



# Interim Inspection Guidance for Environmental Health Specialists During COVID-19

Conducting inspections during the current COVID-19 pandemic requires Environmental Health Specialists (EHS) to take additional measures to protect employees, the public, and yourself while visiting facilities and performing other environmental health duties. As always, please follow CDC and NCDHHS guidance to keep yourself and your family safe in any setting. EHSs should observe the following guidance prior to conducting inspections.

## Assessing the Risk

- At the beginning of the inspection, assess the facility for any signs of ill workers, customers, or others that could cause potential exposure risks.
- Advise the person in charge (PIC) of the safety precautions that you will be taking during the inspection (e.g., wearing a cloth face covering, social distancing, symptom screening) and clarify expectations for employees and staff to protect their employees and yourself during the inspection. Ask if employees are screened for COVID-19 symptoms prior to work and if positive and symptomatic employees are excluded from work.
- Verify establishment safety practices and make every effort to conform to or exceed their requirements.
- Discuss the inspection plan with the PIC, and make sure the expectations are clear prior to beginning the inspection. Recognize that establishments are under an unusually high level of stress during these unprecedented times and if the PIC seems under extreme stress or incredibly agitated, consider postponing the inspection.
- If at any point you or any employee or patron become ill and the risk of exposure to COVID-19-like illness increases, you should discontinue the inspection and contact your supervisor.

## Face Covering and Physical Distancing

- When inside a food establishment or other regulated facility, it is important to follow the CDC recommendation for using a well fitted, clean cloth face covering. Information on the cloth face coverings include [CDC's guidance on wearing and removing cloth face masks](#), [CDC's use of cloth face coverings](#), and [CDC's cloth face coverings FAQ's](#).
- Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for physical distancing. Advise the PIC at the beginning of the inspection that physical distancing of 6 feet will be maintained to the extent possible. This may mean asking employees to step away from their workstation for a short time to assess internal food temperatures or evaluate equipment. Ensure these expectations are set at the beginning of the inspection.
- Avoid entering small enclosed areas with other people. Ask the operator to wait for you outside enclosed spaces like small storage rooms or walk-in coolers while evaluating.

## NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

- Consider wearing a lab coat or other protective clothing to further protect yourself during inspections.
- Ask the PIC to limit the number of people who accompany you during inspection so that physical distancing can be maintained.

### Disinfection

- Equipment should be cleaned and sanitized or disinfected at the beginning of every inspection and prior to entering the establishment. Items that need to be sanitized or disinfected include pens, thermometers, flashlights, clipboards, or other items used during the inspection. Use a solution of at least 60% alcohol in the absence of an EPA-approved disinfectant.
- Minimize equipment carried during the inspection to include only those items necessary to complete the inspection.
- Whenever possible, avoid touching frequently touched surfaces with your hands and use an alternate method for touching these surfaces, like a single-use towel. You can also allow the operator to open the doors or turn on lights.
- Do not exchange paperwork, clipboards, pens, or other materials during the visit. Consider sending your paperwork to the establishment electronically to the extent possible. Keep paperwork collected from the establishment in a dedicated folder.

### Hand Hygiene

- It is important to be extra vigilant about hand hygiene to protect yourself and the employees and patrons at the facility during the inspection. Hands must be washed immediately upon entering the facility using soap and warm running water for at least 20 seconds.
- Increased hand hygiene may be necessary if high-touch surfaces are contacted during the inspection.
- Avoid touching your face, especially with unwashed hands, while in the facility, both during the inspection itself and while completing the paperwork.
- It is not currently recommended to routinely wear gloves during an inspection. Proper handwashing is the best method to help prevent exposure and spread of COVID-19 from contaminated surfaces.
- Consider carrying hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) for use on visibly clean hands after contacting high-touch surfaces or when a handwashing sink is not readily available (e.g., when entering a cooler prior to handling a thermometer). Hand sanitizer should also be used when entering your vehicle after the inspection to decrease possible vehicle contamination.

### Additional Resources

- NC DHHS: [North Carolina COVID-19](#)
- EPA: [Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#)
- FDA: [Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- AFDO: [Best Practices for Conducting Inspections](#)

# Guidance for Field Staff during COVID-19 Phase 2 Re-Opening

As businesses return to normal operations, routine inspections and field work will increase. As you are conducting field work, ensure observance of CDC and NCDHHS guidance to keep yourself and your family safe in any setting, and follow this guidance during field work.

## ASSESS THE RISK

**Prior to beginning an inspection or visit, speak with person in charge (PIC) to make sure there are not symptomatic employees. Let the PIC know what to expect during the inspection in terms of increased precautions.**

## FACE COVERING AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING

**Advise the person in charge you will be observing physical distancing to the extent possible during inspection. All EHS should wear a well fitted cloth face covering in the field.**

**Face coverings are not a substitute from maintaining physical distancing. This may result in asking employees to move from an area so that observations can be completed.**

## DISINFECTION

**Minimize shared use of pens and ensure personal inspection equipment is cleaned and disinfected frequently.**

**Disinfect steering wheel and seat belt buckle/button and ensure cell phones and other equipment are disinfected per manufacturer's recommendations. In the absence of disinfection recommendations use 70% alcohol wipe/spray.**

## HAND HYGIENE

**Practice good hand hygiene during all visits and inspection. Thoroughly wash hands using soap and water for at least 20 seconds upon entering every establishment. Do not touch face with unwashed hands. Regular use of gloves during inspections is not being recommended. Consider carrying hand sanitizer for use while in the field.**