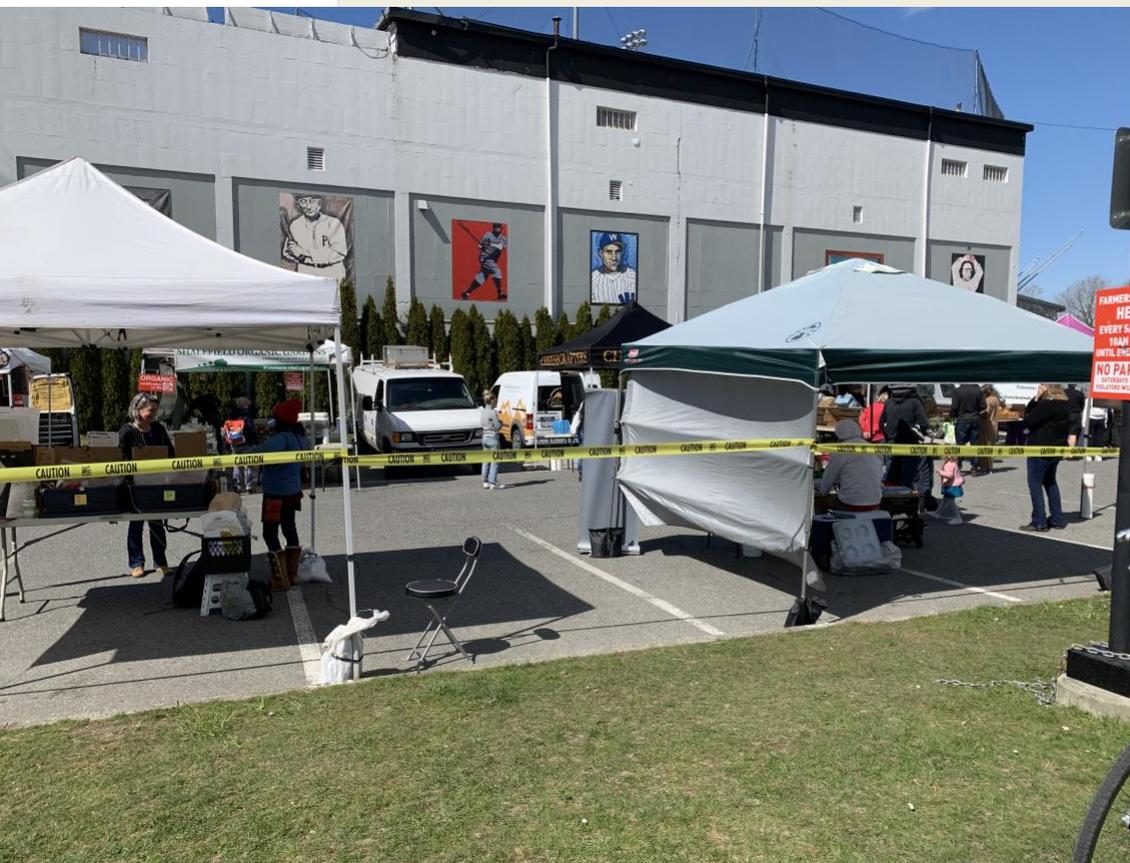


BC Association of Farmers' Markets
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What happens if a farmers' market experiences an exposure of COVID-19? Navigating Operations & Communications



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1. WHAT IS COVID-19?

According to the BC Centre for Disease Control:

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses found mostly in animals. In humans, they can cause diseases ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). The disease caused by the new coronavirus has been named COVID-19.

While many of the characteristics of COVID-19 are still unknown, mild to severe illness has been reported for confirmed cases.

Coronavirus is spread from an infected person through:

- Droplets spread when a person coughs or sneezes
- It can be spread by touch if a person has used their hands to cover their mouth or nose when they cough or sneeze.
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the global outbreak of COVID-19 [a pandemic](#). Subsequently, British Columbia declared [a state of emergency](#) on March 17, 2020 to activate public health measures to prevent the virus from spreading and protect citizens.

2. COVID-19 AND YOUR MARKET

In the continued efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19, while still ensuring access to the necessary goods and services for British Columbians, farmers' markets were declared [an essential service](#) by the Government of BC on March 26, 2020. With guidance and support from the BC Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM), market organizers and vendors quickly stepped in to modify operations so that they could continue to provide access to local food.

We have learned and activated measures to mitigate the spread of the virus in British Columbia, and farmers' market operators continue to successfully adapt to direction from the Government of BC, Provincial Health Officer, BC Centre for Disease Control and other local health authorities as the situation evolves. However, until a vaccine is widely available, community immunity is achieved, or broad successful treatments are developed ([Phase 4](#) of BC's Restart Plan), there is still risk that your farmers' market may experience a case of COVID-19.

In addition to guidance provided on the [BCAFM COVID-19 webpage](#), this guide has been developed for BCAFM member farmers' markets to help navigate the operations and communications should your market or another member farmers' market experience a confirmed exposure of COVID-19.

3. PROCESS OF NOTIFICATION

In the event of a **confirmed** COVID-19 exposure at your farmers' market, the following process of notification applies:

1. Market organizers are notified by public health authority about **confirmed** exposure (learn more about contact tracing [here](#))
2. Market notifies BC Association of Farmers' Markets

Market notifies all vendors and customers, as well as media (where appropriate and as determined by COVID-19 Response Team)

If you are concerned about a *potential* exposure or someone displaying symptoms, in accordance with guidance from the BC Centre for Disease Control:

- anyone who is sick or displaying symptoms should not attend the market, or if they become ill at the market, go home.
- testing is recommended for anyone with cold, influenza or COVID-19-like symptoms, even mild ones (see [BCCDC Testing Information](#)). The person will need to **isolate** while they wait for test results so they do not potentially spread illness to others.
- There is no need to inform anyone of the person getting tested; public health will advise if this is necessary. For questions, people should consult their usual care provider or 811.
- If the COVID-19 test is negative and they don't need to isolate for other reasons (for example, known close contact or international travel within 14 days), the market collaborator should follow up with their usual care provider or 811 regarding next steps to confirm they are clear to return to the market, or if there may be a need for repeat testing or need to isolate for other indications.

The remainder of this guide will advise on what happens if your market experiences a **confirmed** exposure of COVID-19.

4. AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

4.1 Operations

The farmers' market organization and public health authority will work together to determine the best course of action for operations. See *Section 5: Operations* for more information.

4.2 Communications

The farmers' market organization will determine the best course of action for communications through application of this guide and consulting BCAFM. See *Section 6: Communications* for more information.

We also encourage you to use *Appendix C* and *Appendix D* which contain protocols and checklists to guide you through the process.

5. OPERATIONS

In the event there is an exposure in a public setting, such as a farmers' market, local public health will assess the risk of transmission and provide operational guidance specific to the circumstance. They will contact the farmers' market organizers to discuss any next steps.

If you are concerned about a *potential* exposure, please contact your local public health authority.

Local public health contacts:

- Fraser Health: 604-587-3936
- Interior Health: [local health centre](#)
- Island Health
 - South Island: 1-866-665-6626
 - North Island: 1-866-770-7798
- Northern Health: 250-565-2990
- Vancouver Coastal Health: 604-675-3900

Once you have established the best course of action, you are ready to begin communicating with vendors, consumers, and media. See *Section 6: Communications* for this process.

6. COMMUNICATIONS

By following the guidelines established on the [BCAFM Modifying Market Operations webpage](#), including the [BC Centre for Disease Control farmers' market webpage](#), your market is already taking action to reduce the chance of another exposure. With that, the following four-step approach provides a communications guideline to address the exposure your farmers' market is currently dealing with.



4.1 A Four-Step Approach

1. Establish a COVID-19 Response Team
2. Formulate and Implement Communications Plan
3. Monitor Media and Social Media Channels
4. Rebuild Confidence

STEP 1: Establish a COVID-19 Response Team

Your farmers' market should establish a COVID-19 Response Team who can designate a spokesperson, delineate who will handle what and make certain that everyone in your organization knows who is responsible for responding to such inquiries.

Your COVID-19 Response Team should consist of:

- the market manager and/or board member(s) and/or relevant staff member(s)
- a communications professional or an individual who can confidently interface with the media in an organized, strategic manner (may be a board president or other board member, the market manager, other staff or external consultant)
- a BCAFM staff member for consultation (see *Appendix B*).

STEP 2: Formulate Communications Plan

The first and most essential action is to take the time to formulate your plan, including your statement and how it will be delivered (see *Appendix A*). This must be prepared in writing and shared with the COVID-19 Response Team and anyone else who is expected to execute the plan. This allows you to be proactive, because it's your chance to shape your statement.

Important points to consider in crafting your plan and response:

- **Control the message:** Give a concise explanation of what happened, when, and where – *and what you're doing to fix it*. Be sure to also include what measures you have taken and continue to take to prioritize health and safety at your farmers' market with relation to COVID-19, including those who you have taken direction from, including the BC Centre for Disease Control, the Provincial Health Officer and the BC Association of Farmers' Markets. Get all parties involved to participate in responding and make certain that everyone gets your message at the same time and directly from you.
- **Stay community and consumer-focused:** By sharing complete, truthful information with the public and media, you are demonstrating that you're an organization that takes the health and safety of its customers and community very seriously.

The Four Golden Rules in Communicating Your Response

1. Be consistent
2. Be truthful and transparent
3. Take ownership of the issue
4. Display care, concern and genuine sympathy

The Three Golden Rules of Crisis Communications

1. *Respond Swiftly:* In today's world, communications occur in real-time thanks to social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). The longer you wait, the more of a chance for someone else to tell the story.
2. *Know the Facts:* Do not respond to hearsay or rumor. Provide a complete, clear picture of exactly what happened – no matter how uncomfortable that may be. If you are confronted with information you had not heard or cannot verify, explain that you will respond to a particular issue in your next update.
3. *Be Accessible:* Ultimately, crisis communications is a conversation. Don't just blast out a dry "statement." Customers and the general public may want more information, so be sure that an actual person from your COVID-19 Response Team – not a voice recording – is accessible during normal business hours.

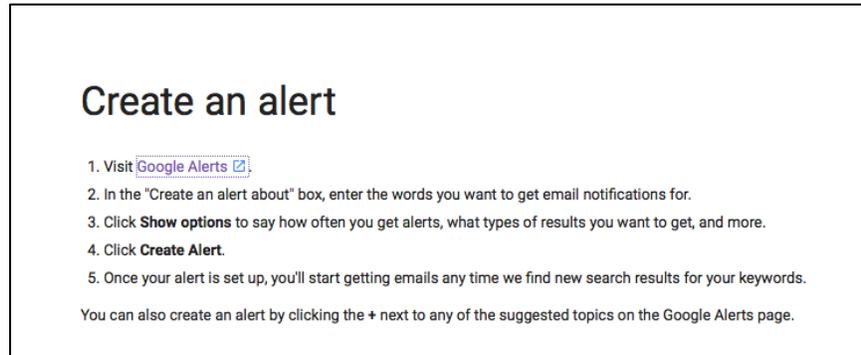
Responding to a related exposure at another market

If an exposure of COVID-19 occurs related to a farmers' market that is not yours, media may contact you for commentary. It is strongly advised to refrain from commenting on the exact situation, but you can feel free to share what YOU do at your market to keep customers safe (follow the guidance provided on this guide and the [Modifying Market Operations webpage](#)).

STEP 3: Monitor Media and Social Media Channels

Google Alerts

Be proactive. Set up a “Google Alert” at www.google.com/alerts, and enter your farmers’ markets’ name. Set up a couple if your farmers’ market has alternate names or spellings.



This free service will alert you immediately if anything related to the exposure and your statement occurs on the Web – sending you a link to the posted media.

How to React Responsibly Online

With the popularity of social media, the public is just as powerful as mainstream media. Thoughtfully managing a negative comment on a Facebook page about your market is just as important as an article about your market in the newspaper. For example, viewers of an Instagram post can leave comments and add their own personal take on the situation – both positive and negative. It’s your responsibility to join in the conversation by monitoring where your name appears online – and then responding to user comments (although do ignore blatantly hostile comments).

Social Media Rules

- **DO ignore overtly hostile comments.** These are usually deleted by the channel in which they were posted, especially if they contain profanity or slanderous statements.
- **DO respond to concerns.** Stick to your statement. If someone wonders what your farmers market is doing about the situation, give them a brief overview of what you’re doing to address the situation. You may also refer them to your website if you have more details there.
- **DO NOT comment on hypothetical events or events/examples that have nothing to do with your market.** Direct them to follow up with others more familiar with the specific situation (provide organization name, where possible).
- **DO NOT assume someone’s culpability as this may subject you to legal action.** For instance, you cannot blame the case at your farmers market on the individual. Stick to your statement.
- **DO NOT get into a lengthy back and forth discussion with anyone in an online environment.** Suggest that the person contact you to discuss the matter in more detail. Remember, be transparent and give them your contact information. If that person does not contact you directly, but continues to post publicly, remind them (and all readers) ONCE that you have invited them in to discuss the issue and then DO NOT respond to them again.

Overall, try not to detract from the conversation with consumers and the public on social media or other communication channels. These are going to be difficult conversations, but we urge you to embrace these discussions. **It is okay to not have all the answers, and it is more important to lead with compassion, empathy and kindness in this challenging time. Ultimately, people want to know they are heard and that their health and safety is your top priority.**

Social Media Response Examples

The image shows two examples of social media interactions. On the left, a user asks a question about social distancing and monitoring, and the BC Farmers Markets author replies with a link to their website. On the right, a user asks about produce contamination, and the BC Farmers Markets author replies with a detailed explanation of safety protocols and a link to their website.

Example 1 (Left):

User: I wonder how the social distancing and the less than 50 people will be monitored at something like this 🤔🙄🙄

Author: BC Farmers Markets We continue to work hard with our member farmers' markets in maintaining the highest level of safety. We invite anyone to visit our website to learn more about how our member markets are modifying their operations to safely serve customers and their communities at this time: bcfarmersmarket.org/bcafm-covid19/

Example 2 (Right):

User: has anyone considered the fact that someone with the virus could easily contaminate produce by merely touching it.

Author: BC Farmers Markets This is a valid concern. BC Farmers' Market member markets' and vendors will continue to operate using FOODSAFE and MarketSafe best practices, as prescribed by provincial health authorities.

We invite you to visit our webpage to learn more on what markets are doing to modify their market operations, prioritizing health and safety for all while still providing access to fresh, local food: <https://bcfarmersmarket.org/bcafm-covid19/>

STEP 4: Rebuilding Confidence

Once an exposure of COVID-19 occurs, and the public hears about it, you'll have to work hard to retain existing customers and continue attracting new ones. Below are a few tactics for rebuilding customer confidence in your organization.

- *Open your doors:* Once it is determined safe to do so (and your market may not have even been ordered to close), invite the community to see for themselves how your market is now not only safe for the public, but is an essential access point for local food. Reiterate the measures you are taking, on any new changes you've made, and maybe even offer a virtual tour of your market if this is available to you.

To be clear, you're not ignoring what's happened; you're acknowledging it but moving on and celebrating the strength of your organization. Also, be sure to interact online and in safe ways at the market with as many people as possible. This reminds your customers that you're in this together – it's easier to forgive a person, harder to forgive an "organization."

- *Support the positive, minimize the negative:* There is a lot that happens to assure safety in everything you do; show that in what you project. "We will continue to promote and advance safety at our farmers' market and to make certain that our customers and friends get the very best service we have to offer."
- *Be patient:* A case of COVID-19 is serious. But with consistent, positive, transparent communication, overtime your organization will regain its customers' confidence.

APPENDIX A: Example Statement

“To our friends, customers and community:

On [insert DATE], [insert Public Health Authority] began investigating an exposure of COVID-19 at [insert farmers' market name]. We have been fully cooperative with the [insert Public Health Authority] through this process, as the health and safety of our staff, vendors, customers and community is our top priority.

[insert concise explanation of steps you have and are taking with public health authority and at your market both before the exposure and after confirmation of the exposure]

At this time, we defer any further health or medical related inquiries to [insert Public Health Authority].

As a local farmers' market organization, we are committed to the staff and vendors we work with, and the community we serve. Thank you for your support and understanding during this difficult time.

[insert farmers' market name]

APPENDIX B: Key Stakeholders

Key Stakeholders - As contact details can change, keep this document updated on a regular basis.

Organization	Contact Details
Farmers Market	COVID-19 Response Team
BC Association of Farmers' Markets	info@bcfarmersmarket.org
Local Health Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fraser Health: 604-587-3936 • Interior Health: local health centre • Island Health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ South Island: 1-866-665-6626 ○ North Island: 1-866-770-7798 • Northern Health: 250-565-2990 • Vancouver Coastal Health: 604-675-3900
HealthLink BC	811 or 711 for the deaf and hard of hearing (24/7 health advice)
Non-Medical COVID-19 Support	For non-medical questions about COVID-19, call 1-888-COVID19, available 7:30AM - 8 PM.

APPENDIX C: Protocol and Checklist for BC Association of Farmers' Markets

	Steps	Action	Guide Reference	Who
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate	As an exposure is identified, BCAFM staff or board notified to share with COVID-19 Task Force	Appendix B	Staff & Board
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor	As an exposure is identified, set up media alerts to gather further details	Section 6	Communications Team
<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine Response	Based on information, determine what level of communications the incident requires.	N/A	COVID-19 Task Force
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop messaging	Based on Response, create a backgrounder and/or talking points. Consider Key Stakeholders.	Appendix B	Communications Team
<input type="checkbox"/>	Media Queries	Designate BCAFM spokesperson. Media may contact BCAFM directly or member markets or market vendors.	Section 6	Identified Spokesperson
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicating with Members	Provide member markets with ongoing updates as determined by response. Consider protocols to protect internal/confidential material. Consider contact methods of list-serve, newsletter, direct emails or phone calls. Consult with market on how to regain confidence	Section 6	Prepared and distributed by Communications Team in consultation with COVID-19 Task Force
<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluation of Response	Review the outcome of the situation and the impact of the response. Follow up with market for feedback and report.	N/A	Membership & Communications Manager and COVID-19 Task Force

APPENDIX D: Protocol and Checklist for Affected Farmers' Market

	Steps	Action	Guide Reference	Who
<input type="checkbox"/>	Operations	Work with public health authority to determine operational course of action.	Section 5	COVID-19 Response Team & Public Health Authority
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor	As the situation is identified, set up media alerts to gather further details and monitor calls.	Section 6	COVID-19 Response Team
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify Response Team	Based on intensity of incident, identify response team.	Section 6	COVID-19 Response Team
<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine Response	Based on information, determine what level of communications the incident requires.	Section 6	COVID-19 Response Team
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop messaging	Based on Response, create a backgrounder and/or talking points. Consider Key Stakeholders.	Appendix B	COVID-19 Response Team
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicating with Media	Designate spokesperson. Prepare backgrounder/points for spokesperson and monitor communications.	Section 6 Appendix E	COVID-19 Response Team
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicating with Vendors, Staff, Customers and Community	Provide ongoing updates. Consider protocols to protect internal/confidential material. Consider contact methods of list-serve, newsletter, direct emails or phone calls. Monitor communications and work on regaining confidence.	Section 6 Appendix E	COVID-19 Response Team
<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluation of Response	Review the outcome of the situation and the impact of the response. Follow up with key stakeholders.	Appendix B	COVID-19 Response Team

APPENDIX E: Communications Log

This log records all contact with stakeholders, as well as media and other parties inquiring about the exposure. This will help to ensure that the many callbacks required are not overlooked. It will also assist in the post-crisis analysis.

Date	Contact Details	Received by	Contact Outcome & Action
	Name: Title: Company: Phone: Email:	[name of person on COVID-19 Response Team]	[Important details from conversation and further action]
	Name: Title: Company: Phone: Telephone:		
	Name: Title: Company: Phone: Telephone:		
	Name: Title: Company: Phone: Telephone:		