COVID-19 and Meat Processing: Background and Technical Assistance

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Background

**MMWR Report (U.S., as of May 31st):**

- At least **16,233** COVID-19 cases among meat processing workers
- At least **86** have died
- **9.1%** of meat/poultry processing workers
- **87%** occurred among workers in minority populations

Meat processing declared “critical infrastructure” on April 28

CDC/OSHA issued guidance on April 26

(Waltenburg et al., 2020)
Technical Assistance

• Team of Infectious Disease Experts from Global Center for Health Security at University of Nebraska Medical Center

• Provided technical assistance to meat processing facilities in Nebraska
  • Onsite visits (14) and technical assistance calls (9)

• Observations and best practices have been collated to develop Guidelines and Recommendations for mitigating risks of COVID-19 in these facilities

https://www.unmc.edu/healthsecurity/
Recommendations & Observations

• Challenges and Increased exposure risks
  • Hundreds to thousands of workers per shift
  • Prolonged close contact on production lines
  • Compact welfare areas (cafeteria, locker rooms, hallways)

• Key Recommendations from Infection Control standpoint:
  • Universal mask policy
  • Physical barriers (e.g., Plexiglass partitions on the line, at cafeteria tables)
  • Physical distancing (on production line, in welfare areas, additional tent space)
  • Education
  • Paid sick leave and no-penalty absenteeism (NOT bonus pay tied to attendance!)
Conclusions

- Worked solely with plant leadership
- Measures have been implemented, but how will they be maintained?
  - Compliance
  - Enforcement
  - Sustained policies

Markets

**Tyson Reinstates Policy That Penalizes Absentee Workers**

By Deena Shanker and Jen Skerritt

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References

UNMC Global Center for Health Security (GCHS):

GCHS Meat Processing Resources: https://www.unmc.edu/healthsecurity/covid-19/playbooks/meatpacking.html
