



Maryland Agritourism Operations During COVID-19: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

As an agritourism operator...

Am I able to operate my agritourism operation?

Agritourism is a broad term (defined in Md. Code, Land Use Art. Section 4-212) that can encompass many types of activities on a farm. This guidance is meant to highlight some of the concerns and restrictions agritourism operators may face. Depending on the nature of the operation, however, there may be state or local Orders, restrictions, recommendations, and/or guidance documents that are more appropriate for the operation or portions of the operation.

On September 1, 2020, Governor Hogan signed a revised [Order](#) to authorize the reopening of recreational and entertainment attractions subject to the current guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) regarding social distancing, including, without limitation, avoidance of large gatherings and crowded places. Political subdivisions in Maryland, **however**, may determine it is necessary to prevent exposure to COVID-19 by restricting agritourism more than is required by the State. To verify if and how an agritourism operation may open safely and legally, an agritourism operator should contact their [local health department](#).

What do I need to do to protect myself, my employees, my customers, and the public from COVID-19?

All Marylanders are advised to take precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19. According to the [CDC](#), the more people an individual interacts with at an event or gathering and the longer that interaction lasts, the higher the potential risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 and spreading COVID-19. **It is absolutely essential that agritourism operators do what they can to reduce the risk of transmission.**

How do I prepare my agritourism operation?

- Develop a plan or checklist for operating consistent with CDC guidance. The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and Maryland Department of Health have created this [checklist](#) for employee policies and precautions to help farms implement best practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19. A checklist for each type of activity you offer as part of your agritourism business may be helpful in determining what can and cannot be offered and implementing best practices for each activity. Verify with the [local health department](#) which planned activities can be offered safely and legally.

In general, operators are advised to:

- Designate staff to assist visitors with complying with the physical spacing, face covering, and other policies/recommendations established for the operation.
 - Keep customers and workers from grouping too close to one another, in no case closer than 6 feet.
 - Allow for customers to be spaced 6 feet or more apart by installing a marking system to visually demonstrate the recommended social distancing and/or limit the amount of people permitted on hay ride type activities.
 - Designate and post signage indicating the direction of foot traffic in main circulation paths (e.g. farm markets, pick-your-own fields, entry and exit points); consider one-way circulation routes.
 - Verify capacity limits for the operation with your local health department.
 - Require customers and workers to wear [face coverings as recommended by the CDC](#). The [Maryland FAQs on Face Coverings](#) is another good resource.
 - Provide face coverings for visitors that arrive without their own.
 - Post mask requirement signs.
- Increase cleaning and disinfecting, especially frequently touched surfaces, in accordance with [CDC guidelines](#). Areas and amenities that cannot be easily cleaned between customers should remain closed, including slides, inflatable bounce houses, interactive mazes, touch pools and prop-based experiences where physical distancing and sanitation protocols are difficult to manage.
- Encourage hand washing by customers and staff and provide hand washing stations throughout the operation, at key customer and staff entrances, and contact areas. Stock stations with soap, paper towels, or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol (60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol)* (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer), and no-touch waste containers.

*Note: Many hand sanitizers on the market have been recalled by FDA as unsafe and/or ineffective. Check the [FDA list](#) prior to purchasing and/or using hand sanitizers.

- If you are providing portable toilets, also provide portable handwashing stations and ensure that they remain stocked with soap and single use hand towels. If possible, provide hand sanitizer stations that are touch-free.
- Ensure that restrooms are functional and cleaned and disinfected at a minimum daily, particularly high-touch surfaces such as faucets, toilets, stall doors, doorknobs, countertops, diaper changing tables, and light switches.
- Maintain physical distancing between customers, unless they are members of the same household, for agritourism activities that require interaction.
- Prevent lines or crowds forming near restrooms and post signs or markers to help customers maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other people.
- Utilize advance registration and payment, timed entry, touchless payments and other methods to maintain social distancing, control the number of visitors at the same time, provide advance notice of COVID-19 related requirements, and reduce touch points within the operation. For example, ask that customers register for a hayride at a specific time and pay in advance.
- Limit available parking to create distance between arriving and departing customers.
- There is no evidence that COVID-19 is spread by food, however, people sharing utensils and congregating around food service areas can pose a risk. Eliminate common source items (condiments, beverage dispenser, etc.) and provide single use packets. Guidance from your [local health department](#), MDH, CDC and the Governor's Executive [Orders](#) for food service facilities must be followed to minimize the risk.
- Offer pre-picked and packaged for sale items in single use containers to minimize crowds and contact with produce.
- If applicable, follow the [CDC recommendations](#) for interactions with animals in public settings.

How do I communicate with my customers about COVID-19 preventative measures?

- Advise customers, in advance, of processes in place at the operation for their comfort and safety, including social distancing, and increased hygiene practices per the [CDC](#) and MDH guidance and that you are open for business.
- Inform customers that they should not visit the operation if they have symptoms of, a positive test for, or were recently exposed (within 14 days) to COVID-19.
- Inform customers, in advance, of any restrictions such as number of people allowed in a group; same household requirements; mask policies; not to attend if they have a fever, any symptoms of illness, have tested positive or been in contact with someone that has tested positive for COVID-19 during the previous 14 days, and/or have been in contact with someone with suspected COVID-19 in the past 14 days; and regular activities that are not offered.
- Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to staff and customers. Tailor information so that it is easily understood by various audiences and is available in alternative formats and languages.

How do I prepare my staff?

- Train staff with reasonably anticipated occupational exposure about the sources of exposure to the virus, when and how to properly use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and proper sanitation techniques, as recommended by the [Occupational Safety & Health Administration \(OSHA\) Control & Prevention Guidance](#).
- Train staff on all COVID-19 related safety protocols. For training assistance, refer to these resources from the MDA and MDH: [Agricultural Workforce Training](#) and [Maintaining a Healthy Workforce](#).
- Screen staff as they arrive for work.
- Have clear policies on illness and COVID-19. Implement flexible sick leave policies and practices that are not punitive and enable employees to stay home when they are sick, have been exposed, are caring for someone who is sick, or who must stay home with children if schools or child care centers are closed.
- Follow the CDC's criteria for when staff should return to work:
 - [If they have been sick with COVID-19](#)
 - [If they tested positive for COVID-19 but had no symptoms](#)
 - [If they have recently had a close contact with a person with COVID-19](#)
- Stagger staff lunch and break times to encourage social distancing.
- Require frequent employee handwashing (e.g., before, during, and after taking tickets, after touching garbage, etc.) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and increase monitoring to ensure adherence.
- If soap and water are not readily available, employees can use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and rub their hands until dry.
- Designate a staff member to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. All staff should know who this person is and how to contact them.

Additional COVID-19 Resources:

Guidance for Businesses and Employers: The CDC's [interim guidance](#) for businesses and employers and [Considerations for Events and Gatherings](#), and the [Events and Gatherings Readiness and Planning Tool](#). Maryland's [Best Practices to Reopen Recreational and Amusement Attractions](#), Business Express [website](#), and [Pick your Own During COVID-19](#).

Food Safety Guidance: The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) has provided specific guidance on food safety [here](#). For more information on farm worker health and hygiene training or other produce safety questions, please email produce.safety@maryland.gov. Additional information is available on the Maryland Department of Agriculture's (MDA) [website](#).

University of Maryland Extension: The University of Maryland Extension and other state extension programs have worked to create factsheets regarding COVID-19 for home consumers, retail-food service, grocery shopping, farms and PYOs, and foodbanks. Materials are also available in Spanish and Chinese, and updated weekly. Visit: <https://extension.umd.edu/foodsafety>.

Cleaning and Disinfection Guidelines: The CDC's [website](#) has general cleaning and disinfection guidelines.