April 16, 2020

Conducting Field Site Visits During the COVID-19 Outbreak: Guidance for Public Health Inspectors

During these challenging times, OHA understands the need for flexibility regarding inspection frequencies for the triennial reviews. For state and local public health staff that continue to conduct field site visits and inspections, this guidance is intended to help prepare for and conduct field visits.

Initial contact with operators

Inform your operators about precautionary measures and alternatives.

- Prior to conducting any field visit, contact the facility to discuss the need for the inspection and field visit. Some questions to ask are:
  - Do they have a physical distancing officer assigned?
  - Are they following proper protocols for physical distancing?
  - Are they successfully limiting the number of people in the food establishment at any one time in order to maintain physical distancing?
  - Are they willing to call and cancel the inspection if any staff is experiencing fever, coughing or difficulty breathing? Assure them you will do the same.

- Let your operators know that you are taking precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Note that you are washing your hands frequently, practicing physical distancing, sanitizing equipment routinely, and are aware of your possible effect on others.

- If anything concerns you during an inspection, remove yourself from the area and call your supervisor. If you encounter workers or members of the public who appear ill, you can discontinue an inspection at any time. If you feel unsafe about conducting field visits for any reason, talk to your supervisor.

Unscheduled site visits

- Do not conduct unscheduled field visits unless necessary.

- Consider the sensitivity of unscheduled site visits or inspections. If a facility is not comfortable with an inspection during this time, re-evaluate the necessity of completing the inspection.
• The inspector can conduct unscheduled site visits if concerned about significant public health risk or there is an immediate business need.

Field tools

Instrument decontamination
• Clean the surfaces of tools using accepted industry practices. Sanitize probes and other tools with alcohol pads or other approved methods in between inspections. Bring your own tools and do not share tools during the inspection.
• Wipe down shared pens, clipboards, phones or other equipment with sanitizing wipes before and after each use.
• Be aware of where you store your equipment bag, laptop/clip board and other items.

Other considerations
• Be aware that operators will likely have questions and concerns about COVID-19. Limit conversations to topics allowed such as cleaning procedures, physical distancing and methods of prevention and reduction of transmission.
• Do not speculate on what restrictions may come next.
• Direct them to www.healthoregon.org/foodsafety for more information.

Cloth masks
Public Health inspectors may choose to wear a cloth mask or face covering during inspections. If worn, cloth masks should be laundered daily in hot water and detergent. There is little evidence that wearing a mask is effective for preventing COVID-19 infection in healthy people; however, masks could reduce the spread of the virus from a wearer who is infected but has no symptoms. Medical masks should be reserved for health care providers who are on the front lines working with patients who are most likely to have COVID-19.

Gloves
Public Health inspectors may choose to wear gloves during inspections. Only use non-latex gloves. Wash your hands before putting gloves on and after taking them off. If your gloves become dirty or contaminated during an inspection, you must remove and replace them with fresh gloves. Using gloves does not replace the need for proper handwashing. If gloves are used incorrectly, they may cause cross-contamination issues.

Physical distancing
During the field visit, continue to practice physical distancing as follows:
• Keep at least six (6) feet apart from others.
• Do not shake hands.
• Avoid sharing equipment.
• Only share the kitchen with essential staff.
• Enter small areas alone. These areas include walk-in freezers, well houses and other small closed in areas. Discuss any findings in open areas.
Handwashing
Avoid touching your face and unnecessary surfaces. Also, wash your hands:
- At the beginning, during and end of an inspection
- Upon arrival and departure
- After touching any surface, particularly frequently touched ones such as door handles.

If an inspector starts to experience symptoms before, during or after inspection
- **Before**: Cancel inspection and notify supervisor.
- **During**: Discontinue inspection. Notify your supervisor as soon as possible.
- **After**: Notify supervisor. Talk with the communicable disease officer on how to proceed. Identify facilities you inspected within the last 48 hours.

You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer. Contact the Public Health Division at 971-673-0440. We accept all relay calls or you can dial 711