



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)



COVID-19 Employer Information for Public Health Inspectors

Updated Oct. 29, 2020

[Print](#)

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness (see list of [symptoms](#)) caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Here's 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 it by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then touching your face, mouth, nose, or eyes.
- COVID-19 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 public health inspectors your workforce might come into contact with the virus by:

- Being in [close contact \(within about 6 feet\)](#) with other people, which can include coworkers, the employees of the facility being inspected, and the public) at the office, during travel, or during inspections.
- Touching or handling high-contact surfaces and equipment, and then touching their face, mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Investigating facilities where COVID-19 transmission is occurring or has occurred, such as healthcare facilities.

More Info for Public Health Inspectors

[Employees and Staff](#)



How you can protect your staff and others and slow the spread

Evaluate your work practices to identify scenarios where workers cannot maintain [social distancing](#) of at least 6 feet from each other and/or the public. Use appropriate combinations of controls following the [hierarchy of controls](#) to address these situations to limit the spread of 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.

- Identify an on-site workplace coordinator who will be responsible for COVID-19 assessment and control.
 - Include representatives of each type of employee in providing input on the COVID-19 workplace health and safety plan. For example, include professional, utility, relief, janitorial, maintenance, administrative, and supervisory staff in the planning.
 - If service personnel and/or the public enter the workplace, develop plans to communicate with them regarding modification to work procedures.
 - Consider off-site field work and travel in the COVID-19 workplace health and safety plan, such as what equipment and materials may be needed to protect public health inspectors during routine inspections and multi-day travel, which could include driving long distances, flying, and staying in overnight lodging. Include public health inspectors and their supervisors, travel preparers, and motor-pool workers in this planning.
 - Notify all workers that any COVID-19 concerns should be directed to the identified 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 as they report to work.
 - Screening options could include having employees self-screen prior to arriving at work or having on-site screening by taking an employee's temperature and assessing potential symptoms prior to traveling or reporting to worksites for inspections (see [CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)).
 - Make sure employees can maintain at least 6 feet of distance while waiting

for screening.

- Determine what state and local regulations apply to the locations and facilities being inspected and identify the point of contact for COVID-19 precautions at those facilities. As part of your organization's COVID-19 workplace health and safety plan, train and equip inspectors to comply with any regulations and infection control protocols in place at the facilities being inspected, if they are at least as protective as your organization's established infection control protocols.

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

- 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.
- Close off any areas used for prolonged periods of time by the sick person.
- Perform [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 electronic equipment used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces. If other workers do not have access to these areas or items, wait 24 hours (or as long as possible) before cleaning and disinfecting. If it has been more than seven days since the person with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 has been in the workplace, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary.
- 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 not return to work until the criteria to [discontinue home isolation](#) are met, in consultation with healthcare providers.

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.
- Close or limit access to common areas where employees are likely to congregate and interact, such as break rooms, parking lots, and 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 have accessible sinks, soap, water, and a way for people to dry their hands (e.g., paper towels, hand dryer).
- Make sure the workspace is [well ventilated](#)  .
 - If the permanent offices or workspaces have special ventilation (such as ventilated tables or portable ventilation units), they should be used.
 - 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%. If possible, increase filter efficiency of HVAC units to highest functional level.
 - 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 disease is thought to spread](#) (including spread by asymptomatic individuals), 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](#) appropriately, [covering coughs and sneezes](#), [washing hands](#), [cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces](#), not sharing personal items or tools/equipment unless absolutely necessary, not touching their face, mouth, nose, or eyes, and the importance of not coming to work when sick.
 - Training and other communications 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.
- Consider maintaining small groups of workers in teams (cohorting) to reduce the number of coworkers each person is exposed to.
- If possible, collect information on COVID-19 precautions in use at the facilities to be inspected, even if it means pre-announcing these inspections.
- Implement specific policies that minimize travel or face-to-face interactions for inspectors.

- Assign inspectors to facilities that limit the distance traveled and need for overnight lodging.
- Provide technological support for conducting elements of inspections virtually, such as record reviews and employer and employee interviews.
- Consult [CDC travel guidance](#) on additional precautions that can be taken if inspectors must travel and stay overnight.
- **Clean and Disinfect frequently touched surfaces.**
 - If surfaces are 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 sanitizing disposable wipes for inspectors to have on hand when they are in the field. These can be used to clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces or items used during the inspection (e.g., desks, clipboards, pens, cameras, cell phones, laptops, keyboards, etc.). Do not share materials such as clip boards, pens, or touchscreens if possible.
- Give employees enough time to wash and dry their hands, and provide accessible sinks, soap, water, and a way to dry their hands (e.g., paper towels, hand dryer).
 - 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 to inspectors for use in the field.
- Maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet in offices or workspaces and while inspectors are in the field. This may require limiting the number of people in offices or workspaces at one time. (Consult state and local guidance if available.)
- **Post signs and reminders** at workplace entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on social distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette. Signs should be accessible for people with disabilities, easy to understand (preferably including infographics), and may include signs for non-English speakers, as needed. CDC has free, simple [posters available to download](#) and print, some of which are translated into different languages.
- Encourage or require [cloth face coverings](#) in the workplace and field as appropriate.
 - Cloth face coverings are intended to protect other people—not the wearer. They are not considered PPE.
 - Emphasize that care must be taken when putting on and taking off cloth face coverings to ensure that the worker or the cloth face covering does not become contaminated. Hand hygiene should be conducted after removing cloth face coverings.
 - Cloth face coverings should be routinely laundered.
 - Cloth face coverings should not be worn if their use creates a new risk (i.e. interference with driving or vision, or contributions to heat related

illness) that exceeds their COVID-19 related benefits of slowing the spread of the virus. Cloth face coverings should also not be worn by anyone who has trouble breathing or is unable to remove the covering without assistance. CDC provides information on [adaptations and alternatives](#) that should be considered when cloth face coverings may not be feasible.

- Consider requiring visitors to the workplace (service personnel or the public) to also wear cloth face coverings.

- **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 inspections are occurring in a location with known COVID-19 patients (such as a healthcare facility) 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 Information for Health Care Workers about Coronavirus](#)
- [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](#)  
- CDCINFO: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348 | website: www.cdc.gov/info

Last Updated Oct. 29, 2020

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