



Working with Livestock

COVID-19 GUIDANCE

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people who tend to livestock can protect themselves and others from spreading the virus by changing their practices. This is particularly important where different individuals care for a group of animals, such as on larger farms, stables, cooperative farms, school farms, FFA chapter farms, or 4-H club farms. The risk comes from close contact between humans, rather than the livestock. There is no evidence that contact with any livestock species increases the risk of humans contracting COVID-19.

WSDA offers the following recommendations to reduce your risk and spread of the disease.

Communication and Coordination

Today's technology allows rapid and accurate communication between people using text, messaging, and chats on smartphones. Email chains and phone trees can also be used.

Create a schedule for a group of people who share duties caring for the same livestock. A schedule ensures all feeding, watering, and cleaning chores get done while preventing contact between people from different households.

- Schedule at least five hours between shifts (the COVID-19 virus can stay in the air for over three hours). Divide the schedule in whatever way works best for the group (e.g., a.m. and p.m., 24-hour periods, weekly).
- Designate a backup. Have the scheduled caregiver send a group communication confirming when chores are done. If no confirmation message is received, the group can follow up and send the backup if necessary to ensure animals receive care.

Write out and share instructions with all caretakers.

- Clearly identify individual animals, such as with ear tags or neck chains, so special needs and concerns can be communicated accurately.
- Keep instructions simple but detailed enough to guide someone through basic chores even if they are not familiar with those animals.
- Be specific about hay and feed amounts; use weight or volume measures, rather than terms like "an armful."

Pay particular attention to details related to medicated feed. Feed only to designated animals. Record feeding details (dates and amounts) so the owner can document feedings for quality assurance. Feeding errors could result in unacceptable medication residues in food animals, risk to consumers, loss of income, and fines and penalties.

Take a cellphone along when performing chores.

- Have contact information for each animal's owner, the property owner, and the local veterinarian.
- Call for help if any problems arise. Sharing a text message, photo, or video with a knowledgeable person allows them to give advice about actions to take.

Establish signage at the site to reduce confusion and unnecessary foot traffic. Signs for parking, tools, hay, steer feed, sheep minerals, and so forth can make tasks clearer and ensure the animals are getting the right care.

- Weatherize signs to keep them legible.

Plan ahead for how veterinary services will be provided if necessary, including emergency services for any animals on the site.

- Ask the veterinarian which practices or treatments could be postponed or eliminated and which are essential.

WSDA has created planning template documents to help coordinate your group. Printable copies can be found on the last four pages of this publication; they include:

- Caretaker Contact List
- Group Livestock Care Schedule
- Group Livestock Care Instructions
- Cleaning and Disinfection Protocol

Logistics

Detailed planning will help coordinate a group of people caring for multiple animals at a single site. For instance, inventory, reorder, and restock supplies and feed as needed, taking into account potential delivery delays.

Address transportation issues. For instance, caregivers from different households should travel separately to comply with physical distancing.

- Limit site access to a single entry/exit point to control vehicle and foot traffic. This also encourages caregivers to use handwashing stations and trash receptacles at the access point.

Sometimes animals may need to be separated and moved to other locations to ensure their care and protect human health.

- Follow all physical distancing recommendations during this process.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect all equipment used to transport the animals.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Standard PPE while caring for livestock includes gloves, coveralls, and disinfected footwear.

- With the added concern of COVID-19, consider using face coverings as well. These may not be necessary if those doing chores in a given shift are all from the same household. If not, use a cloth covering over your mouth and nose. Even when wearing a face covering, keep a minimum six-foot distance between others.

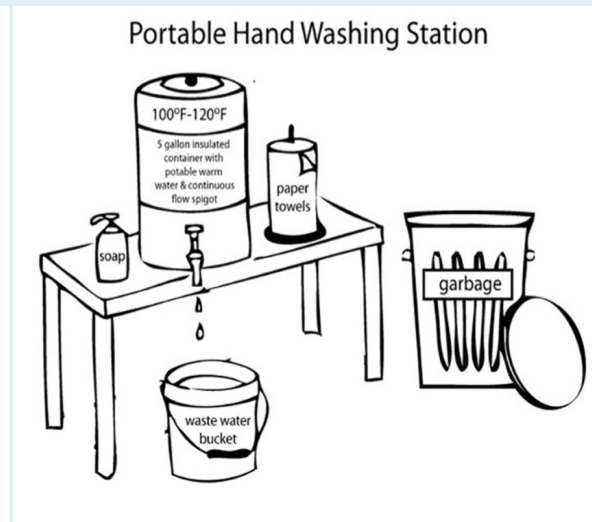
You may also consider hair protection (a hat), a beard net, and safety goggles. There is no evidence this extra protection is needed to prevent contracting COVID-19 from livestock. However, they can reduce passing zoonotic diseases from livestock to humans and carrying pathogens off the farm.

Disinfection

Handwashing with soap and water for 20 seconds is more effective than using sanitizing gels when hands are visibly dirty, such as after performing chores.

- Simple, inexpensive portable handwashing stations (see Figure 1) can be set up at any site. Use a paper towel to turn water spigot on and off and dispense soap.
- Sanitizing gel may be applied to clean and dry hands.
- Wash hands before handling animals, between groups of animals, and after all chores are done.

Figure 1. (Right) Low-cost portable handwashing station for remote locations. Replenish warm water as needed. (Illustration adapted from Kalamazoo (MI) County Environmental Health by Sarita Role Schaffer as published in Washington State University Extension FS257E, "Practical Biosecurity Recommendations for Farm Tour Hosts 2017").



Set up convenient boot-washing stations away from livestock housing and feeding areas and encourage use.

- Use a hose, long-handled boot brush, and soap to remove all visible manure, mud, and other organic debris (See Photo 1).
- After boots are clean, they can be disinfected, either at the livestock site, or after transported home in garbage bags or buckets.
- Do NOT rely on foot baths, which are hard to maintain and do not promote adequate contact time with disinfectant.

*Photo 1. (Right) Cleaning boots with soap, water, and a boot brush before disinfecting.
(Source: USDA APHIS.)*

Disinfectants registered with the EPA proven effective against coronavirus are listed on EPA's COVID-19 webpage (List N).

- Few are effective on soft or porous surfaces.
- Some are familiar over-the-counter brands, such as certain Lysol® and Clorox™ products.
- A solution of four teaspoons fresh household bleach mixed in one quart of water, with at least one minute of contact time, is an effective disinfectant against the virus causing COVID-19.

Vinegar, baking soda, and other substances that claim to work against pathogens are not effective or registered by EPA as disinfectants. It is a violation of federal law to use them for this purpose.

People Factors

Working in shifts should reduce the risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus between people. Other prevention measures include:

- Allow only essential personnel (animal caretakers) on the premises.
- Maintain the recommended six-foot distance between people from different households.
- Install “No Visitors” signs.
- Schedule each shift’s workers from the same household.

All caretakers should take their temperature twice a day.

- If temperature is elevated and/or the person feels sick, no one in their household should do livestock chores for at least 14 days.
- Anyone who has underlying health conditions or suppressed immune system should avoid animal caretaking duties to reduce their risk of contracting diseases.

Some caregivers may not be familiar with certain livestock species, and some animals may be wary of strangers. Take extra care when working with unfamiliar animals. Simply providing feed and water may be safest, while letting those who are familiar with the animals clean their facilities.

Don't Forget These Key Risk Reduction Strategies

- ▶ Keep your hands away from your mouth, nose, eyes, and face.
- ▶ Frequently wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- ▶ Stay at least six-feet away from people not in your household.
- ▶ Cough or sneeze into a tissue and discard it.
- ▶ Stay home if you are ill.



Biosecurity

While taking extra measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19, remember to maintain the biosecurity practices that prevent the spread of any animal-to-animal and animal-to-human disease.

- Wash hands before and after handling groups of animals.
- Wear disposable gloves if zoonotic diseases are a concern (e.g., sore mouth, ringworm).
- Designate clothing (coveralls) and footwear for on-farm use only.
- Clean and disinfect footwear between groups of animals and before leaving premises.
- When leaving the premises, blow your nose into a tissue and discard it in a waste receptacle.
- Place dirty coveralls in plastic garbage bags for transport; launder after pre-soaking with an EPA-approved pre-soak product.
- Touch as few surfaces as possible.
- Clean and disinfect any surfaces touched, such as cell phones, gates, doorknobs, water faucets, panels, tools, and brush handles.
- Use metal, concrete, or plastic rather than wood or dirt wherever possible to aid disinfection.
- Designate tools for handling feed and others for manure.
- Do not share grooming equipment or tools with others.
- Do not touch animals other than your own.
- Tend to healthy animals before sick animals.
- Tend to young animals before older animals.
- Quarantine new or returning animals for at least 30 days before adding to the herd.
- Keep vaccinations current for all animals.
- Decide how needed veterinary care will be provided.
- Monitor animals daily for signs of illness.
- Separate sick animals from others and keep them in an isolation pen.
- Remove dead animals and bury, compost, or landfill carcasses promptly.
- Control fly, vermin, wildlife, pest, dog, and cat activity to reduce the spread of disease agents.
- Protect feed and water from contamination.
- Prevent contact between:
 - Sick people and livestock
 - Poultry and wild waterfowl
 - Sheep or goats and cattle or bison
 - Swine and poultry

Additional Resources

See COVID-19 webpages at:

- agr.wa.gov — Livestock and pets
- wsvma.org
- avma.org
- cdc.gov — Daily life and coping; If you have animals

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Cleaning and Disinfection Protocol

Remove all grossly visible debris.

The presence of gross contamination or organic material, especially feces, will inactivate most disinfectants.

Wash the area or item with water and detergent.

Thoroughly rinse the cleaned area to remove any detergent residue.

Some disinfectants may be inactivated by detergents; therefore, it is very important to rinse well after washing the area or item.

Allow the area to dry completely.*

Select and apply an appropriate, effective disinfectant.

Dilution instructions for disinfectant:

Ensure the proper contact time!

This is one of the most overlooked steps!!
Contact time may vary depending on the disinfectant selected, but is usually at least 10 minutes. Consult the product label.

Thoroughly rinse away any residual disinfectant and allow the area or item to dry.

* Best practices allow for complete drying prior to disinfectant application