



COVID-19 at Work: understanding transmission in the food processing sector

As part of Theme 3 of PROTECT, the COVID-19 at Work study aims to identify which workplace factors and workforce characteristics are associated with risk of COVID-19 infection among workers in the food processing sector.

By enhancing knowledge and understanding of transmission within the food processing sector, the study will support the cross-sharing of lessons learned, good practices and information sources across the industry and between its sub-sectors.

Study findings will help generate recommendations for government agencies and the industry as a whole to respond more effectively to infectious disease outbreaks and keep businesses operating, while also highlighting gaps in information resources and where further research is needed.

The research questions the project aims to address include:

- What is the extent of past cases of COVID-19, and case rates relative to the number of people employed, across the food sector?
- What are the associations between the incidence of new cases of COVID-19 and features of the workplace and workforce?
- What are the risk factors for COVID-19 infection in the sector, and what guidance can be provided to reduce the risk of transmission among workers?

The research will take place in four stages:

- **Stage one, baseline survey:** a short baseline survey across the food processing sector will provide an overview of COVID-19 rates in different branches of the industry.
- **Stage two, follow-up by workplace:** a follow-up survey, conducted via phone call or video conference, will collect information on any new cases of COVID-19, along with more detailed information about work and non-work features, including control measures for each facility.
- **Stage three, sector-level 'deep dive' study:** qualitative semi-structured interviews will be conducted, via video conference, with industry stakeholders including government representatives, trade unions, trade associations, academics and conglomerates to understand the barriers and opportunities to reduce transmission of the COVID-19 virus in the food processing sector.
- **Stage four, site-specific nested studies:** a small subset of facilities will be selected to take part in site specific assessments where verbal 'talk throughs' with the workforce will take place. Site based sampling will also be conducted to obtain photographs of the physical work environment which will enable the context of the interview and survey responses to be better understood. Additionally, interviews with employer representatives will be carried out to better understand their perceptions of potential transmission risk, whether controls seem adequate, levels of compliance and any means of monitoring or enforcement.

The study team are currently conducting stage two with food businesses. If you would like to be involved, or have any questions about the project, please contact the project lead, Miranda Loh, at CovidAtWorkStudy@iom-world.org or on 0131 449 8052.

Project team

Project lead(s):

- Dr Tony Fletcher, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
- Dr Miranda Loh, Institute of Occupational Medicine

Other partners:

- University of Manchester

Study documents

- [Participant Information Summary](#)