Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

WEAR A MASK. PROTECT OTHERS.

COVID-19 Employer Information for Utility Workers

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Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness (see list of symptoms) caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Here is what we currently know:

- The main way the virus spreads is from person to person through respiratory droplets.
- You may also be able to get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then touching your face, mouth, nose, or eyes.
- The virus may be spread by people who are not experiencing symptoms.

COVID-19 can sometimes cause serious complications. People at increased risk for severe illness include:

- Older adults
- People of any age who have underlying medical conditions

As an employer of utility workers, your workforce might be exposed to the virus when:

- In close contact (within less than 6 feet) with other people at the worksite, which can include customers, coworkers, contractors, and visitors.
- Touching or handling frequently touched surfaces and equipment, and then touching their face, mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Entering an environment with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases.

More Info for Utility Workers

Employees   〉

How You Can Protect Your Staff and Others and Slow the Spread

Evaluate your workplace to identify scenarios where workers cannot maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet from each other and/or customers. Use appropriate combinations of controls following the hierarchy of controls to address these situations to limit the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. A committee of both workers and management may be most effective at recognizing all scenarios.

While protecting workers, it is important to note that control recommendations or interventions to reduce risk to COVID-19 must be compatible with any safety programs and personal protective equipment (PPE) normally required for the job task. Approaches to consider may include the following:

Create a COVID-19 Workplace Health and Safety Plan.

Review the CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers and the Resuming Business Toolkit for guidelines and recommendations that all employers can use to protect their employees.

- Continue to follow any state and local regulations for utility workers in addition to the recommendations here.
- Identify an on-site workplace coordinator who will be responsible for COVID-19 assessment and control.
  - When developing plans, include all employees in the workplace, for example: staff, utility employees, relief employees, janitorial staff, maintenance, and supervisory staff.
  - If customers and contractors enter the workspace, develop plans to communicate with them regarding modification to work or service processes.
  - Notify all workers that any COVID-19 concerns should be directed to the individual appointed as the COVID-19 workplace coordinator.
- Implement flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices.
  - Develop policies that encourage sick employees to stay at home without fear of reprisals, and ensure employees are aware of these policies.
  - If contractors are employed in the workplace, develop plans to communicate with the contracting company regarding modifications to work processes.
- Consider conducting daily in-person or virtual health checks (e.g., symptom and/or temperature screening) of employees on scheduled workdays.
  - Screening options could include having employees self-screen before arriving at work or having on-site screening by taking employees' temperatures and assessing potential symptoms prior to beginning work. (see CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers)
  - Make sure employees can maintain at least 6 feet of distance while waiting for screening.
  - Make employee health screenings as private as possible and maintain the confidentiality of everyone's medical status and history.

Take action if an employee is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19.

- Immediately separate employees who report with or develop symptoms at work from other employees and arrange for private transport home. These employees should self-isolate and contact their health care provider immediately.
- Perform enhanced cleaning and disinfection after anyone suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 has been in the workplace. Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect offices, bathrooms, common areas, and shared equipment used by the sick person, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces or objects. If other workers do not have access to these areas or items, wait 24 hours (or as long as

possible) before cleaning and disinfecting.

- Employees who test positive for COVID-19 should immediately notify their employer of their results.
    - Sick employees should follow CDC recommended steps to self-isolate or seek care. Employees should consult with healthcare providers and should not return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met.
    - While maintaining confidentiality of everyone's medical status, employers should inform employees about possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace and instruct potentially exposed employees to follow quarantine.

Develop hazard controls using the hierarchy of controls to prevent infection among workers. You may be able to include a combination of controls noted below.

- **Engineering Controls (Isolate people from the hazards)**
  Alter the workspace using engineering controls to prevent exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19.
    - Modify the alignment of workstations where feasible. For example, redesign workstations so workers are not facing each other.
    - Establish, where possible, physical barriers between workers, and between workers and customers.
        - Use strip curtains, plastic barriers, or similar materials to create impermeable dividers or partitions.
    - Close or limit access to common areas where employees are likely to congregate and interact, such as break rooms, parking lots, and in entrance/exit areas.
    - Consider making foot-traffic single direction in narrow or confined areas, such as aisles and stairwells, to encourage single-file movement at a 6-foot distance.
    - Use visual cues such as floor decals, colored tape, and signs to remind workers to maintain distance of 6 feet from others, including at their workstation and in break areas.
    - Place handwashing stations or hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol in multiple locations throughout the workplace for workers and customers.
        - Use touch-free stations where possible.
        - Make sure restrooms are well stocked with soap and paper towels.
    - Make sure the workspace is well ventilated ⬀ .
        - Work with facilities management to adjust the ventilation so that the maximum amount of fresh air is delivered to occupied spaces while maintaining the humidity at 40-60%.
        - Portable high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration units may be considered to remove contaminants in the air of poorly ventilated areas.
        - Additional considerations for improving the building ventilation system can be found in the CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers.
- **Administrative Controls (Change the way people work)**
  Provide training and other administrative policies to prevent the spread of COVID-

19.
- All workers should have a basic understanding of COVID-19, how the virus that causes the disease is thought to spread, what the symptoms of the disease are, and what measures can be taken to prevent or minimize the transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Trainings should include the importance of social distancing (maintaining a distance of 6 feet or more when possible), wearing cloth face coverings or masks appropriately, covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands, cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces, not sharing personal items or tools/equipment unless absolutely necessary, and not touching their face, mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Train utility field service workers how to conduct an additional on-site COVID-19 specific hazard assessment ⧉ before entering a building to determine if anything has changed since the assessment was conducted by the scheduler.
  - Remind workers that if their assessment deems the job unsafe, they can exercise Stop Work Authority (SWA) and consult with management for next steps.
- Workers should be encouraged to go home or stay home if they feel sick. Ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance, and that employees are aware of and understand these policies.
- Consider maintaining small groups of workers in teams (cohorting) to reduce the number of coworkers each person is exposed to.
  - Provide additional vehicles for transport to the worksite to limit the number of people riding together.
- Conduct a COVID-19 specific phone assessment before scheduling work assignments within a customer's home or business.
- Determine if the task is urgent and should be scheduled or if it can be delayed.
- Train schedulers to conduct a situational phone assessment before conducting work at a building to determine the risk of exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. Questions to assess risk of COVID-19 illness include:
  - Has anyone in the building been diagnosed with COVID-19?
  - Has anyone in the building had recent contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19?
  - Is anyone in the building currently experiencing symptoms?
  - If anyone in the building has symptoms, have they remained isolated away from the task area?
- Develop guidance for workers' entry into occupied dwellings, businesses, and service facilities based on task, occupancy, and information gathered from the phone assessment. Additional infection control guidance will be necessary if there might be a risk of a worker being exposed to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Ask for a small number of utility field service workers to voluntarily train on the proper use of PPE if they must enter a worksite where someone is ill or has been confirmed to have COVID-19 and they cannot be physically separated from the work area. See Infection Control Guidance for Healthcare Professional about Coronavirus for more information.

- As part of your organization's COVID-19 workplace health and safety plan, train and equip workers to comply with any regulations and infection control protocols in place at the facilities where work is occurring, if they are at least as protective as your organization's established protocols.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
    - If surfaces are visibly dirty, clean them using a detergent or soap and water before you disinfect them.
    - Use products that are EPA-registered ⎘ , diluted household bleach solutions, or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, appropriate for surface disinfection.
- Provide cleaning and disinfecting materials and conduct targeted and more frequent cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (shared vehicles, tools, equipment, break rooms, rest areas, countertops, doorknobs, toilets, tables, light switches, phones, faucets, sinks, keyboards, etc.).
- Clean and disinfect all work surfaces and tools between customers or at the end of a shift.
- Do not share materials such as clip boards, pens, or touchscreens if possible.
- Provide employees adequate time and access to soap, clean water, and a way to dry hands for handwashing.
    - Remind employees to wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, they should use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
    - Provide hand sanitizer, tissues, and no touch waste baskets at the cash registers and in the restrooms.
- Maintain social distancing at the worksite.
- Limit the number of people at the worksite at one time. (Consult state and local guidance if available.)
- Remind employees that people may be able to spread the virus that causes COVID-19 even if they do not show symptoms. Consider all close interactions (within 6 feet) with employees, customers, and others as a potential source of exposure.
- Post signs and reminders at entrances, in work vehicles, and in strategic places providing instruction on social distancing, hand hygiene, use of cloth face coverings or masks, and cough and sneeze etiquette. Signs should be accessible for people with disabilities (e.g., large print), easy to understand, and may include signs for non-English speakers, as needed.
- Communication and training should be easy to understand, in preferred language(s) spoken or read by the employees and include accurate and timely information.
- Emphasize use of images (infographics) that account for language differences.
- Reinforce training with signs (preferably infographics), placed in strategic locations. CDC has free, simple posters available to download and print, some of which are translated into different languages.
- Use cloth face coverings or masks as appropriate.
    - Cloth face coverings or masks are intended to protect other people—

not the wearer. They are not considered to be personal protective equipment.

- Emphasize that care must be taken when putting on and taking off cloth face coverings or masks to ensure that the worker or the cloth face covering or mask does not become contaminated.

- Cloth face coverings or masks should be routinely laundered.
- Cloth face coverings or masks should not be worn if their use creates a new risk (e.g., interferes with driving or vision, or contributes to heat-related illness) that exceeds their COVID-19 related benefits of slowing the spread of the virus. Cloth face coverings or masks should also not be worn by anyone who has trouble breathing or is unable to remove it without assistance. CDC provides information on adaptations and alternatives that should be considered when cloth face coverings or masks may not be feasible (e.g., people who are deaf or hard of hearing, have intellectual or developmental disabilities, or sensory sensitivities).
- Consider requiring that visitors to the workplace (service personnel, customers) to also wear cloth face coverings or masks.
- If the company provides employees with work clothing, provide enough to allow workers to wear fresh clothing daily. If laundry service is not provided, encourage employees to wash their work clothing daily at the highest recommended temperature setting.

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**
PPE is the last step in the hierarchy of controls because it is more difficult to use effectively than other measures. To be protective and not introduce an additional hazard, the use of PPE requires characterization of the environment, knowledge of the hazard, training, and consistent correct use. This is why special emphasis is given to administrative and engineering controls when addressing occupational hazards, including when applying guidance to slow the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

In the current COVID-19 pandemic, use of PPE such as surgical masks or N95 respirators is being prioritized for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance. If a utility field service worker is entering a worksite that may have a suspected or confirmed person with COVID-19, see the Infection Control Guidance for Healthcare Professionals about Coronavirus for more information on PPE.

How You Can Help Your Staff and Others Cope with Stress

Mental health is an important component of worker safety and health. The COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges in the ways many people work and interact with others, which may lead to increased feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Information and resources about mental health, recognizing signs of stress, taking steps to build resilience and manage stress, and knowing where to go if you, your staff, or others need help are available here.

How to Get More Information

You, as the employer, are responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and informing employees of the hazards in your workplace. You can utilize these additional sources for more information on reducing the risk of exposures to COVID-19 at work:

- CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
- CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility
- CDC Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes
- NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic: COVID-19
- CDC COVID-19
- OSHA COVID-19 ↗
- OSHA Guidelines on Preparing Workplaces for COVID 📕 ↗
- Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council Assessing and Mitigating the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) ↗
- CDCINFO: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348 | website: cdc.gov/info