



March 12, 2020

## **Coronavirus COVID-19**

The spread of the Coronavirus, or “COVID-19” is a rapidly evolving situation, and the Safety Director has received numerous requests for guidance on this subject. *The information contained in this Bulletin is derived from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and should be considered as “interim” guidance since the spread and development of COVID-19 is ongoing.* Updated information will be provided as the situation develops. A separate Bulletin concerning COVID-19 is being issued for law enforcement personnel.

As of March 12, 2020, there are 1,215 cases of COVID-19 in 42 States and the District of Columbia in the United States. There have been 36 deaths from the disease thus far, mostly from the Seattle area, and most of the deaths from a long term healthcare facility. COVID-19 is classified as “highly contagious” and is “droplet” spread. Statistics reflect that 80% of those who are infected show only “mild” symptoms, while 20% show signs of serious illness. The most vulnerable age group are adults 60 and older with those at 80 years of age and up, showing the highest risk. It is important to note that the risk is greater for those with serious underlying health conditions (heart issues, lung problems and those with diabetes).

CDC is working across the Department of Health and Human Services and across the U.S. government in the public health response to COVID-19. Current knowledge is largely based on what is known about similar coronaviruses. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in humans and many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats, and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people, such as with MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV.

The following interim guidance may help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, in non-healthcare settings. The guidance also provides planning considerations if there are more widespread, community outbreaks of COVID-19.

To prevent stigma and discrimination in the workplace, use only the guidance described below to determine risk of COVID-19. Do not make determinations of risk based on race or country of origin, and be sure to maintain confidentiality of people with confirmed COVID-19. The confidentiality provisions under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) are still in effect for the COVID-19 outbreak. There is much more to learn about the transmissibility, severity, and other features of COVID-19 and investigations are ongoing. Updates are available on CDC’s web page at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/covid19](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/covid19).

### **Recommended strategies for employers to use now:**

#### **Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:**

- Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 72 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies. If possible, establish policies and procedures to permit employees to work from home for a limited amount of time if necessary. The N.J. Department of Health website

This bulletin is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization’s policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor. For further information regarding this bulletin, contact your Safety Director at 877.398.3046.

included information concerning the law passed in 2018 mandating sick leave for employees. Refer to the following link for more information: [https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019\\_schoolbusiness.shtml](https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_schoolbusiness.shtml)

- 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.
- Employers should 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.

#### **Separate sick employees:**

- CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available).

#### **Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all employees:**

- Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, and hand hygiene at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen. Posters and handouts are available for use on the CDC website.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
- Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
- Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.
- Visit the coughing and sneezing etiquette and clean hands webpage for more information.

#### **Perform routine environmental cleaning:**

- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the usual cleaning agents in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
- No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

#### **Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps:**

- Check the CDC's Traveler's Health Notices for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. Specific travel information for travelers going to and returning from China, and information for aircrew, can be found at on the CDC website. The CDC website lists certain travel advisories for the following countries:
  - Level 3 Health Notice: China, Iran, South Korea, Italy
  - Level 2 Health Notice: Japan
  - Level 1 Health Notice: Hong Kong

- The CDC has not issued any type of domestic travel advisory to date. The CDC will continue to re-evaluate the need to issue a domestic travel advisory if the virus spreads and the cases become concentrated in a particular geographical area.
- Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of acute respiratory illness before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure employees who become sick while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor and should promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.
- If outside the United States, sick employees should follow your company's policy for obtaining medical care or contact a healthcare provider or overseas medical assistance company to assist them with finding an appropriate healthcare provider in that country. A U.S. consular officer can help locate healthcare services. However, U.S. embassies, consulates, and military facilities do not have the legal authority, capability, and resources to evacuate or give medicines, vaccines, or medical care to private U.S. citizens overseas.

### **Assistance in the State of New Jersey**

- The CDC strongly recommends that employers review the resources available in their own states and localities from the State and local departments of health. The New Jersey Department of Health established a COVID-19 page on their website for information at <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml>. The NJDOH set up a hotline to provide answers and more detailed information at (1-800-222-1222 or 1-800-962-1253 if using out-of-state phone line).
- If you are planning a public event that will likely attract a large number of people (parade, festival, concert, etc...), the CDC recommends that employers speak with the local department of health concerning any restrictions or precautions that should be taken prior to announcing the event.

### **Additional Measures in Response to Currently Occurring Sporadic Importations of the COVID-19:**

- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.
- If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.

### **Planning for a Possible COVID-19 Outbreak in the US**

The severity of illness or how many people will fall ill from COVID-19 is unknown at this time. If there is evidence of a COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S., employers should plan to be able to respond in a flexible way to varying levels of severity and be prepared to refine their business response plans as needed. For the general public, such as workers in non-healthcare settings, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low.

Employers need to consider how best to decrease the spread of acute respiratory illness and lower the impact of COVID-19 in their workplace in the event of an outbreak in the US. They should identify and communicate their objectives, which may include one or more of the following: (a) reducing transmission among staff, (b) protecting people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications, (c) maintaining business operations, and (d) minimizing adverse effects on other entities in their supply chains. Employers should:

- Ensure the plan is flexible and involve your employees in developing and reviewing your plan.

- Conduct a focused discussion or exercise using your plan, to find out ahead of time whether the plan has gaps or problems that need to be corrected.
- Share your plan with employees and explain what human resources policies, workplace and leave flexibilities, and pay and benefits will be available to them.
- Review human resources policies to make sure that policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are consistent with existing state and federal workplace laws, such as HIPAA. HIPAA considerations and legal protections are NOT waived for COVID-19, i.e. employers may not know who has been infected. For more information on employer responsibilities, visit the Department of Labor's and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's websites.
- Identify essential business functions, essential jobs or roles, and critical elements within your supply chains required to maintain business operations. Plan for how your business will operate if there is increasing absenteeism or these supply chains are interrupted.
- Set up triggers and procedures for activating and terminating the company's infectious disease outbreak response plan. Work closely with your local health officials to identify these triggers.
- Plan to minimize exposure between employees and also between employees and the public, if public health officials call for social distancing.
- Establish a process to communicate information to employees and business partners on your infectious disease outbreak response plans and latest COVID-19 information. Anticipate employee fear, anxiety, rumors, and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.

Read the full Interim Guidance from the CDC for Employers at [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fguidance-business-response.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fguidance-business-response.html)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Safety Director will update interim guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available.