hydro-alcoholic solution is used after the removal of the equipment.
- For **production lines** where tasks already require **the use of respiratory protective devices** against dust and aerosols, workers are considered to be protected even if working within less than two meters from each other. Nevertheless, the following measures must be applied:
  - The use of respiratory protective devices must be managed within the framework of a respiratory protection program and tests to evaluate seal integrity must be performed.
  - Add protective glasses (protective eyewear) if they are not already worn.
  - When exiting the production zone, safely<sup>3</sup> remove gloves, protective glasses (protective eyewear) and the respiratory protective device and place non-reusable equipment in the garbage or in bins or resealable bags reserved for that purpose, then throw them away.
  - Disinfect reusable equipment (e.g. protective eyewear, reusable mask) with a product suitable for that equipment.
  - Ensure that hands are washed or that a hydro-alcoholic solution is used after the removal of equipment.

**For the handling (reception and expedition) of merchandise:**

- Ensure the stability of work teams that come into contact with staff arriving from outside the company (e.g. delivery staff, truck drivers, etc.);
- Ideally, arrange for delivery staff and suppliers to leave merchandise at the company entrance so as to avoid the comings and goings of workers from other companies in building areas;
- Leave merchandise on a clean surface, while respecting a two-meter distance between individuals;
- Keep handling operations separate from other company activities, where possible.

**For the transmission or signing of documents:**

Where possible, limit the exchange of physical documents (e.g. favour electronic signatures for contracts and delivery slips).

When physical documents are required:

- Place documents on a clean surface when transmitting and recuperating them, while maintaining a two-meter distance between individuals;
- Do not share pens with contacts, who must use their own pen;
- Foresee extra pens that can be left with clients;
- If your pen is dirty, clean it with a damp cloth and mild soap;
- When recuperating documents, place them in an envelope and carry them in a folder or document holder.

---

<sup>3</sup> Remove gloves, wash hands with a hydro-alcoholic solution, remove protective eyewear, wash hands with a hydro-alcoholic solution, remove mask by its elastics without touching the paper, and finish by washing hands with a hydro-alcoholic solution.

7. Disinfect **dining rooms** after each meal, and **sanitary facilities (and locker or changing rooms)** on every work shift with the usual disinfecting product.
8. Clean **frequently touched areas** (tables, counters, doorknobs, phones, computer accessories, pens, etc.) on every work shift or whenever there is a change in the person using the area, with the usual disinfecting product.
  - a. **For production lines**, respect usual hygiene and food safety recommendations of the Québec Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPAQ). Pay particular attention to:
    - Hand controls on production lines (e.g. levers, handles, buttons);
    - Tools and other devices handled in the context of production activities.
    - For more information:  
[https://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Avis\\_publicite/English\\_Questions-ReponseclientelesMAPAQ.pdf](https://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Avis_publicite/English_Questions-ReponseclientelesMAPAQ.pdf)
  - b. **For merchandise handling activities** (reception and expedition), pay particular attention to manual controls on forklifts and handles of pallet trucks.
9. Remove work clothes at the end of the work shift. Proceed with cleaning according to usual procedures.
10. Have a pandemics contingency plan that is adapted to your workplace and see to its implementation (<https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/en/document-000969/>)
  - \* For recommendations relating to foreign agricultural workers, refer to the document “Recommandations de santé publique qui doivent être appliquées pour l’accueil de travailleurs étrangers temporaires (TET) afin de soutenir les activités agroalimentaires au Québec en contexte de pandémie COVID-19”.

**Note:** The above recommendations are based on the information available at the time of their drafting. Given that the situation and knowledge on the SARS-CoV-2 virus (covid-19) are evolving rapidly, these recommendations are subject to change.

## Interim Recommendations for the Food Processing Industry

### **AUTHOR**

SAT-COVID-19 Working Group  
Institut national de santé publique du Québec

### **LAYOUT**

Anouk Sugàr, administrative agent  
Direction du développement des individus et des communautés  
Institut national de santé publique du Québec

© Gouvernement du Québec (2020)