

# OSHA Guidance Summary: Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19

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([OSHA 3990-03 2020](#))

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) developed COVID-19 planning guidance based on traditional infection prevention and industrial hygiene practices. It focuses on the need for employers to implement engineering, administrative, and work practice controls and personal protective equipment (PPE). This guidance is intended for planning purposes. Employers and workers should use this planning guidance to help identify risk levels in workplace settings and to determine any appropriate control measures to implement. Additional guidance may be needed as COVID-19 outbreak conditions change, including as new information about the virus, its transmission, and impacts, becomes available,

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides the latest information about COVID-19 and the global outbreak: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov). The OSHA COVID-19 webpage offers information specifically for workers and employers: [www.osha.gov/covid-19](http://www.osha.gov/covid-19).

A COVID-19 outbreak could affect workplaces through absenteeism, change in commerce patterns, and interrupted supply/delivery.

## Steps to Reduce Workers' Risk of Exposure to SARS-CoV-2

### **Develop an Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan**

If one does not already exist, develop an infectious disease preparedness and response plan that can help guide protective actions against COVID-19.

Stay abreast of guidance from federal, state, local, tribal, and/or territorial health agencies, and consider how to incorporate those recommendations and resources into workplace-specific plans.

Plans should consider and address the level(s) of risk associated with various worksites and job tasks workers perform at those sites. Considerations may include:

- Where, how, and to what sources of SARS-CoV-2 might workers be exposed
- Non-occupational risk factors at home and in community settings
- Workers' individual risk factors (e.g., older age; presence of chronic medical conditions, including immunocompromising conditions; pregnancy)

Follow federal and state, local, tribal, and/or territorial (SLTT) recommendations regarding development of contingency plans for situations that may arise as a result of outbreaks (e.g., increased absenteeism, interrupted supply chains/deliveries).

## **Prepare to Implement Basic Infection Prevention Measures**

- Promote frequent and thorough hand washing, including by providing workers, customers, and worksite visitors with a place to wash their hands. If soap and running water are not immediately available, provide alcohol-based hand rubs containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Encourage workers to stay home if they are sick.
- Encourage respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes.
- Provide customers and the public with tissues and trash receptacles.
- Employers should explore whether they can establish policies and practices, such as flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), to increase the physical distance among employees and between employees and others if state and local health authorities recommend the use of social distancing strategies.
- Discourage workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible.
- Maintain regular housekeeping practices, including routine cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, equipment, and other elements of the work environment. When choosing cleaning chemicals, employers should consult information on Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved disinfectant labels with claims against emerging viral pathogens. Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims are expected to be effective against SARS-CoV-2 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for use of all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, PPE).

## **Develop Policies and Procedures for Prompt Identification and Isolation of Sick People, if Appropriate**

- Prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a critical step in protecting workers, customers, visitors, and others at a worksite.
- Employers should inform and encourage employees to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 if they suspect possible exposure.
- Employers should develop policies and procedures for employees to report when they are sick or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
- Where appropriate, employers should develop policies and procedures for immediately isolating people who have signs and/or symptoms of COVID-19, and train workers to implement them. Move potentially infectious people to a location away from workers, customers, and other visitors. Although most worksites do not have specific isolation

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rooms, designated areas with closable doors may serve as isolation rooms until potentially sick people can be removed from the worksite.

- Take steps to limit spread of the respiratory secretions of a person who may have COVID-19. Provide a face mask, if feasible and available, and ask the person to wear it, if tolerated. Note: A face mask (also called a surgical mask, procedure mask, or other similar terms) on a patient or other sick person should not be confused with PPE for a worker; the mask acts to contain potentially infectious respiratory secretions at the source (i.e., the person's nose and mouth).
- If possible, isolate people suspected of having COVID-19 separately from those with confirmed cases of the virus to prevent further transmission—particularly in worksites where medical screening, triage, or healthcare activities occur, using either permanent (e.g., wall/different room) or temporary barrier (e.g., plastic sheeting).
- Restrict the number of personnel entering isolation areas.
- Protect workers in close contact with (i.e., within 6 feet of) a sick person or who have prolonged/repeated contact with such persons by using additional engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE. Workers whose activities involve close or prolonged/ repeated contact with sick people are addressed further in later sections covering workplaces classified at medium and very high or high exposure risk.

## **Develop, Implement, and Communicate about Workplace Flexibilities and Protections**

- Actively encourage sick employees to stay home.
- Ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
- Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.
- Recognize that workers with ill family members may need to stay home to care for them. See CDC's Interim Guidance for Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Homes and

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Residential Communities: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html).

- Be aware of workers' concerns about pay, leave, safety, health, and other issues that may arise during infectious disease outbreaks. Provide adequate, usable, and appropriate training, education, and informational material about business-essential job functions and worker health and safety, including proper hygiene practices and the use of any workplace controls (including PPE). Informed workers who feel safe at work are less likely to be unnecessarily absent.
- Work with insurance companies (e.g., those providing employee health benefits) and state and local health agencies to provide information to workers and customers about medical care in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak.

## Medium Exposure Risk

Medium exposure risk jobs include those that require frequent and/or close contact with (i.e., within 6 feet of) people who may be infected with SARS-CoV-2, but who are not known or suspected COVID-19 patients. In areas without ongoing community transmission, workers in this risk group may have frequent contact with travelers who may return from international locations with widespread COVID-19 transmission. In areas where there is ongoing community transmission, workers in this category may have contact with the general public (e.g., in schools, high-population-density work environments, and some high-volume retail settings).

## Jobs Classified at Medium Exposure Risk

### *What to Do to Protect Workers*

In workplaces where workers have medium exposure risk, employers should follow the guidance for **Steps All Employers Can Take to Reduce Workers' Risk of Exposure to SARS-CoV-2** (above) and implement control measures described in this section.

### *Engineering Controls*

- Install physical barriers, such as clear plastic sneeze guards, where feasible.

### *Administrative Controls*

- Consider offering face masks to ill employees and customers to contain respiratory secretions until they are able to leave the workplace (i.e., for medical evaluation/care or to return home). In the event of a shortage of masks, a reusable face shield that can be decontaminated may be an acceptable method of protecting against droplet

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transmission. See CDC/ NIOSH guidance for optimizing respirator supplies, which discusses the use of surgical masks, at: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/respirators-strategy](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/respirators-strategy)

Keep customers informed about symptoms of COVID-19 and ask sick customers to minimize contact with workers until healthy again, such as by posting signs about COVID-19 in stores where sick customers may visit (e.g., pharmacies) or including COVID-19 information in automated messages sent when prescriptions are ready for pick up.

- Where appropriate, limit customers' and the public's access to the worksite, or restrict access to only certain workplace areas.
- Consider strategies to minimize face-to-face contact (e.g., drive-through windows, phone-based communication, telework).
- Communicate the availability of medical screening or other worker health resources (e.g., on-site nurse; telemedicine services).

## **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

When selecting PPE, consider factors such as function, fit, decontamination ability, disposal, and cost. Sometimes, when PPE will have to be used repeatedly for a long period of time, a more expensive and durable type of PPE may be less expensive overall than disposable PPE. Each employer should select the combination of PPE that protects workers specific to their workplace. Workers with medium exposure risk may need to wear some combination of gloves, a gown, a face mask, and/or a face shield or goggles. PPE ensembles for workers in the medium exposure risk category will vary by work task, the results of the employer's hazard assessment, and the types of exposures workers have on the job.