**Safety for Farm Children During COVID-19 Stay-at-Home Orders**

W.E. Field

L. Maynard

S.G. Ehlers

E.J. Sheldon

Recent data indicates a decline for Indiana’s frequency of farm-related fatalities involving children. However, the current stay-at-home order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic means more children are currently on farms or more regularly working them — which can potentially increase their exposure to farm workplace hazards.

A silver lining of farming families spending more time together is the opportunity to educate children about the farm workplace and establish a culture of safety.

It is advised that guardians devote pertinent attention when supervising children working on farms and assign tasks that are both safe and age-appropriate.

The [National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Safety and Health](https://www.marshfieldresearch.org/nccrahs) has identified five strategies (summarized below) to keep youth safe and healthy on a farm.

**Do Not Bring Young Children Near Tractors / Self-Propelled Equipment**

Facing daycare limitations and school closures, a farmer may be tempted to invite children to the field as an extra rider or have them sit and play nearby during work. Data shows that putting children in these circumstances can have tragic results.

Tractor accidents account for 40 percent of America’s farm-related deaths to youth under 15. It is advised that farmers keep young children away from tractors and self-propelled equipment — including skid-steer loaders and lawn mowers.

**Keep Young Children Away from Certain Farm Areas**

Any farm contains hazards for young children who lack either the judgment or physical development to estimate the potential for danger.

Keep young children away from areas of a farm where equipment operators may not see them, as well as the following areas:

* Grain and feed storage bins
* Silos
* Manure storage sites
* Chemical storage and mixing facilities
* Livestock breeding areas (especially those with bulls)
* Front-of-shop and/or high-traffic locations

When possible, establish safe play areas for young children that are separate from any work space.

**Assign Age-Appropriate Tasks**

Children develop at different paces, and any farm work assigned to them should match their physical *and* intellectual abilities. Consider the following when assigning tasks:

* How long will the task take?
* How much physical strength is required?
* How much supervision is necessary?

When assigning tasks to teenagers, remember to take their individual experiences and judgment skills into account.

For more information on age-appropriate tasks, [visit the Cultivate Safety website](https://cultivatesafety.org/work/).

**Ensure a Safe Workplace for Children and Everyone**

It’s easy for adults to take for granted workplace areas that could be dangerous to young children or even to less-experienced workers. Now is the time to [conduct a farm safety inventory](https://extension.purdue.edu/INPREPared/farmsafetyinventory/) using a tool available on [Purdue Extension’s INPREPared website](http://inprepared.org/).

The form offers step-by-step instructions for a thorough, walk-around farm inspection, documentation for potential hazards, and suggestions on ways to address any hazards. (If the form doesn’t exactly match your farm, use it as a guide to tailor your own form.) Consider involving the entire family in this activity to encourage a culture of farm safety.

**Train Younger Workers Responsibly**

Unrealistic expectations of children working on a farm can lead to situations of frustration, property damage, injury or worse. Use this time to train children accordingly and in alignment with age-appropriate responsibilities.

It is also essential to serve as a good role model, as children will emulate behaviors they see. Show them how to conduct themselves. Demonstrate safe work practices for them to follow — including proper hygiene and best practices for food safety.

For more information on training young workers, see the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s [resources for young workers](https://www.osha.gov/youngworkers/) and [youth in agriculture](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/agriculture/index.html), or read [Basic Principles for Training Teens](https://cultivatesafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/basic-principles-for-training-teens.pdf) (available in English and Spanish).

Again, the silver lining as we all adjust to stay-at-home measures is that children can learn more about farm safety and responsibly contribute to farm work. At the same time, guardians can evaluate and establish their role in creating a culture of farm safety. Protecting everyone will make it easier for farm families to emerge from these uncertain times with their health intact and a readiness to succeed in the future.

**Additional Resources**

* INPREPared offers a comprehensive Online Agricultural Safety & Health Resources Guide under its [Educator / Trainer Resources section](https://extension.purdue.edu/INPREPared/resources/).
* [The Gearing-Up-4-Safety curriculum](http://www.agsafety4youth.info/) helps youth aged 14-19 meet federal training requirements for agricultural employment. Presented by Purdue University’s Department of Agricultural Sciences Education and Communication, the curriculum includes 14 PowerPoint presentations with instructor notes, case studies, a glossary and student activity sheets.