



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COVID-19: WE ALL HAVE A PART TO PLAY IN PREVENTION

CELINA- In recent days, Mercer County has seen an increase in the number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19. As more new information becomes available, the Mercer County Health District (MCHD), continues to examine and analyze the data in search of common links between individuals who are infected.

“It is important that everyone takes ownership in helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community,” said Jason Menchhofer, MCHD Administrator. “We cannot let our guard down at anytime while fighting to stop the spread of this virus.”

As of May 9, 2020, a total of 71 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed in Mercer County since testing began. Of those 71 people, 24 are currently employed by the Cooper Farms Plant in St. Henry. MCHD is still investigating how these people became infected.

The plant employs approximately 700 people, and the leadership team at Cooper Farms has worked diligently, with the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), to implement a plan to protect the employees. Members of MCHD were invited to the plant to see the enhancements made and asked to offer any guidance for further improvements. The company began its COVID-19 communication the first week of March, with the addition of further prevention measures starting the next week. The employee communication began with symptom awareness, hygiene reminders, and cleanliness guidelines.

Ongoing implementation of the company’s COVID-19 plan includes enhanced team member and management prevention protocols. Anyone entering the building must go through temperature screening and a health and travel assessment. Anyone failing to meet the set criteria will be sent home. Face coverings are also mandated for anyone in the building and team members who may be sick during their shift are sent home.

They have also implemented an aggressive sanitizing schedule, physical barriers where team members cannot maintain six feet of separation, staggered start and break times, and have limited rotation of team members from one area or department to another.

As the response has evolved, Cooper Farms and MCHD have been in frequent communication to ensure all the best steps are being taken. Although employees of the Cooper Farms plant who have respiratory symptoms are being tested for COVID-19, testing of all employees is not recommended at this time.

The current situation illustrates that importance of prevention at all levels, from the front-line employee's personal life to the top of any organization. For employers, it is especially important to think of this when considering whether a team member should be able to work. If an employee is experiencing a fever, cough, shortness of breath, or any other symptoms of illness, it is important for that employee to stay home and avoid spreading the illness to someone else. If a sick employee decides to show up for work, administrative controls should be in place to keep from admitting that employee to the facility.

MCHD reminds Mercer County residents that we are all in this together, and we all must do our part to protect ourselves and each other from COVID-19. As more conclusions are drawn from the growing body of data, the health district will continue to share information and messages of prevention.

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