



Public Health  
England



Herefordshire  
Council

## Press Statement

12 July 2020

### Response to outbreak of COVID-19 at a farm in Herefordshire

Herefordshire Council is working with Public Health England (PHE) Midlands to support vegetable producers AS Green and Co, based in Mathon near Malvern, following an outbreak of COVID-19 among their workforce.

Around 200 key workers are employed to carry out picking and packing work vital to the UK food supply chain and local economy. During the harvesting season, the workforce resides in mobile homes based on the farm, so as a precaution, the whole group are being treated as one extended bubble. Workers are being asked to remain on the farm during the period of isolation and stay within household groups, to reduce risk of spread within the workforce and into the wider community. Herefordshire Council is arranging food and essential supplies for residents on the site, while they self-isolate.

**Katie Spence, PHE Midlands Health Protection Director, said:** “We are working closely with the management at AS Green and Co to support the health and wellbeing of their workforce and wider public health.

“At this phase of the pandemic, we still expect to see cases in the community and within settings where people are closer together, such as workplaces, which is why the Test and Trace system is important, to help us pick up on any potential problems and swiftly to take remedial action to reduce spread.

“To support this workforce of around 200 key workers, the company has put in place a range of infection control measures to try to reduce the risk of staff being exposed to COVID-19. Measures include supporting testing on site, promoting social distancing in communal social areas and in the indoor packaging area; providing PPE for staff where applicable, encouraging regular handwashing for at least 20 seconds, and promoting the use of face coverings in closed areas.

“Despite these measures, a small number of workers became symptomatic earlier this week and they and a few close contacts among the workforce were tested initially and found to be positive. In line with NHS guidance, affected individuals were asked to self-isolate for 7 days, with their households and close contacts asked to isolate for 14 days.

“As we have seen a global trend of large food producers being subject to outbreaks, as a precautionary measure, the decision was made to test the entire workforce. The initial batch of results showed a significant percentage of positive cases, despite these individuals being asymptomatic. We are still awaiting a few final results, but currently we have 73 positive cases of COVID-19 among the workforce.

“PHE Midlands and Herefordshire Council are therefore working with AS Green and Co to closely monitor and manage the outbreak and support individual workers.”

**A spokesperson for AS Green said:**“Our staff are our priority, they are hard-working key workers helping us provide food for the country during these unusual times. We contacted PHE and we are working closely with them and Public Health at Herefordshire Council to prevent the spread of COVID-19.”

**Karen Wright, Director of Public Health for Herefordshire, said:** “While Herefordshire is the first to experience an outbreak of this kind, this is not unexpected. Our priority is to protect the health and wellbeing of all residents in our community. Prompt testing on the farm has allowed us to understand transmission and control the spread of infection. We continue to support the farm management, their workers – who form an important part of our local economy, and the local community through this challenging time. Anyone who has a fever, persistent dry cough, or loss or change in their sense of taste or smell should call 119 or go online to arrange a test.”

## Notes to Editors

1. Public Health England (PHE) exists to protect and improve the nation’s health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-leading science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and a distinct delivery organisation with operational autonomy. We provide government, local government, the NHS, Parliament, industry and the public with evidence-based professional, scientific and delivery expertise and support.

Website: [www.gov.uk/phe](http://www.gov.uk/phe) Facebook: [www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland](https://www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland)  
Follow us on Twitter @PHE\_UK @PHE\_WestMids

2. **About outbreaks in large-scale food producers**

Across the country, PHE’s Health Protection Teams (HPTs) are working with local authorities to advise and support them in the management of COVID-19 outbreaks in

factories, including large-scale food production companies. PHE has published guidance for factories and other businesses advising how to reduce the risk of transmission in factories and other workplaces, including guidance on social distancing, hand hygiene and cleaning the workplace.

PHE is working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) on additional guidance for the food industry in light of the emerging evidence in producers such as meat processing plants. This guidance will take into account information from international partners and will be published as soon as possible.

Where outbreaks occur, we are working closely with NHS Test and Trace to ensure appropriate testing and tracing of contacts, both within and outside of the workplace. Where required, mobile testing units are being deployed to ensure large workforces are tested promptly.

### 3. **About local clusters and outbreaks**

PHE has been working closely with all local authorities to prepare for and manage any potential local clusters and outbreaks and our epidemiological analysis will play an important role identifying if there are any significant sustained increases in communities.

As we continue to carefully emerge from lockdown, it is important now more than ever that people continue to follow government advice on social distancing, self-isolation, wearing face coverings, and practicing good hand hygiene, in order to keep the number of new cases on its way down. Anyone with a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of or change to their sense of smell or taste, should stay at home and arrange a test immediately.

### 4. PHE Midlands would like to remind people about the guidance for self-isolation.

#### **Self-isolate if:**

- you have any symptoms of coronavirus (a high temperature, a new, continuous cough or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste)
- you're waiting for a coronavirus test result
- you've tested positive for coronavirus – this means you have coronavirus
- you live with someone who has symptoms, is waiting for a test result or has tested positive

#### **If you're self-isolating, you and anyone you live with must not leave your home:**

- do not go to work, school or public places – work from home if you can
- do not go on public transport or use taxis
- do not go out to get food and medicine – order it online or by phone, or ask someone to bring it to your home
- do not have visitors in your home, including friends and family – except for people providing essential care
- do not go out to exercise – exercise at home or in your garden, if you have one

### 5. Further information on self-isolation:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/how-long-to-self-isolate/>

### 6. Information on getting a test if you suspect you have COVID-19:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/ask-for-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>

7. Information on symptoms of COVID-19:  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>

8. **About Herefordshire**

Herefordshire is a predominantly rural county with around 95% of the county classified as such. It has the third lowest population density of any English county with large areas of picturesque and relatively unspoilt countryside. In addition to Hereford city, there are five historic market towns (Bromyard, Kington, Ledbury, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye), each with a distinctive character. The largest business sectors in Herefordshire are currently manufacturing, defence and security, food and drink production, agriculture and tourism.

'Agriculture, forestry and fishing' is the largest industry in Herefordshire with 2,415 businesses; 24% of total businesses in Herefordshire, followed by 'construction' and 'professional, technical activities' (11% each). Herefordshire employs a higher proportion of people in manufacturing than nationally; six percentage points higher in the county than in England as a whole. Almost half of manufacturing in Herefordshire is classed as low technology; this includes food and beverages which is a historically strong sector within the county. Agriculture, forestry & fishing (including farm agriculture) (6,500), Accommodation and food services (6,500) and Education (6,000) also employed large numbers of people in Herefordshire and account for 23% of total employment. More information can be found at [www.understanding.herefordshire.gov.uk](http://www.understanding.herefordshire.gov.uk)

**For more information contact:**

**Herefordshire Council Press Office on 01432 260 006 Out Of Hours 01432 260 384**  
**PHE Midlands (West) press office on 0121 232 9223/4 Out Of Hours 07834 311 393**