

# BONSUCRO WHO GUIDANCE ON COVID-19

## BACKGROUND

On 11 March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new coronavirus a pandemic. According to the [WHO](#), as of 6 April 2020, there are 1,174,866 confirmed cases in 205 countries and there have been 64,541 deaths from the virus.

WHO and public health authorities around the world are taking action to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. However, long-term success cannot be taken for granted. All sections of our society – including businesses and employees – must play a role if we are to stop the spread of this pandemic.

Bonsucro has no intention of replacing local and international guidance on preventing and managing the spread of the virus, but it is important that we support the sugarcane sector in confronting the reality of the virus. Based on the WHO recommendations, published on the WHO [website](#), we have extracted key messages for the sugarcane sector based different guidelines, notably the guidance “Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19” available [here](#).

### Introduction

This document can be used to complement the guidelines you might have already developed and implemented. The sector faces many challenges, but has been quick to respond with impressive efforts to reduce the spread of the virus. For example, donating large quantities of alcohol for the production of hand sanitizers and disinfectants. At the time of writing, many head-offices and mill offices have shut and employees are isolating – abiding by local rules.

Sugarcane production plays a vital role in many rural communities worldwide: entire communities rely on mills and farms for income. In some cases, agriculture and sugarcane related activities have been identified as essential to the economic operations of their countries and therefore considered essential industries and must continue to operate.

### Key takeaways

- Mills and farms can play a critical role to help the adoption of life-saving practices.
- Mills and farms should remove/amend practices that may act as a barrier for workers to disclose their symptoms. Examples of barriers are fear of dismissal and loss of income.
- It is vital to mitigate the negative social impact of illness and isolation on workers/their dependents and adapt operations ready for a reduced workforce.
- Farmers, employees, workers and managers can disseminate information on adopted actions to their own families and community.
- Simple, targeted communication, messaging and training are critical to prevent the spread of the virus.
- In a landscape where the population might have difficulty reading, the use of pictograms and demonstration is effective. Mills can engage the larger local communities, including smallholder farmers.
- It is important that millers share their experience of mitigation/adaptation measures at national/ regional level so we can learn from each other.
- National associations have a key role to play to support their members in adapting.
- Encourage setting-up a Covid-19 response committee at mill or local level to help tackle the virus with efficient management, tracking and. This committee could oversee the implementation of practices described below and set up a plan to mitigate the possible long-term impacts of the pandemic.

Bonsucro would like to thank Dr Peter Allsopp and Ineke Wesseling (members of Bonsucro's Technical Advisory Board), Pat Brenchley (RCL FOODS), Ant Edmonds (Farmer) and Denis Chavarria (SER San Antonio) for their support and examples included in these guidelines.

# 1. SIMPLE WAYS TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN YOUR WORKPLACE

The most basic preventive measures are hand washing and promoting good respiratory hygiene.

Employers should start doing these things now, even if COVID-19 has not arrived in their communities. By adopting these measures, businesses can reduce the number of working days lost due to illness and stop or slow the spread of COVID-19.

- Make sure your workplaces are clean and hygienic: surfaces (e.g. desks and tables) and objects (e.g. telephones, keyboards, machine controls, dashboard of control rooms, diner tables, steering gears of tractors and harvesters) need to be wiped or sprayed with disinfectant regularly
- Promote regular and thorough hand-washing by employees, contractors and customers
- Put sanitizing hand rub dispensers in prominent places around the workplace. Make sure these dispensers are regularly refilled
- Display posters promoting hand washing and respiratory hygiene.

## Handwashing

Ensure soap and sanitizers are supplied to all workstations including workshops, canteens, dormitories, office spaces and remote workstations such as effluent treatment, waste storage and maintenance.

Although it is more complicated to have soap and sanitizers in place on farms, they should be provided in areas where workers interact, such as resting areas, portable toilets, eating areas, transportation, agriculture offices, cane payment offices and bridge weigh-ins.

Control of the level of supplies should be delegated to the teams at workstations and in the fields. Re-ordering should be a high priority.



Protect yourself and others from getting sick

## Wash your hands



- after coughing or sneezing
- when caring for the sick
- before, during and after you prepare food
- before eating
- after toilet use
- when hands are visibly dirty
- after handling animals or animal waste



Team leaders at mill and farm levels should brief their teams on the use of soap and hand-sanitizers, for example at the beginning of each shift.

Extension officers can be used to share information on the virus and sanitation requirements to smallholder farmers and local communities.

Requiring everyone to wash or sanitize their hands anytime an event takes place or every time someone enters the mill can help accelerate habits to be adopted.

Communication must be simple and easy to understand. Use of pictures and demonstration can increase effectiveness.

Communicating by example is also effective. Requiring hand sanitation before boarding buses, entering a meeting room or using tools/equipment that are normally shared (sprayers, maintenance) might facilitate adoption of practices and prevent the virus to spread.

When mills or farms organise transport for workers, measures could be taken to reduce the spread or introduction of the virus to the work force. This could include compulsory hand sanitation before boarding and increasing the number of vehicles and reducing the number of workers at each time to follow recommendation on social distancing (e.g. half full bus).

If workers come to work by public transport, information should also be shared on good hygiene practices, including not touching eye, nose and mouth.

Contractors should wash their hands as soon as they arrive on the premises of the mill/farms. They should also be reminded of the measures to prevent the spread of Coronavirus and equip their team with soap and hand sanitizers. If this is not possible, the mill should supply them.

## Promote good respiratory hygiene in the workplace

- This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately. Wash your hands or use hand-sanitizer.
- Display posters promoting respiratory hygiene. Combine this with other communication measures such as offering guidance from occupational health and safety officers, briefing at meetings and information on the intranet etc.
- Ensure that face masks and / or paper tissues along with closed bins are available at your workplaces.

The role of health and safety officers is critical in promoting good respiratory hygiene. Together with ad-hoc committees, they will increase the adoption of good practices. If guidance is provided, ensure that this occurs in adequate languages especially if there are foreign workers within your premises.

## Follow national travel and isolation advice

The CEO, truck drivers, cane transporters and farm extension officers are often required to travel. This means they are at risk of carrying the virus to new communities. It is important to inform them of this possibility and ensure they understand the practices that will prevent the virus to spread (hand washing with soap and use of sanitizers and good respiratory hygiene).

Keep promoting the message that people need to stay at home even if they have only mild symptoms of COVID-19 or any respiratory symptoms.

Encourage employees and workers to feel safe to report if they or someone in their household is suffering from symptoms that could be COVID-19. If symptoms are hidden by fear of dismissal and loss of income, the virus is likely to spread fast within the workforce causing critical disruptions.

Display posters with this message in your workplaces. Combine this with other communication channels commonly used in your organisation or business.

This can be done through the Whatsapp/WeChat/Line channels employees/management might have created. It can also be displayed through the app that links the mills to the network of independent farmers supplying the mills. Farm extension officers are a vital link between the mill and independent farmers (smallholder and other farmers). Their capacity to relay the message will be critical in the fight against the spread of the virus. Developing an adequate train-the-trainer training programme would be critical.

- Brief your employees, contractors and customers that if COVID-19 starts spreading in your community anyone with even a mild cough or low-grade fever (37.3°C or more) needs to stay at home. They should also stay home (or work from home) if they have had to take simple medications, such as paracetamol/acetaminophen, ibuprofen or aspirin, which may mask symptoms of infection
- Make clear to employees that they will be able to count this time off as sick leave.



## 2. HOW TO MANAGE COVID-19 RISK IN MEETINGS

Managers often move across factories, across the supply area and even across cities or countries and can become a source of contamination. Careful consideration should be taken before any in-person meeting takes place. In principle, all in-person meetings should be replaced by online meetings, even within the premises of the mill. If not possible, social distancing should be implemented and direct contact scaled down to the minimum. This is to prevent more people to being infected.

When receiving contractors or guests to the premises, give them a short health questionnaire with questions related to Coronavirus including asking where they have previously visited and whether they have any symptoms.

- Pre-order sufficient supplies and materials, including tissues and hand sanitizer for all participants. Have surgical masks available to offer anyone who develops respiratory symptoms

Keep attendee lists – this will be critical in case one of the participants falls ill and will help the public authorities to trace people at risk of contracting the virus. The list should include any farmers and extension officers that were met before or when starting to display the symptoms of the disease.

If this happens, the chair of the meeting should inform the other participants. They should be advised to monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days and take their temperature twice a day.

If they develop even a mild cough or low-grade fever (i.e. a temperature of 37.3 C or more) they should stay at home and self-isolate. This means avoiding close contact (less than 1 metre) with other people, including family members. They should also call their healthcare provider or the local public health department, giving them details of their recent travel and symptoms.

As with workers and contractors, inform participants they must not attend if they have symptoms like cough, runny nose or fever.

During the meeting, avoid physical contact such as hand-shaking, encourage people to cover their face with the bend of their elbow or a tissue if they cough or sneeze. If there is space, arrange seats so that participants are at least 1 metre apart.

### Companies need to think and act across five horizons.

#### The five horizons



#### Resolve

Address the immediate challenges that COVID-19 represents to institution's workforce, customers, technology, and business partners



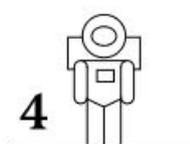
#### Resilience

Address near-term cash-management challenges and broader resiliency issues during virus-related shutdowns and economic knock-on effects



#### Return

Create detailed plan to return business to scale quickly as COVID-19 situation evolves and knock-on effects become clearer



#### Reimagination

Reimagine the next normal: what a discontinuous shift looks like and implications for how institutions should reinvent



#### Reform

Be clear about how regulatory and competitive environments in industry may shift

# 3. GETTING YOUR WORKPLACE READY IN CASE COVID-19 ARRIVES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Develop a plan for what to do if someone becomes ill with suspected COVID-19 at your workplace. It should include employees, contracted workers, seasonal and temporary workers.

Plans should extend to workers at farms (independent farms and smallholders). Close communication and support should be provided to independent farmers, including and especially smallholders, who might employ workers who fall ill because of Coronavirus.

- The plan should cover putting the ill person in a room or area where they are isolated from others in the workplace, limiting the number of people who have contact with the sick person, and contacting the local health authorities.

The plan could include assigning some rooms for people needing to isolate. If workers are hosted by the mill or farm in dormitories, consider keeping some rooms empty ready for affected workers to isolate.

Preparation and readiness are critical and a potential re-organisation of accommodation for workers should be planned well in-advance of the arrival of Covid-19. Workers should not be at fear of losing their accommodation because of the preparation or because they have fallen ill with the virus.

Coordinate your plans with local public health authorities and other relevant bodies and seek their input. You should also involve the workers, their representatives in the discussions.

- Develop a contingency and business continuity plan for an outbreak in the communities where your business operates. See the McKinsey image above on page 4.
- The plan should address how to keep your business running even if a significant number of employees, contractors and suppliers cannot come to your place of business, either due to local restrictions on travel or because they are ill.

A plan is critical to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. The plan can take the approach of eliminate/prevent/mitigate the risk of contamination.

Offering the necessary guarantee (housing, paid sick leave, employment) to ill workers (including temporary, season and migrant workers) who have to self-isolate will help eliminate the risk of the virus entering the premises. The plan should also evaluate how protection can extend to workers of smallholder farmers who might not be in capacity to handle or bear such consequences.

The plan should also consider the procedure for tracing and tracking any workers who might have become in contact with a worker who has tested positive to Covid-19 or is displaying the symptoms. It would help the virus to further spreading.

Management should prepare to re-organise shifts to make up for absences due to illness. This may include dividing the workforce into separate teams that never meet. The movement of workers within the mill and across facilities/farms should be considered to reduce contact. Teams might be required to stop interaction with other teams/offices/fields/villages.

The plan must also consider the possibility of a low workforce during harvest and how it would impact the mills (less input and consequently less output) down to the fulfilment of orders. The impact of delayed or missed harvest also needs evaluating.

Management should review the places that contamination is possible: entries to the mills (e.g. manually harvested field, worker transportation, clock-in/clock-out desks), canteen, changing rooms/toilets/showers, cane reception, loading and dispatch). Physical contact should be avoided and people should keep at least 1 metre apart. Social spaces may need rearranging to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

Work procedures might need to be adapted for example, ensuring that workers remain at 1 metre away only if this doesn't jeopardise the safety of workers. If workers need to maintain physical contact for safety, the use of mask can limit the spread of the virus, but workers should wash their hands after any contact.

## Community support

Be sure your plan addresses the mental health and social consequences of COVID-19 in the workplace or in the community and offer information and support.

This is particularly important in areas where sugar mills and farms are a critical component to community life. In discussion with worker and community representatives but also charities and organisations supporting local communities, an assessment of impact of self-isolation on the livelihood of the community must take place. This includes mitigation measures for people/group of people who can't access food stores and medicines whilst isolating. Some communities have set up groups of volunteers to organise these activities for the more vulnerable. Plans should forecast possible loss of livelihood for workers who suffer from the virus and of isolation (the inability to work because of illness may put people and their dependents at risk of food insecurity).

Finally, the plan should include how to handle situations where isolated people become critically ill. It should cover the procedures required including transportation to health centres with intensive care units.

- In summary, maintain good sanitary behaviour by washing hands, good respiratory hygiene and remain as isolated as possible
- Get in touch with Bonsucro if you have any questions.

**MOST OF ALL, BE PREPARED.**