



## Strategies to Control the Spread of COVID at Seafood Processing Plants: Social Distancing and Physical Barriers

Authored by Abigail Villalba, Extension Specialist, Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center, Virginia Tech

### Social Distancing and Physical Barriers

Seafood processing workers often work prolonged hours (e.g., 8–16+ hours) per shift, close to one another in seafood processing areas, during cutting, mixing, weighing, packing, or quality control stations, on processing lines, and onboard vessels. Working close together (< 6 feet) on the processing line is very common and during shared spaces such as break rooms, locker rooms, and entrances/exits. Limiting workers face-to-face contact with others and providing physical barriers are ways that companies are able to continue production while protecting their workforce. Here are some strategies that companies and their employees can follow to minimize exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

### Social Distancing



By maintaining at least 6 feet apart from your co-worker, companies can support social distancing while at work. If social distancing is not possible,

then companies can do other things such as adjustments to the work environment and providing physical barriers

### Install physical barriers

If appropriate to the type of work, install shields or barriers, such as plastic, between line workers to protect workers from person-to-person droplets.

Barriers can be constructed using strip curtains, plexiglass, or any material that can be cleaned and disinfected.

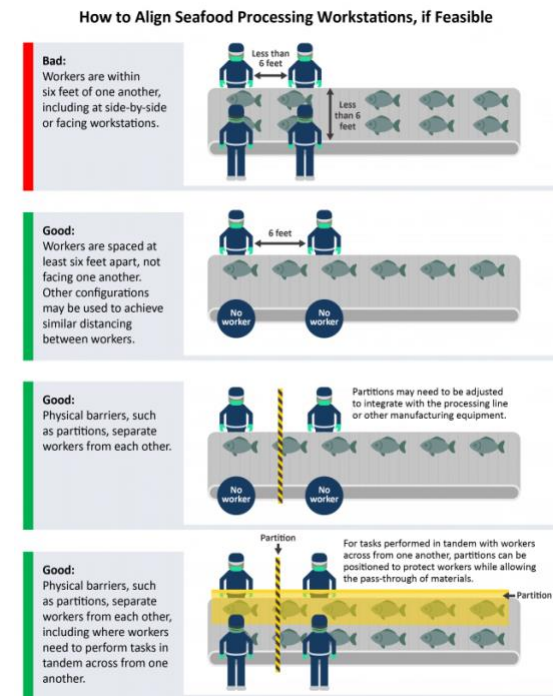


Figure 1. How to align seafood processing workstations. (CDC illustration)

## Stagger work shifts

Staggering work shifts, breaks and arrival /departure time can support and facilitate social distancing by reducing workers density at times when they may be near each other and sharing spaces such as in break rooms, locker rooms, entrance and exits and shared transportation.

## Increase worker separation in common areas

Remove or rearrange chairs and tables in break or lunch areas to allow for more space between employees during their lunch break.

Encourage single-file movement of workers who are separated by six feet by providing visual cues such as floor markings, signs, and other visual cues.

## Processing Vessels



Work onboard vessels may increase the risk for workers getting infected with COVID 19.

- Designate a workplace coordinator to do a COVID-19 assessment to identify risks and strategies for control.
- Install engineering controls (e.g., modify workstations, use physical barriers and ventilation), if feasible.
- Have workers quarantine and self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days prior to initial entry to vessel. Consider paid leave while in quarantine.
- Prevent introduction of COVID -19 to anyone entering or working in the worksite (e.g., delivering fishermen and tenders, truck drivers, contractors, and others).

## Educate workers

- About recognizing COVID-19 symptoms and how they may prevent exposure to the virus.
- Take into consideration workers language diversity.
- If providing signs and/or written information, materials should be:
  - Easily understood
  - In preferred language
  - At appropriate literacy level
  - Contain accurate and timely information
  - Consider using infographics

## Additional Resources

CDC 2020. Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers Responding to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

CDC 2020. Protecting Seafood Processing Workers from COVID-19. Interim Guidance from CDC and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Developed in consultation with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-seafood-processing.html>

Visit Virginia Cooperative Extension: [ext.vt.edu](http://ext.vt.edu)

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg.

2020

FST-377NP  
VSG-20-07