

# Coronavirus Advisory

## Keeping Truckers Healthy and Safe during the COVID-19 Pandemic



During the COVID-19 pandemic, the trucking industry has become extremely critical to Americans maintaining their way of life. Truck drivers are on the front lines daily keeping stores stocked, hospitals supplied and first responders equipped during this crisis. As employers of truckers, it is imperative that trucking companies identify and implement strategies to keep their drivers healthy and safe as they keep the American public fed and our healthcare providers supplied with crucial supplies.

### Living on the Road during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Truck drivers working through the COVID-19 pandemic have fewer services open to them while they labor to keep the American supply chains working. Many states have implemented restrictions on restaurants, which prohibit table service and limit business to takeout and delivery only. In these jurisdictions, truckstops can remain open for grab and go foods but are prohibited from allowing customers to dine inside the facility. Truckers are not only limited to dining options but also facilities to rest, exercise, and practice daily hygiene.

Truckers are also more likely to have underlying risk factors that put them at a greater risk of having complications from COVID-19. Since the virus impacts the lungs, smoking is a significant risk factor. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the national average smoking rate is 19%, but the rate for transportation workers is 28%, and for long haul truckers, the rates are even higher at 51%.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the lifestyle and schedule with trucking, healthy eating and exercise can be a challenge. As a result, truckers can have a difficult time fitting in activity that can help reduce their risk of chronic conditions and maintain a healthy weight. Truckers are twice as likely to have diabetes than the general population, and more likely to be obese.<sup>1</sup> These both contribute to decreased health resiliency, reduced healing, and the possibility of more complications if they contract COVID-19. The following are some helpful tips for employers and drivers during the pandemic:

### Tips for Employers

Right now employers are dealing with issues on all sides – employee safety, health and well being are just the tip of the employer iceberg. While many employees are working remotely for the first time in their careers, drivers have been “remote workers” for as long as there have been goods and services that need to be delivered over long distances. What should employers be doing not just now but into the future to assure that their employees on the road stay connected, engaged and informed? See below for just a few tips and ideas that will show those remote driver employees how much their employer values them.

- ✓ Since they are probably not accessing the company website on a regular basis, having a regularly scheduled call for everyone at the same time each week would be a good way to maintain a touchpoint with the drivers. This call should focus on keeping them updated on the latest COVID-19 information and tips and tools to help them as they stay on the road.
- ✓ Do not suspend employee appreciation programs during the pandemic! All employees – and especially those, like truck drivers, who are essential for keeping the country moving will be motivated by recognition for milestones, achievements and other notable events (like birthdays). Find ways to include the over the road crew in this recognitions in ways that they find valuable.
- ✓ Find ways to connect with drivers’ families. With so much disruption in everyone’s lives, it may be difficult for drivers to concentrate on their work while worried about their families who are having to cope at home without them. If at all possible, find out from the drivers what their families may be needing and look for ways to help if at all possible.

- ✓ Be personal with employee communications. If at all possible, have supervisors schedule time every day to call individual drivers and ask how they are doing. Often, supervisors may feel like there are too many conflicting tasks to take care of and do not believe they have time to just have a friendly chat. Avoid discussing issues and having the call devolve into a disciplinary call. Instead, just letting the drivers know that their managers have their back and they have an open line of communication any time can create a better engaged workforce.
- ✓ While drivers are generally used to the isolation of over the road working conditions, it's a good idea to assure them they are not alone and that there are company resources available any time in order to help them stay healthy while delivering essential goods and products throughout the country. The tips and tools listed below can be shared as well as reminding them of the company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

### *Tips for Eating Healthy with Limited Options*

- ✓ Grab fruit options for snacks- Most truckstops have healthier options such as fresh fruits when choosing fruits, consider the best nutrition and benefit: #1 – Raw fruit #2 – Frozen fruit #3 – Canned fruit.
- ✓ Diabetics and pre-diabetics should choose low sugar bars and snacks over starchy high glycemic or high sugar snacks.
- ✓ Choose snacks in portion control containers to be aware of portion sizes.
- ✓ Use apps and tools to assist in tracking calorie intake.
- ✓ Watch sugar intake and stay away from energy drinks that are high in sugar.
- ✓ Replace chips and candy bars with walnuts, almonds, whole grain crackers or cheese.
- ✓ Grab pre-packaged salads instead of hot dogs and burritos- look for low calorie dressing options.
- ✓ Utilize truckstop's takeout options for hot meals- look for lean meats and vegetable options or sub sandwiches with lean meats and vegetables with whole wheat bread versus burgers and fries.
- ✓ Choose truckstop chains with known healthier food options- many truckstops have implemented COVID-19 response plans to assist professional truck drivers as they continue to serve America. Several of the larger truckstop chains have created special apps, websites, and special food management plans to assist drivers in staying safe as they stop for food.

### *Tips for Prevention of COVID-19 During Stops*

- ✓ Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after having been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- ✓ Maintain social distance of six feet away from others.
- ✓ Wash hands after touching high touch areas while stopped such as gas pumps, door handles, credit card machines, or any item while in public areas.
- ✓ If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all hand surfaces and rub them together until they feel dry.
- ✓ Keep hand sanitizers and a disinfectant spray or wipes in the cab for daily cleaning
- ✓ Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- ✓ Use technology when possible to manage paperwork versus office spaces in truckstops. Phone applications such as [BasicBlock](#) are apps for truck drivers on the road. All of a driver's paperwork can be filed on a phone, instead of in a truck stop or office. Their tool allows truckers to put a barrier between them and the high traffic areas of a truck stop.
- ✓ Disinfect and clean cab area and handles on trucks. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed [a list of approved disinfects](#) for use against SARS-CO2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The CDC has established [guidelines](#) on how to properly disinfect various surfaces and materials.

- ✓ Plan ahead for stops with access to clean facilities that offer shower, laundry, and other needed services. [TruckerNation](#) has compiled a list of business, communities, and services that have stepped up to lend a helping hand to drivers during this time of uncertainty.
- ✓ Know and follow state and local community restriction orders regarding preventing the spread of COVID-19. In areas such as the greater New York area are requiring truck drivers and other people driving into the city to deliver needed supplies to stay in their vehicles as much as possible as supplies are loaded and unloaded, avoid being within 6 feet of others as much as possible when they exit their vehicles, and move to electronic receipts if possible. [TruckerNation](#) has developed a list of state covid-19 information for drivers and motor carriers.

### *Tips for Staying Fit*

- ✓ When safe, walk around the perimeter of the truck and track mileage in steps. Challenge yourself to add more laps each day.
- ✓ Try out apps for step tracking, fitness, and exercises that don't require equipment (body weight exercises).
- ✓ Encourage and promote tobacco cessation programs and free state quit lines for support.
- ✓ Be sure to include stretching and strengthening for spinal health.
- ✓ Consult with employee assistance program services, available 24/7, for emotional support.
- ✓ Seek out parks and greenways with open walking trails.

### *Tips for Managing Sickness or Potential Exposure on the Road*

- ✓ Know the signs and symptoms of COVID-19. According to the CDC, early onset symptoms, which may appear two – 14 days after exposure to an already-infected person, include:
  - A sudden loss of smell, or a marked change in the way foods taste
  - Fever
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath
- ✓ Know when to seek medical attention. Given the current shortage of testing kits, and the already stressed nature of hospitals and other medical facilities, however, the CDC does not recommend seeking testing or medical attention unless the following, more severe, COVID-19 symptoms appear:
  - Trouble breathing
  - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
  - New confusion or inability to arouse out of bed
  - Bluish lips or face
- ✓ Know the company's protocols for getting infected truckers home or to a medical facility if necessary. Telemedicine gives drivers access to a 24/7 access to a physician anywhere in the country.

<sup>1</sup>Source: "Smoking and Truck Drivers: One Risk Too Many". [Tobaccofreelife.org](#) Accessed April 2020.