



Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department

2104 21st Circle | P.O. Box 779
Wisner, NE 68791-0779

*Proudly serving Burt, Cuming,
Madison and Stanton Counties*

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CONTACT: Gina Uhing, Health Director 402-529-2233

COVID-19 Outbreak being investigated at Tyson Foods, Inc., Madison

{Madison, NE} On the evening of Thursday, April 16th, Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department (ELVPHD) was made aware of two confirmed COVID-19 cases—both employees at Tyson in Madison, NE. At this time, there are a total of six confirmed cases stemming from employees of that Tyson plant. An additional 30+ tests are pending at this time from Tyson employees or direct household contacts of Tyson employees.

On the prior evening of April 15th, our department was notified of the statewide initiative to increase COVID-19 testing in the area and were advised that a mass testing event was to be offered in the ELVPHD district for up to 100 patrons in coordination with DHHS, Nebraska Public Health Lab and military personnel. After learning of the positive cases at Tyson in Madison, ELVPHD made the decision to earmark the majority of the 100 tests for Tyson employees and/or household members of Tyson employees. Initially, support was achieved from both corporate and local Tyson leaders.

On Friday evening, April 17th, our department was notified in writing from Tyson Vice President in Arkansas that upon further reflection, Tyson was declining to provide names of any Tyson team members as requested by our department. Further, the notice stated that Tyson did not see that providing team member information to us was necessary, as they believed that the testing should be reserved for other groups stating that they had not identified symptomatic Tyson team members who had not been tested.

Through public advertising, the screening event schedule was filled the evening of Friday, April 17th. Of those Tyson employees requesting a test through the public scheduling solicitation, the majority of those were reporting symptoms in conjunction with their request to be tested.

ELVPHD made several recommendations (in writing) to Tyson on Friday, April 17th, reiterating that utmost attention to stopping spread and exposures in the plant now could procure immense gain in outbreak control in the days and weeks ahead. Tyson was asked to immediately begin the following:

1. Excuse from work the high risk exposures immediately without punishment or retaliation towards the affected employee/s;
 - a. Employees reporting illness must be excused per the Directed Health Measures which include two weeks of quarantine;
 - b. Symptoms must be screened at the point of entry each day for each employee. Somebody in management or nursing should oversee this for each employee. Anyone with fever OR cough OR sore throat must be excused from work immediately. This must be communicated to the employees that a worker will be sent home, no exceptions, regardless of his/her carpooling arrangements. We also ordered a supervised mid-day symptom screen of all employees to promptly identify anyone that should develop symptoms midday.
2. Increase measures to prevent spread and exposure in the lunchroom, cafeteria, breakrooms and/or locker rooms. This included not gathering in groups in these areas of the plant, and discontinue

practices of buffet lines, shared serving utensils or condiments, and disallowing refillable cups and mugs;

3. Discontinue the practice of shared helmets, headsets, business radios, water fountains, etc.;
4. Disinfecting as a priority, and it is one that will likely require more manpower and resources. Hourly disinfection of door handles, vending buttons, bathrooms, time clock buttons, any spigots or nozzles that employees are touching, handles/levers/knobs/buttons on steering wheels of heavy machinery. Although every example could not be provided, plant leaders were encouraged to walk through the plant and notice what is being touched repeatedly, as well as items that a large number of employee touch, such as bathroom stalls, toilet flushers, soap dispenser buttons, push buttons for air dryers should have hourly wipe down. More often is even better.
5. Masks—all employees mask at all times while in the plant until further notice—this includes in commons areas and must include covering of the nose and mouth for all employees. Tyson was asked to creatively think of a way to have employees eat their meals and continue operation without congregating unmasked. This includes carpooling. Those carpooling should be encouraged to commute in mask.

As this outbreak investigation continues, testing results, case numbers related to Tyson, and any further updates will be provided to the public by way of a media release.

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