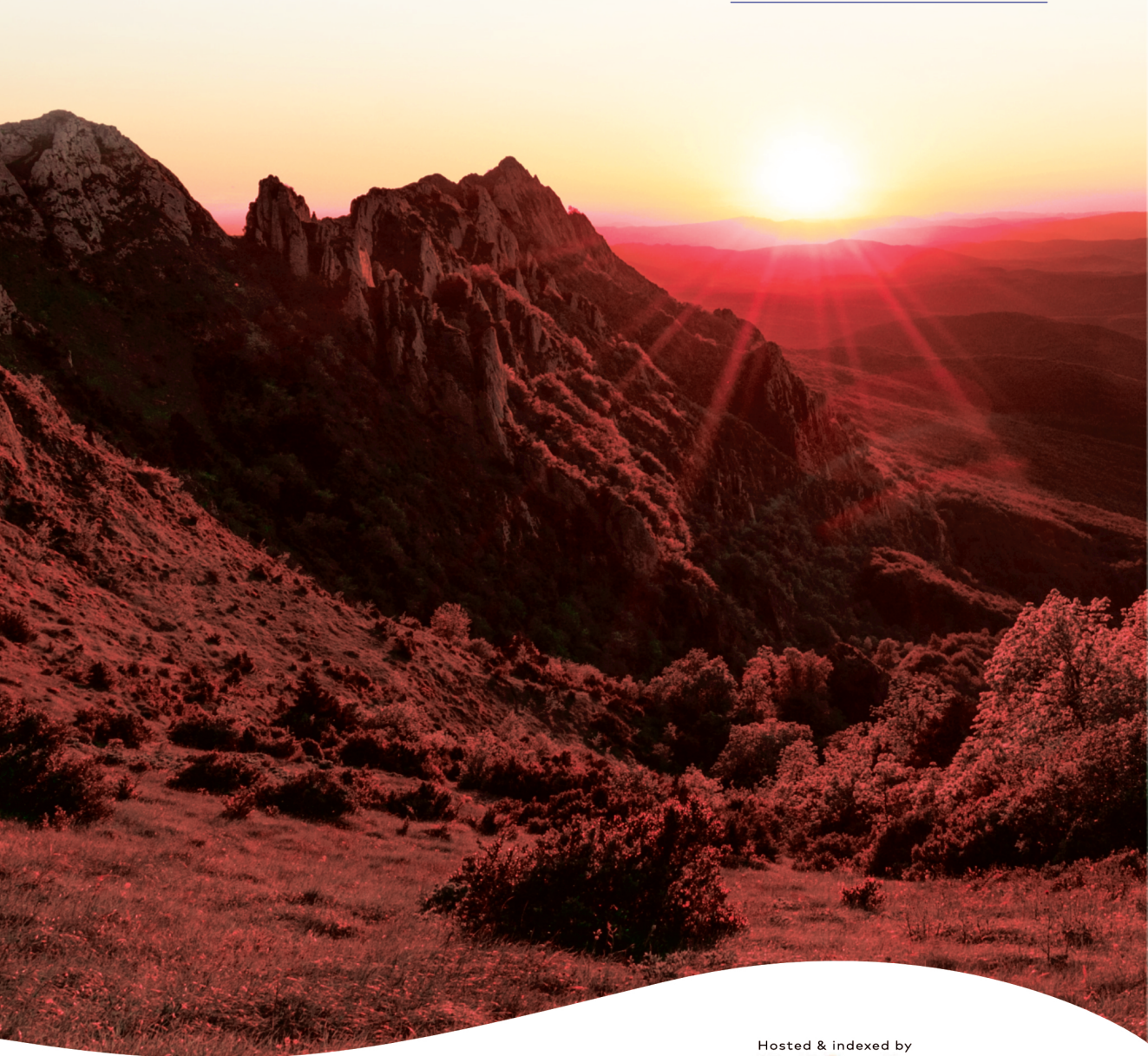


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Preventing coronavirus in a busy (multi-faceted) workplace – packaging agricultural and veterinary products

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Abstract

In this opinionated professional letter, Cooper tackles strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in multi-faceted workplaces like packaging facilities for agricultural and veterinary products. The letter emphasizes the critical need for strict adherence to hygiene practices, proper mask usage and social distancing both during work and commute. The virus' potential to spread via aerosolization, contaminated surfaces and inadequate mask-wearing is highlighted, with public transportation and shared workplace tools identified as key areas of concern. To mitigate these risks, Cooper suggests measures such as wearing surgical masks (or dual masks), using face shields, routine cleaning of surfaces and unidirectional floor markings are also recommended. Cooper believes workers must practice hygiene during breaks and in smoking areas, avoid physical contact with sick individuals and maintain surface cleanliness. In his opinion, Cooper also discusses the adverse impact of harsh workplace conditions on employees' mental and physical health noting stress from long shifts, punitive management and low wages exacerbating unsafe behaviours, such as improper disposal of waste and theft, which further complicate the work environment. The short well thought text addresses the aforementioned issues with respectful management practices, realistic job targets and adequate support systems like rapid testing, isolation facilities and record-keeping being singled out as having the potential of creating a safer and more productive workplace. Clearly, Cooper battles with the continuing manifestation of the COVID-19 Virus in various contexts years after ravaging the world.

Keywords: Covid-19, workers, multi-faceted, veterinary, agriculture



Coronavirus (Covid-19) is a novel virus believed to have emerged from a multi-complex meat market in Wuhan, China, in 2019. It rapidly spread globally through human transmission and international travel, causing significant economic disruption, widespread deaths and global crises. The severity of the pandemic led the World Health Organisation (WHO) and governments worldwide to mandate preventative measures such as the compulsory wearing of masks, maintaining social distancing of 1–2 metres, and regular handwashing with soap and water or the use of alcohol-based hand sanitiser. However, despite these efforts, many individuals have disregarded these rules, inadequately wearing masks, neglecting social distancing and washing hands infrequently. Its airborne transmission (Wang et al., 2020) further necessitates regular disinfection of frequently touched public surfaces.

Public transportation is a critical vector for Covid-19 transmission, particularly among unvaccinated individuals. Overcrowding, cramped seating and passengers neglecting mandatory safety measures exacerbate the risk. In many cultures, loud conversations and shouting among passengers further facilitate virus spread through respiratory droplets. Shared surfaces, such as door handles, armrests and window levers, pose additional risks as the virus can survive on surfaces for hours, entering the body through mucosal orifices such as the nose and mouth. Practices like rubbing one's eyes are particularly hazardous. Asymptomatic carriers inadvertently spread the virus to workplaces, where shared tools like pump-trucks, forklifts, wheelie-bins, totes and trolleys become reservoirs for contamination (for ca.48hr.). The aerosolised spread of the virus is also worsened by uncovered coughing or sneezing. Proper and consistent use of face masks has proven effective in saving lives, highlighting the need for public education to normalise mask-wearing, as routinely practised by healthcare professionals, scientists and veterinarians (Olaimat et al., 2020). Workers have to be educated to become accustomed to wearing masks as, indeed, scientists, veterinarians, doctors, dentists, nurses and other health care professionals have.

Government-enforced measures, such as wearing surgical masks alongside cloth masks, significantly attenuate transmission rates. For additional protection, face shields may be worn but require regular cleaning with alcohol-based wipes or soap and water. Shields are particularly effective in preventing droplets from reaching others and minimising exposure to infected respiratory emissions. Establishing consistent routines for mask-wearing and surface disinfection reduces workplace risks, even in busy environments involving boxed goods, storage (including damages), stacking, packing and distribution.

During breaks, workers must sit in screened areas and sanitise surfaces before eating or drinking. Smokers must maintain social distancing in designated smoking areas, where masks are removed. When departing the premises, strict social distancing is necessary and avoidance of sick, sneezing and coughing individuals is wise, as well as being careful not to come in contact with voided mucus and saliva. Movement within workplaces should adhere to floor markings ensuring unidirectional flow and strict distancing measures should be observed when entering or leaving premises.

In workplaces, overly rigid and punitive management practices often exacerbate stress and compromise adherence to safety protocols. Common practices, such as excessive monitoring via CCTV and strict enforcement of productivity targets, create stressful and hostile environments including precise clock-in-and-out regimes. enforce long walking distances in between the workspace or area and the canteen; strictly time how long a worker spends in the toilet; ridged apportioning of timed targets between scanning and picking a product; and issuing negative marks with enforced subsequent punitive punishments for failing to meet outrageous company demands, are not uncommon. Employees working long shifts of 10–12 hours, with only two 30-minute unpaid breaks, may resort to unhygienic coping strategies, such as urinating in bottles or defecating in hidden areas due to time constraints. Such conditions often result in mental and physical health issues (Cooper, 2022). Moreover, a culture of theft and sabotage can emerge, where workers engage in acts of defiance, including concealing stolen goods or swapping personal items with workplace stock. Workplace stress often leads to health problems including those of a mental and physical nature (Cooper, 2022). A harsh, nasty, exhausting and unfriendly workplace results. To support their low and/or delayed wages, poor net remuneration after tax and, as a form of vindictive retribution against harsh management practices, a culture of theft may emerge and is often common including swallowing of small metal items such as spare parts; inserting a condom or plastic bag enclosed product including veterinary medication internally; or illegally and surreptitiously swapping worn-out dirty shoes or attire with brand new items and walking out with them.

To prevent the spread of Covid-19 and maintain a safe, productive workplace, employers must foster respectful treatment of workers, employ fair and professional management and provide realistic job targets. Comprehensive safety measures, including rapid testing, record-keeping and support systems for self-isolating employees, are essential and morally justified. Addressing workplace stress and ensuring a collaborative, supportive environment can significantly reduce transmission risks and promote overall well-being.

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