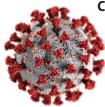# What Airline Workers Need to Know about COVID-19

## CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES AND GATE AGENTS

Accessible version: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/airport-customer-factsheet.html

**Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)** is a respiratory illness caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms often include a fever, cough, or shortness of breath. Our understanding of how the virus spreads is evolving as we learn more about it, so check the **CDC website** (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html) for the latest information.

**The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person:**

Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).

Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.

Recent studies indicate that the virus can be spread by people before they develop symptoms (pre-symptomatic) or who never develop symptoms (asymptomatic). It also may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. However, this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at **higher risk for more serious complications** (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html) from COVID-19.

**CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings** (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html) in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. Cloth face coverings may prevent people who don't know they have the virus from transmitting it to others. These face coverings are not surgical masks or respirators and are not appropriate substitutes for them in workplaces where masks or respirators are recommended or required.

## As an airline customer service representative or gate agent, how can I protect myself?

As a customer service representative or gate agent, potential sources of exposure could include assisting a person with COVID-19 in close contact or by touching your mouth, nose, or eyes; or handling passenger items, such as baggage, boarding passes, identification documents, credit cards, and mobile devices.

- Limit close contact with others by maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet, when possible.

- Provide a facemask to any visibly sick person you are assisting if one is available and they can tolerate it. Ask them to cover their mouth and nose with tissues when coughing or sneezing. Follow employer's guidelines for additional steps as required.

- Avoid handling of passenger and airline crew boarding passes, luggage, identification documents, credit cards and mobile devices, where possible.

- Allow passengers to hold their own documents and scan their own boarding pass or mobile device.

- Practice routine cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces such as workstations, keyboards, touchscreens, printers, and computers, following the directions on the cleaning product's label.

- Follow your employer's normal guidance for handling service/support animals.

- Proper **hand hygiene** (https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html) is an important infection control measure. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.

- Key times to clean hands in general include:
  » Before, during, and after preparing food
  » Before eating food
  » After using the toilet
  » After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing

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## As an airline customer service representative or gate agent, how can I protect myself? (continued)

- Additional times to clean hands on the job include:
  - » Before and after work shifts
  - » Before and after work breaks
  - » After touching frequently touched surfaces
  - » After interacting with a customer who is visibly ill
  - » After putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

## What steps should my employer take?

Your employer should develop a COVID-19 health and safety plan to protect employees. This plan should be shared with you and your coworkers. Your employer should:

- **Take steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if an employee is sick** (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html). Actively encourage sick employees to stay home. Sick employees should not return to work until **the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met** (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-in-home-patients.html), in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.

- Provide information on who to contact if employees become sick.

- Implement flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices. Consider drafting non-punitive emergency sick leave policies if sick leave is not offered to some or all employees.

- Develop policies for responding to the identification of sick passengers, crew, or coworkers.

- Designate someone to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Employees should know who this person is and how to contact them.

- Provide employees with accurate information about COVID-19, how it spreads, and risk of exposure.

- Provide training on proper **handwashing** (https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html) practices and other routine infection control precautions. This will help prevent the spread of many diseases, including COVID-19.

- Provide employees with access to soap, clean running water, and drying materials or alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol at their worksite.

- Provide disposable disinfectant wipes so that commonly touched surfaces (such as workstations, keyboards, touchscreens, printers, and computers) can be wiped down by employees. For disinfection, use **products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2** (https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2), diluted household bleach solutions, or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and are appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's directions for use.

- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.

- Conduct frequent cleaning of employee break rooms, rest areas, and other common areas.

- Place posters that encourage **staying home when sick** (https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/tools-resources/educational-materials.html)**, covering coughs and sneezes** (https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/etiquette/coughing_sneezing.html) and **washing hands often** (https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/materials.html) at the entrance to the workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.

- Follow all applicable federal regulations and public health agency guidelines.

## Where can I get more information?

Stay informed. Talk to your employer, supervisor, union representative, or airport personnel who are responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. See these sources for more information on reducing the risk of worker exposures to COVID-19:

**CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) website:** https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html

**NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic website:** www.cdc.gov/niosh/emres/2019_ncov.html

**CDC COVID-19 website:** https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/

**OSHA COVID-19 website:** www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/controlprevention.html

**CDCINFO:** 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348 | website: https://wwwn.cdc.gov/dcs/ContactUs/Form

## cdc.gov/coronavirus