

**Recommendations for Employment and Social Development Canada for Migrant
Agricultural Workers Programs
during the COVID-19- Virus Pandemic**

1. Employers' participation in migrant agricultural worker programs should be contingent on evidence that employers have the capacity to implement self-isolation and distancing measures.

- Employers' ability to bring workers should be contingent on proof of adequate housing capacity to support social distancing measures (e.g. hotel reservation, a lower number of recruited workers to increase spacing among workers if same housing to be offered). This evidence should be established through in-person site inspections by ESDC agents in coordination with public health units.
- Direct phone lines must be made accessible to workers by ESDC agents and provided to workers in their preferred language so that they can report inadequate housing that puts their health at risk.
- ESDC should coordinate alternative shelter and financial compensation options for workers in cases where employers fail to provide adequate safe housing. These workers should have an immediate path for open work permits and should be provided with help to secure alternative work and housing.
- Evidence of adequate hand-washing stations and hand sanitizer should be provided both before and during the workers' stay. ESDC should provide funding to help farmers meet adequate hygiene requirements, and a baseline number should be provided to ensure adequate hygiene (e.g. one handwashing station per eight people maximum).
- Adequate self-isolation and social distancing measures should be explicitly stated in migrant agricultural workers' contracts.

2. ESDC should ensure that migrant agricultural workers do not work during the 14-day self-isolation upon arrival and have sufficient support provided (e.g. food, personal products) to meet their basic needs. ESDC should coordinate access to relevant financial compensation in the case of illness.

- Given that workers are coming from different countries and regions, ESDC must provide employers with rigorous self-isolation standards that both protect workers and the general public. This should include a strict requirement that workers not work during the self-isolation period to ensure

their safety. Clear oversight is required to make sure all workers are paid their required hours during this period.

- Given that the 14-day self-isolation period was developed specifically for households (natural groupings), ESDC must coordinate testing of new workers arriving on farm a few days after their arrival in order to ensure inspections do not contribute to virus transmission among workers living together.
- ESDC should communicate clearly to workers that they are entitled to pay during this time (both initial self-isolation as well as any subsequent self-isolation if symptoms develop during their stay). This will facilitate compliance with rigorous safety standards for self-isolation. Clear instructions of how to contact an ESDC agent if their employer is not providing adequate housing conditions to ensure their health and safety within the context of the pandemic must be provided to all workers, and posted in common living areas.
- ESDC must communicate clear expectations to employers to ensure that migrant agricultural workers have access to sufficient groceries and other basic amenities (e.g. cash remittances) while adhering to current public health measures. For instance, groupings of five workers who have been self-isolated together can be provided with access to a vehicle on a rotating schedule. Or, the employer can be responsible to coordinate delivery of affordable groceries to workers.

3. ESDC should establish standards that ensure employers provide channels for workers to access medical care independently

- As has been documented in prior literature, employer mediation or ‘gatekeeping’ may create a perceived pressure or disincentive for workers to report symptoms.
Workers should be provided with accessible tools in their preferred languages to monitor and keep track of symptoms and self-assessments. Written and digital materials should include information for referral to health and social support agencies who can help bridge service navigation barriers.
- Workers should be provided with accessible information in their preferred language that can help them feel empowered to participate in self-assessments, and link with telehealth phone lines or local community health centres that can assist them. This information should also be verbally reviewed with workers to ensure comprehension. This will make it so workers do not have to depend solely on their employers to monitor their risk of developing COVID-19.

- Outreach for workers for ongoing symptom monitoring should be delivered in the worker's preferred language and with an understanding of cultural norms that may require prompting or further explanation.
- 4. Workers should have the option to report COVID-19-like symptoms directly to ESDC in addition to public health authorities. Further, workers must be provided with help and information that will ensure that they do not lose their livelihood if they report COVID-19 symptoms**
- In line with the recommendation above, workers should be provided with information and training about ways that they can report their symptoms directly to a public health agency (rather than through their employer). Workers can be assisted to report concerns to their employer to be able to implement necessary quarantining measures.
 - Workers should know about all wage compensation options they are eligible for (Employment Insurance, Canadian Emergency Response Fund, 75% wage subsidy)
 - Clear information about legal or settlement advocacy groups who can help individuals secure these benefits should be distributed to all workers upon arrival.
 - All of the resources mentioned above must be made available in the languages spoken by migrant agricultural workers.
 - Transparency and proactiveness in this regard will send a clear message to workers that they do not need to choose between their health and safety and their livelihood. And that the public values their health beyond their productivity.
- 5. Special consideration needs to be given to migrant agricultural workers who may be physiologically vulnerable to the virus, and to the unique challenges faced by this population**
- Due to their unique living conditions in conjunction with widespread restrictions on mobility, migrant agricultural workers may be more vulnerable to feelings of isolation and subsequent mental health challenges. ESDC or partnering agents must provide information for workers to access mental health and community support via phone or internet in their preferred language.
 - Individuals should have the opportunity to weigh the risks of participation in the program this year (e.g. individual risk factors such as age and underlying conditions, chance of becoming infected, the possibility of not being able to return to their country of origin). Should they decide that it is too dangerous

for them to participate in the program this year, ESDC should work with consulates from sending countries to ensure that their positions are still available to them in the 2021 season.

- Workers over the age of 65, or, with existing medical conditions, who are in Canada, should be provided with housing that allows them to self-isolate apart from a larger cohort.
- If workers experience circumstances that require them to remain in Canada after their work on the farm has ended (e.g. become infected, pandemic mobility restrictions), ESDC should develop a process that allows workers to immediately qualify for an open work permit. These workers should be assisted in finding secure housing and additional work as needed.

6. Until adequate oversight and coordination with health authorities is in place, ESDC should cease entry of migrant agricultural workers into Canada.

- Current federal guidelines put too much responsibility on employers, and in fact, sets them up to fail, as current [outbreaks](#) suggest. Clear standards, especially to adhere to necessary public health measures, must be communicated to employers along with resources and regulatory mechanisms to ensure that these standards are followed (see below).
- Current federal guidelines do not outline clear roles for both ESDC to coordinate necessary and emergency health services with employers and migrant agricultural workers. In this state of emergency, ESDC, in partnership with health services, must show clear leadership in coordinating prevention and health services that can curb and mitigate the spread of infection among migrant agricultural workers.

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