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CDC Issues Updated COVID-19 Guidance for Employers in Non-Healthcare, Critical Infrastructure Sectors

Human Resources & Employment

The CDC this week issued [updated COVID-19 guidance](#) for employers, supplementing its “Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)” by adding to its cleaning and disinfecting guidelines, social distancing best practices, and strategies and recommendations to respond to the virus.

[As we previously wrote about](#), there are multiple steps a business should take to decrease the spread of COVID-19. The CDC recommends that employers adhere to the guidelines set by local and state health officials and continue to follow OSHA guidance on protecting workers from potential exposure.

Additionally, the CDC recommends that employers identify a “workplace coordinator” responsible for COVID-19 issues in the workplace. The CDC, like the U.S. Department of Labor, encourages employer flexibility in its operations, suggesting that telework, staggered shifts and modified leave policies be implemented where possible.

The CDC also issued new guidance specifically for employers in the 16 sectors deemed “critical infrastructure” by the federal government. These sectors are:

- Chemical
- Commercial Facilities
- Communications
- Critical Manufacturing
- Dams
- Defense Industrial Base
- Emergency Services
- Energy
- Financial Services
- Food and Agriculture
- Government Facilities
- Healthcare and Public Health
- Information Technology
- Nuclear Reactors, Materials, and Waste
- Transportation Systems
- Water and Wastewater Systems

These sectors are designated by the Department of Homeland Security as critical because they are considered “so vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination thereof.” Notably, the guidance applies to the contracted vendors of these sectors as well

as custodial staff.

To ensure continuity of operations, the CDC guidance provides that critical infrastructure workers who may have been exposed to a person suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 “may be permitted to continue work following potential exposure to COVID-19, provided they remain asymptomatic and additional precautions are implemented to protect them and the community.”

These additional precautions include:

1. pre-screening affected employees by taking their temperature before they enter the facility
2. requiring those employees to self-monitor under the supervision of the employer's occupational health program
3. maintaining social distance of six feet or greater as work duties permit
4. regularly cleaning and disinfecting all offices, bathrooms, common areas, and shared electronic equipment
5. requiring the affected employee to wear a face mask at all times while in the workplace for fourteen days after last exposure

The CDC states that employers can issue facemasks or can approve employees' supplied cloth face coverings in the event of shortages.

A potential exposure means being a household contact or having close contact within six feet of an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. In the case of potential exposure from a fellow employee, the same precautions should be followed.

Where an employee becomes sick at work, they should be sent home immediately. Surfaces in the employee's workspace should be cleaned and disinfected, and the employer should gather information on persons who had contact with the ill employee during the time the employee had symptoms and 48 hours prior to symptoms. All employees who were within six feet of the sick employee would be considered exposed and should self-monitor, wear a mask at work for 14 days and receive temperature checks before entering the worksite.

Additionally, the CDC provides the following additional considerations:

- Employees should not share headsets or other objects that are near mouth or nose
- Employers should increase the frequency of cleaning commonly touched surfaces
- Employees and employers should consider pilot testing the use of facemasks to ensure they do not interfere with work assignments
- Employers should work with facility maintenance staff to increase air exchanges in room
- Employees should physically distance when they take breaks together, as well as stagger breaks, don't congregate in the breakroom, and don't share food or utensils

The CDC created a [handout](#) that employers may, but are not required, to provide employees.