

Guidance for Workplaces:

Responding to Sick or Possibly Sick Employees with COVID-19

This information is intended for business administrators in response to sick or possibly sick employees with COVID-19. **It is important that if you have an employee in your workplace with COVID-19 that you keep it confidential.**

The following is guidance for potential scenarios you may encounter in the workplace.

Scenario: Employee is being tested for COVID-19 or has symptoms but is not tested

- Any employee being tested for COVID-19 should not work and should be [isolated at home](#) while waiting for test results.
- If the test result is negative or testing was not done, the employee should stay home until fever has been gone for 3 days and symptoms improve without fever-reducing medications.

Scenario: Employee has lab-confirmed COVID-19

When an employee notifies you of a positive COVID-19 test if the employee is not already isolated at home, they must be sent home immediately. Advise the employee to stay in isolation. Ask the employee which coworkers they have been in close contact with starting two days before the start of symptoms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines *close contact* as “a person that has been within 6 feet of the infected employee for a prolonged period of time (about 10 minutes)”. Your local health department will contact you to obtain this information for the purpose of determining who was in close contact. Not every employee will be contacted (only those identified as close contacts by the above definition). Your health department will also follow-up with the person confirmed to have COVID-19 to advise of next steps. We are happy to collaborate with your Employee Wellness Coordinator if you have an employee wellness program in place and are monitoring your employees.

Notification: Consider alerting your staff as soon as possible, but remember to keep it confidential as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Your message should include:

- Possible dates of exposure
- Advise employees to watch for signs and symptoms which develop within 2 – 14 days from possible exposure
- Remind employees how to best protect themselves from COVID-19 and the importance of staying home if they are sick
- Let your employees know what your establishment is doing as a result of exposure (e.g. closing, cleaning, policies etc.)
- Remind your employees of the establishment’s illness policy

- Where to find reputable sources and information for COVID-19 (CDC, local health department, www.coronavirus.idaho.gov)

Cleaning: If the employee was in the building while infectious (starting 2 days before onset of symptoms) and it has been less than a week since the employee was last in the building, cleaning is recommended. If it has been more than a week since the employee was last in the building, then special cleaning is not necessary. It is recommended to close off areas used by the ill employee and wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area. If possible, wait up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfection. The CDC offers guidance on how best to clean an area in which an infectious person was present.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

Returning to Work After COVID-19 Illness:

People with COVID-19 who have stayed home (home isolated) can stop home isolation under the following conditions:

Your employee will not have a test to determine if they are still contagious. They will be cleared to return to work after these three things have happened:

- They have had no fever for at least 72 hours (that is three full days of no fever without the use of medicine that reduces fevers)

AND

- other symptoms have improved (for example, when their cough or shortness of breath have improved)

AND

- at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared

Scenario: Employee has had potential exposure to a lab-confirmed COVID-19 case

If you or an employee at your establishment think you or they have been exposed to someone with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19, follow the steps below to monitor your health and avoid spreading the disease to others if you get sick.

You generally need to be in close contact with a sick person to get infected. Close contact includes:

- Living in the same household as a sick person with COVID-19
- Caring for a sick person with COVID-19
- Being within 6 feet of a sick person with COVID-19 for about 10 minutes, or
- Being in direct contact with secretions from a sick person with COVID-19 (e.g., being coughed on, kissing, sharing utensils, etc.).

- ✓ People who have been in close contact with a person who is sick from COVID-19 should stay home for 14 days since the last day of contact with the infected individual and monitor their health.

- ✓ If you have not been in close contact with a sick person with COVID-19, you should monitor your health for 14 days since the last day of contact with the infected individual. Your risk of becoming ill is lower than for someone who has close contact
- ✓ If you get sick with fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, body aches, headaches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat (even if your symptoms are very mild), contact your healthcare provider. They will evaluate your symptoms, determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19, and instruct you on care, self-observation and/or isolation.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to call my local health department if I learn of a sick employee?

Advise your sick employee to seek medical assistance. The physician will then determine if the employee needs to be tested or not. Once the department receives a positive result for your employee, the department will follow-up with the employee and the employer.

Can my local health department confirm the name of my employee so I know they actually tested positive for COVID-19?

Your local health department is unable to provide any Patient Health Information, which is covered by HIPAA. It is best if your employee is able to provide you with confirmation from their health care provider or the laboratory that conducted the testing.

An employee calls in to report that they have tested positive for COVID-19. They didn't have any obvious symptoms when they were on the job, but they work closely with other people and may have exposed them to COVID-19. What steps do I need to take?

This employee must stay home and self-isolate until at least 10 days have passed after the symptoms first appeared AND at least 3 days after recovery. Recovery means that fever is gone for 72 hours (3 days) without the use of fever-reducing medications and other symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, diarrhea) have improved.

Employees who have been in close contact with a suspected or known case of COVID-19 while that individual was ill or at any time starting two days before symptoms appeared should be in quarantine at home for 14 days. A close contact is any person who was within 6 feet for more than 10 minutes of the ill individual or had unprotected direct contact to body fluids of the ill employee (e.g. cough or sneeze on face or sharing of a drink or a food utensil).

You cannot legally tell other employees who is sick. It is a violation of patient rights to reveal private medical information about someone. Employees may guess who the infected person is, but even if they do it is illegal for you to divulge that information. That said, there are steps you can take to protect your other workers and your customers:

- Assess who has had close contact as described above with this employee, on the job, during breaks or at lunch. Those individuals are at risk and should home quarantine for 14 days from the time of their last close contact with the infected worker while the worker had symptoms and two days (48 hours) before symptoms appeared. If they don't get sick within fourteen days, the time span over which the virus generally appears, they can come back to work safely. In the meantime, they may be able to work remotely.

- If the employee was in the building while infectious (starting 2 days before onset of symptoms) and it has been less than a week since the employee was last in the building, cleaning is recommended. If it has been more than a week since the employee was last in the building, then special cleaning is not necessary. Thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment and surface in the workplace that the employee may have touched, such as doorknobs/push bars, elevator buttons, restroom doors, copiers or other office machines, etc. Use cleaning chemicals with EPA-registered disinfectant labels with claims against emerging viral pathogens. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers guidance on how best to clean an area in which someone with confirmed COVID-19 was present.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

If one of your other employees develops symptoms while in quarantine, then they should follow the return to work guidelines noted above (10 days after symptoms started and 3 days after fevers have resolved and symptoms improved)

One of our employees has a suspected case of COVID-19 but hasn't been tested.

In this situation, you would follow all of the same steps outlined above for an employee who tested positive for COVID-19. During the current COVID-19 outbreak it is likely that many people with cold and flu-like symptoms have COVID-19. Most people do not need to see a doctor or get a test for COVID-19 because they will have a mild illness and get better at home. As above, the employee needs to self-isolate. Any colleagues who had close contact with the infected person while that person was symptomatic or in the two days (48 hours) before the onset of symptoms should remain home for a full 14 days following their last contact. To help us avoid overburdening the health system, you should not require a healthcare provider's note either to justify the absence of an employee who is sick with respiratory disease or to permit the employee to return to work.

Resources:

- CDC: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Print Resources:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>
- CDC: Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>
- CDC: When and How to Wash Your Hands
<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>
- Central District Health COVID-19 Webpages:
 - <https://www.cdh.idaho.gov/dac-coronavirus.php>
 - <https://www.cdh.idaho.gov/dac-coronavirus-resources.php>
- State of Idaho Official Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Website:
<https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/>