

# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING MEAT PROCESSING PLANT OPERATIONS, WORKER SAFETY, AND COMMUNITY WELFARE

The President declared meat an “essential resource” under the Defense Production Act, effectively mandating plants maintain some production. Meat processing plants, therefore, have both a financial incentive and special responsibility to remain open even with an elevated risk of outbreaks.

This analysis focuses on answering the question: What strategies and interventions can most effectively and ethically reduce the risks of outbreaks and protect the people working in these plants, as well as the viability of the plants, their local communities and the nation’s food supply?

The recommended strategies are grounded in an overarching public health commitment to effectiveness using the least-restrictive means to achieve goals. They are also grounded by a set of shared values based on mutual respect, fairness, and community interdependence. Especially during pandemic conditions, these values include accountability, transparency, fair allocation of risks and benefits, reciprocity, and interdependence.

## ETHICAL UNDERPINNINGS



GLOBAL CENTER  
FOR HEALTH SECURITY

### RECIPROCITY

COVID-19 disproportionately burdens some groups – including workers in essential industries. This disproportionate burden creates reciprocal obligations on others, including their employers, the government and community organizations. These include the responsibility to keep those deemed essential as safe as possible, which, in turn will minimize possible harms to others, including their families and other community members. Information about and access to health care for COVID-19 should be provided to all workers.

### PROTECTING HEALTH

It is the obligation of regulators to require preventive measures at all plants, thereby protecting workers and the community from infection. In addition, paid sick leave and no-cost testing should be provided. People who are infected and unable to obtain a test might not know they are infectious, thereby posing greater risk to others in their workplace and community.

### REDUCING BURDEN

Sacrifice is an inevitable part of burden-sharing in a community. It is the obligation of regulators and enforcement agencies to require preventive measures at all plants, thereby protecting workers and the community from infection, and establishing a level playing field for the industry. A level regulatory field ensures that burdens from addressing the pandemic are distributed equitably. Businesses that operate and benefit economically from plant operations must shoulder some burdens, as must workers and other community members.

### REDUCING HARM

Reduction of harm entails limiting infections while also limiting any adverse impacts of public health measures. Administrative and engineering controls should be implemented and enforced to ensure the safety of workers. Lack of paid sick leave and penalizations for illness-related absences during the pandemic harm not only the worker but also the health and wellbeing of co-workers and the local community and the financial security of the plant.

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We recommend three pillars of action to avoid or mitigate COVID-19 outbreaks, each with its own set of ethical expectations. On-site prevention requires actions from employers, employees, and others to ensure reasonable safety in the workplace; off-site prevention requires actions to create off-site conditions that reduce the risk of community transmission; and the treatment and remediation pillar requires actions to ensure adequate care in the event a worker becomes ill. Importantly, the ethical expectations include a path toward some level of enforcement to ensure a level playing field across the industry, especially for emergency workplace safety regulations.

## PILLAR #1: ON-SITE PREVENTION

**Strategy 1.1: Adjust line speeds, workflows, and product through-put relative to worker numbers**

**Strategy 1.2: For all leadership, including line supervisors, ensure that communication to workers of sick leave, safety, and IPC policies is consistent with pandemic specific safety policies**



**Strategy 1.3: Implement administrative/engineering controls per OSHA guidance**

**Strategy 1.4: Provide adequate personal protective equipment**

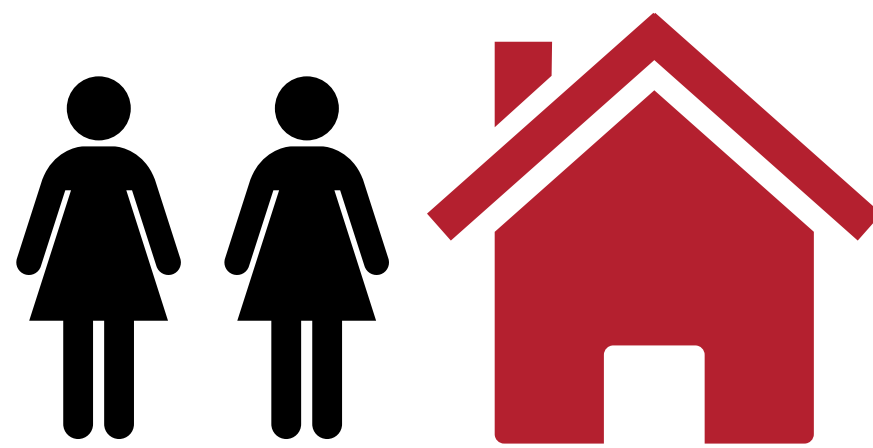


**Strategy 1.5: Provide education to help workers protect themselves from the virus**

**Strategy 1.6: State and local governments should incentivize meat processing plants adherence to worker safety practices in the plant**

## PILLAR #2: OFF-SITE PREVENTION

**Strategy 2.1: Partner with local or state health departments to identify and secure adequate housing for workers who need it, especially for those in quarantine or isolation**

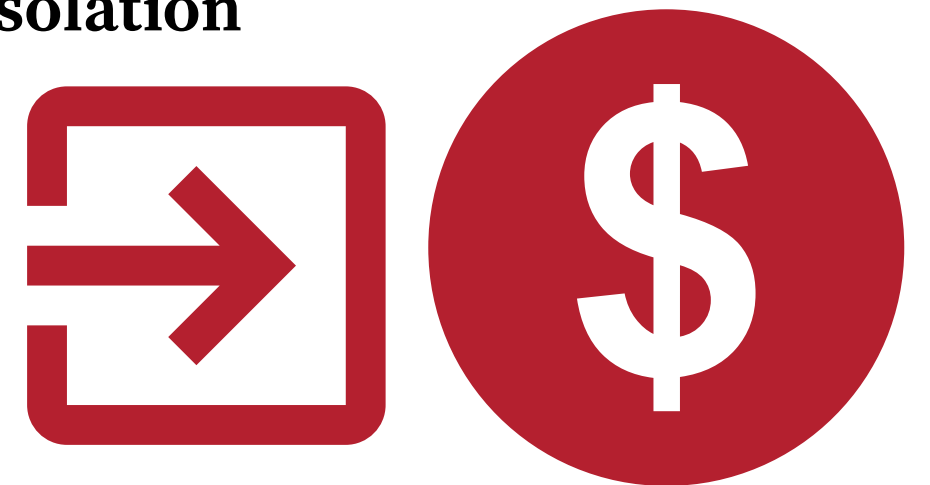


**Strategy 2.2: Partner with public health departments and community organizations to foster culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach**



## PILLAR #3: TREATMENT

**Strategy 3.1: Provide paid sick leave without penalty for workers in quarantine or isolation**



**Strategy 3.2: Provide no-cost testing**



**Strategy 3.3: Provide information about and access to health care for those who develop COVID-19 illness**

