KEY PRINCIPLES TO CONTROL RISK

Version 1, 7 April 2020

This document has been prepared by the Farm Safety Technical Panel

Protecting the people with a high probability of serious health outcomes

With COVID-19 all age groups can be infected, become sick, have severe disease, and die. It is clear that the risk of a serious health outcome increases sharply in older people and people with pre-existing health conditions. **Reassign work so that these people have minimal or no contact with others.**

Preventing spread on farm

The COVID-19 disease is highly contagious. The virus enters the body through the mouth, nose or eyes. It spreads from breath and through coughing in addition to virus shedding through skin onto surfaces. It is a sticky virus that can survive on contaminated surfaces, for at least several days.

Everyone is susceptible. Many people will become infected. Signs don't show for 2-14 days. More than 80% of spread so far has happened from people shedding the virus **before** they have the signs of illness. **This means we all have to behave as if anyone who is not in total isolation COULD be shedding the virus.**

The virus can be killed relatively easily with detergents and disinfectants. Surfaces need to be cleaned with soap and water, alcohol, detergents or disinfectants or quarantined for 7 days.

The best way to 'break the chain' of spread is to:

Prevent contact between people:
- Control who enters the farm
- Design workflow for zero contact
- Physical distance as far apart as practicable. This is an airborne disease - people have caught COVID-19 in shared spaces, such workplaces, public transport or vehicles. The Health Department advises at least 1.5 metres, though more is better. This virus can live suspended in the air for several hours. Maximising fresh ventilation and avoiding shared enclosed spaces is also important.

Prevent contact with contaminated surfaces:
- Anything coming onto the farm should be quarantined for 7 days or disinfected
- Work out which things on-farm are only touched by one person.
- Surfaces used by multiple people must be cleaned and disinfected between each person's use
- Wash hands often (20 seconds, soap and running water or use sanitisers) and wear gloves

Protect from high-risk situations:
- Ensure that workers stay away if they are sick
- Only have people come onto the farm for essential work
- Work remotely and electronically where possible
- Protect older (60+ years) and vulnerable workers (e.g. smokers or people with pre-existing health conditions) who are at greater risk of severe illness and death. You can do this by changing where they work or the work they do. Where possible, select an isolation strategy for older and vulnerable workers

Managing health and safety during these times

In a pandemic situation, it is reasonable to expect that OHS/WHS obligations placed on the employer and the employee will include complying with all current public health advice and any emergency measures.

These OHS/WHS obligations include:

- A farm owner/employer to provide and maintain a safe working environment for everyone who visits and/or works on the farm and to consult and provide, information,

instruction, training and supervision to ensure that this occurs.
- Workers, supply chain, contractors and others (family/visitors) to work safely, not only for themselves but to not put others at risk
- Everyone to consult and cooperate at all times with what the farmer has put in place to stop the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

The way we do this:
The global state of knowledge about COVID-19 is evolving daily. Preventing exposure on a dairy farm requires appropriate daily actions and adjustments as this is where our personal, home, workplace and community life connect.

How do we do this?
- When preparing for work on the farm, from a health and safety perspective we apply the following risk management principles:
- Identify hazards
- Assess risks
- Select appropriate controls based on the Hierarchy of Controls so far as is Reasonably Practicable
- Implement the controls
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of the controls

Concept: So far as is Reasonably Practicable - in relation to COVID19
Firstly, work through what you know about the hazard - how it is transmitted, consequences and risk to human life. For example, do you have vulnerable people on your farm?

Then assess what you know about controls. How suitable and available are they?

Hierarchy of Controls Principles:
Australian OHS/WHS laws require that as far as reasonably practicable, risks to health and safety are eliminated. If this cannot be achieved, then risks to health and safety are to be reduced as far as reasonably practicable. The Hierarchy of Controls puts the most effective mechanisms at the top of the list. In relation to COVID19, this means controlling shared air and shared surfaces in your workplace.

This process should be implemented in the following order:

1. **Eliminate the hazards or risks**
   - In relation to COVID19 this could involve total isolation or shutdown of activities. If this can't be achieved, move to step 2.

2. **Reduce the risks to prevent them causing harm**
   - In relation to COVID19 this could mean reducing the risk by changing the systems of work (how the work is organised),
   - Provide personal protective equipment (PPE), disinfectants, change jobs for staff who are vulnerable, quarantine goods for 7 days,
   - Change visitor entry arrangements,
   - Consider workforce planning that can adapt to key workers being away from work due for any reason.
   - When the job or task has been changed to accommodate the vulnerable population, ensure that the allocated workers have the required training and supervision needed for them to work safely.
   - Use separate teams with thorough cleaning of all touched surfaces at the end of each team shift.
   - Use red tape to mark touch points that will require cleaning between teams.
   - Plan daily work to implement physical distancing and infection control practices
   - Where you choose physical distancing measures that result in a worker working alone or in isolation, ensure communications and emergency management procedures are in place and monitor their mental health and wellbeing.
   - Could tasks be completed electronically on personal unshared equipment?

3. **Change how the work is done**
   - Divide your workers into two or more totally separate teams so that if someone becomes infected only one team is out of action.
   - In relation to COVID19 this could mean we reduce the likelihood of infection using safer procedures and supervision.
   - Provide training, conduct daily pre-start meetings, regular instructions and supervision.
   - Implement physical separations during work.
   - Disinfecting self and shared surfaces.

- Monitor to ensure new expectations are implemented.
- **Use personal protective equipment** to protect people from harm: ensure that gloves, aprons, boots, disinfectants are all used as required
- **Label all personal equipment so there is no confusion about who can touch what.**

Use the checklist on the following page to apply these principles in your day to day work.

Ensure continuous improvement by:
- Daily reminders to self, workers and others
- Seeking feedback and consulting on the effectiveness of controls
- Monitoring credible information sources (including the Dairy Industry COVID-19 Directory) and making decisions regarding any required changes to the way the work is performed

---

References

SafeWork Australia – Model Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks

https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/book/model-code-practice-how-manage-work-health-and-safety-risks

Worksafe Victoria – A guide for employers: Preparing for a Pandemic, February 2020

https://content.api.worksafe.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-02/ISBN-Preparing-pandemic-guide-employers-2020-02.pdf

QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES
Applying the principles	
What job am I about to do, or organise others to do? (family members, workers and/or contractors/supply chain involved)	
Is the job essential or can it be delayed?	
If it is essential, how many people are needed for the job?	
Where can exposure occur during the job? (consider equipment, tools and materials where there is risk of contamination)	
What are the work methods that apply to the job? (consider isolation or physical distancing and infection control)	
Does everyone know?	
Have I communicated these expectations and work methods to those people doing the job?	
How have I communicated this?	
Do they understand?	
Have they agreed to implement the changed work practices?	
Is everyone working safely?	
Are the people doing new jobs trained to do the job safely so that they are not at risk from other health and safety hazards?	
Are all people following required work methods and expectations?	
Am I supervising, monitoring and reviewing the work methods for the job?	
Is everyone applying physical distancing and hygiene measures/infection control when performing all work? Are all other normally expected health and safety controls being implemented including those controls associated with working alone or in isolation? (emergency planning and monitoring mental health and wellbeing)	