

# COVID-19: Guidance for Businesses and Employers

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The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) is working closely with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal, state and local partners to monitor and respond to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. Employers should be able to respond in a flexible way to varying levels of severity and be prepared to refine their business response plans as needed. CDPH recommends the following guidance to help limit COVID-19 exposure and spread in the workplace. The guidance also provides planning considerations if there is more widespread transmission as we expect to see more cases in the United States and in Chicago.

## **Sick employees must stay home:**

- Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness must stay home and not go to work until they are free of fever for:
  - at least 7 days since their symptoms first appeared; and,
  - at least 3 days (72 hours) since recovery defined as no fever (without using fever-reducing medications) and improvement in symptoms.
- Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

## **Separate sick employees:**

- Employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, difficulty breathing) 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), throw out the tissue, and wash their hands or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer.

## **Employees at higher risk of severe illness should stay home as much as possible:**

- Those at higher risk include:
  - People over 60 years of age. The risk increases significantly thereafter and escalates with age, with persons over age 80 in the highest risk category.
  - People, regardless of age, with underlying health conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, or chronic lung diseases like COPD, as well as those with severely weakened immune systems.
- Employees at higher risk should be offered to telework (when feasible). They should avoid all non-essential travel and stay away from crowded social gatherings of people as much as possible.

*This version was released on 03/18/2020. It may be updated with new guidance.  
Please visit [www.chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://www.chicago.gov/coronavirus) to find the latest version.*

- Employees at higher risk should consider ways of getting food, supplies, and necessary medications brought to their house and have a plan if they get sick. If they develop symptoms, they should seek medical care right away.

### **Implement social distancing and other mitigation strategies:**

- 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.
- For employees who are able to telework, supervisors should encourage employees to telework instead of coming into the workplace.
- Ensure that you have the information technology and infrastructure needed to support multiple employees who may be able to work from home.
- Limit large work-related meetings or events. Provide alternative options for attending events via phone, video, or web applications.
- Limit non-essential business travel.

### **Prepare for possible increased numbers of employee absences:**

- Determine how you will operate if absenteeism spikes from increases in sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who must stay home to watch their children if dismissed from school.
- Assess your essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your services or products. Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed).
- Identify essential jobs or roles and critical elements within your supply chains (e.g., raw materials, suppliers, subcontractor services/products, and logistics) required to maintain business operations.
- Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions so that the workplace is able to operate even if key staff members are absent.
- Set up authorities, triggers, and procedures for activating and terminating the company's emergency operations plan, altering business operations (e.g., possibly changing or closing operations in affected areas), and transferring business knowledge to key employees.

### **Promote enhanced respiratory and hand hygiene:**

- 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.
- 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.

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

- Increase the frequency of cleaning all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs.
- For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

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### **Additional measures in response to possible COVID-19 exposure in the workplace:**

- Identify possible work-related exposure and health risks to your employees. OSHA has more information on how to [protect workers from potential exposures](#) to COVID-19.
- Plan to minimize exposure between employees and also between employees and the public.
- Establish a process to communicate information to employees and business partners. Anticipate employee fear, anxiety, rumors, and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to [CDPH's guidance for exposed individuals](#).

### **Measures to be taken if a staff member, contractor, or a client tests positive for COVID-19 and exposed others in the workplace:**

- Isolate the individual and immediately contact CDPH at 312-746-4835.
- 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).
- Direct close contacts of the employee, defined as being within 6ft of the employee for 10 or more minutes while they were ill, to stay home and monitor their health for 14 days as per [CDPH's guidance for people who might have been exposed](#).
- Determine workplace closure and what length of time is warranted in consultation with CDPH.
- Develop a plan for continuity of business and services, and establish alternate mechanisms for these to continue.
- Develop communication plans for workplace closure to include outreach to staff, clients, and the community.
- Provide guidance to staff reminding them of the importance of community social distancing measures while workplace is closed, including discouraging staff from gathering elsewhere. Community social distancing measures include canceling group activities or events, religious services, and sporting events.
- In consultation with CDPH, determine the timing of return of staff, and any additional steps needed for the workplace to reopen. Please note that there have been reports of employees and others being stigmatized. We urge organizations to ensure staffs' privacy to help prevent discrimination.
- Refer employees in need of mental health support to the [NAMI Chicago](#) helpline at 833-NAMI-CHI (833-626-4244) for a listening ear, mental health information or referrals.
- Contact the [Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection](#) or visit [chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://chicago.gov/coronavirus) to see what resources are available to businesses, consumers and employees impacted by the COVID-19 Outbreak.

For the latest updates, visit [chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://chicago.gov/coronavirus) or [cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://cdc.gov/coronavirus).