Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

MENU >

WEAR A MASK. PROTECT OTHERS.

Returning to Work

Updated Sept. 11, 2020   Print

What you need to know

- In general, the more closely you interact with others and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread.
- If you return to work, continue to protect yourself by practicing everyday preventive actions.
- Keep these items on hand when returning to work: a mask, tissues, and hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, if possible.

Considerations for returning to work

Do you have or think you might have COVID-19, or have you been around someone who has the virus?	• If you have or think you might have COVID-19, you should isolate, whether or not you have symptoms. Learn what isolation means and when you can be around others after being sick. • If you might have been exposed to COVID-19, you should stay home. This is called quarantine. Learn when to start and end quarantine.
Are you or someone in your household at increased risk of severe illness? You may need to take extra precautions.	• If you are at increased risk for severe illness, check with your employer to see if there are policies and practices in place to reduce your risk at work, like telework or modified job responsibilities.

Are you the primary caregiver for your child or someone else? If so, here are some things to think about:	• If someone else will be taking care of your child, ask them to review information about caring for children. • If someone else will be providing care for a household member that is at increased risk of severe illness or needs extra precautions, ask them to review this information.
Are there ways you can minimize the number of people you interact with?	• In addition to any measures your business may have implemented to reduce your risk (e.g., installed barriers), take additional steps to minimize the number of people you interact with. • Interacting with more *people* raises your risk since some people may have the virus and not know it since they have no symptoms. • Can you have virtual meetings to limit the number of in-person interactions? • When interacting with other people, are policies in place for colleagues or customers to wear a mask and to keep 6 feet of space between others?
What's the length of time that you will be interacting with people?	• Spending more *time* with people who may be infected increases your risk of becoming infected. • Spending more time with people increases *their risk* of becoming infected if there is any chance that you may already be infected.

Protect yourself and others in the workplace

Stay home when needed

- If you have or think you have symptoms or have tested positive for COVID-19, stay home and find out what to do if you are sick and find out when you can be around others.
- If you are well, but you have a sick family member or recently had close contact with someone with COVID-19, notify your supervisor and follow CDC recommended precautions.

Monitor your health

- Be alert for symptoms. Watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID-19.
  - This is especially important if you are running essential errands, going into the office or workplace, and in settings where it may be difficult to keep a physical distance of 6 feet.
- Take your temperature if symptoms develop.
  - Don't take your temperature within 30 minutes of exercising or after taking medications that could lower your temperature, like acetaminophen.
- Follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.

Wear a mask

- Wear a mask in public settings where staying 6 feet apart (about two arms length) is not possible. Interacting without wearing a mask increases your risk of getting infected.

- Wearing a mask does not replace the need to practice social distancing.

Social distance in shared spaces

- Maintain at least 6 feet of distance between you and others. COVID-19 spreads easier between people who are within 6 feet of each other.
  - Keeping distance from other people is especially important for people who are at increased risk for severe illness, such as older adults and those with certain medical conditions.
  - Indoor spaces are more risky than outdoor spaces where it might be harder to keep people apart and there's less ventilation.
- Avoid close contact with others on your commute to work, if possible. Consider biking, walking, driving either alone or with other members of your household. Learn how to protect yourself when using transportation to commute to work.

Wash your hands often

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. If your hands are visibly dirty, use soap and water over hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth if you haven't washed your hands.

Cover your coughs and sneezes

- Remember to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues into no-touch trash cans and immediately wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
  - If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.

Avoid sharing objects and equipment

- Avoid using other employees' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible. If you cannot avoid using someone else's workstation, clean and disinfect before and after use.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces, like workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, and doorknobs. Dirty surfaces can be cleaned with soap and water before disinfection.
- To disinfect, use these EPA-registered disinfectants ⬈ .

Returning to work after quarantine or isolation

Quarantine keeps someone who might have been exposed to the virus away from others. Learn when to start and end quarantine.

Isolation separates someone who is infected with the virus from others. Learn when you can be around others after being sick.

Protect Your Health This Flu Season

Essential workers: protect yourself from flu this fall and winter with a flu vaccine. While getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19, it can protect you from becoming sick with flu and needing medical care. Flu is another serious respiratory illness that can cause missed work, hospitalizations, and, in some cases, even death. The combination of flu and COVID-19 could overwhelm healthcare settings.

Protect yourself, your family, and your community by getting a flu vaccine.

More Information

Worker Safety and Support

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Businesses and Workplaces

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Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces

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Content source: National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases