

A note from Alberta Health Services to Alberta's cattle feeders

Since the beginning of November, we have seen an increasing trend of feedlot operations with COVID-19 across the South Zone of Alberta Health Services (AHS). This includes cases within support industries such as feed supply and trucking. This aligns with increasing illness in all of Alberta, impacting nearly every sector. To date, in the South Zone, **five feedlot operators have had confirmed clusters** (more than one case) of COVID-19 illness on their farm.

Why does this matter to you?

- COVID-19 can affect any demographic, any age and any sector, despite all best efforts
- While illness may be mild for many, for some, it can be very serious
- Increasing community spread can lead to more outbreaks in vulnerable settings such as care facilities, where risk of serious complications and death are higher
- Increasing spread may jeopardize the health system, affecting staff and services
- Illness on feedlots in workers can have a significant impact on operations, which can impact business continuity and animal welfare

Key areas to focus on:

- **Staff Rooms** – this is where individuals tend to let their guards down. It is important to have measures in place at all times in the workplace. People share snacks (common trays, condiments) and have prolonged visits in close proximity in these spaces. We have seen many instances where a team of staff who share the break room unknowingly spread to colleagues, just by having lunch or coffee. People with COVID-19 are infectious (able to spread the virus), 48 hours before the onset of symptoms. With the holiday season upon us, it is common to have oranges, trays of treats, pot lucks and other activities that bring people together. It is important to remember to keep your distance from your colleagues, they are not considered your cohort. They are like the rank steer that does not want to be caught to be treated. Try to schedule or take breaks at different times, wipe down surfaces after each use and reduce any shared items as much as possible.
- **Vehicle Sharing** – Another common source of spread is when you carpool with a colleague, head to town for supplies or travel on the feedlot in a truck/tractor for more than 15 minutes. This is where those additional measures like masking or face coverings are an asset. You should be masked when in close proximity (within 6 feet) with a colleague for more than 15 minutes, cumulative in a day.
- **Treating cattle, handling or moving animals in tight spaces (chutes, alleys, barns)** – The virus can spread without masking protection of both workers (nose and mouth) in this situation. Outdoors is generally a lower risk activity, but those closer proximity interactions, where there may be more exertion (breathing heavy) is when aerosols can go farther.

These are situations where AHS Public Health South Zone have seen transmission within feedlot operations. As feedlots are important to our agriculture industry and economy, prevention and best management *before* a case occurs is easier than contact tracing,

isolation and quarantine after. We know that no producer wants to spread illness to their most important asset, their staff.

Feedlot operators need to be documenting (and making available when requested) the policies and procedures you have implemented on site. Local health services will require this information when conducting contact tracing and other COVID-19 related inquiries. AHS needs this information to ensure anyone potentially exposed receives the correct guidance.

At minimum, operators should be able to provide: Names, addresses, phone numbers, date of last shift, roles and positions of staff, workers and visitors who were potentially exposed to an infectious case while they were at that location

Each feedlot also needs to be prepared to respond to symptomatic workers or confirmed cases of COVID 19. It is necessary that feedlots have detailed protocols and procedures as well as a comprehensive written Rapid Response Plan to assist AHS in their worksite investigation.

Vital documentation:

- **Date of reported illness**
- **Date of last shift**
- **Role and Duties**
- **Potential close contacts**
- **Crucial roles and contingency plans**
 - o **Ex: If regular staff cannot feed animals, who completes the job and how**
- **Employee health and safety measures**
 - o **Masks/face coverings where distance cannot be maintained, sanitization, shift work, distancing policies, etc. Hand hygiene**
- **HR Policies**
 - o **Employee symptom reporting and isolation plan**
 - o **Sick leave policy**
- **Visitor protocols**

Specific information and detailed planning for each of these points and more can be found in our comprehensive [COVID-19 Feedlot Operations resource](#).

There are also several good resources within this document like this [Feedlot Emergency Planning tool](#), HR Guidelines, and much more.

For more information, please contact your ACFA.

