

Interim Guidance: Considerations for Businesses and Employers, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

March 8, 2020

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed guidance for businesses and employers in the United States to help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illness in non-healthcare settings; this guidance also provides planning considerations if there are widespread community outbreaks of COVID-19. Creating a plan for your workplace or business can help protect you, your employees, and the health of the local community. The full text of this guidance can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>.

In consultation with local health officials, businesses should consider the following intervention strategies based on COVID-19 severity status in Virginia. Broadly, VDH will assess and categorize COVID-19 severity using measures including the number of cases reported, case- hospitalization ratio and number of localities affected. Businesses should take into consideration their ability to implement modifications to their normal operations for moderate and high severity level situations depending on the size and scope of their organization.

Workers and employers involved in health care, death care, laboratory, airline, border protection, and solid waste and wastewater management operations should consult [OSHA guidelines](#) for these specific worker groups.

Regularly and proactively communicate with your employees to reduce stigma and misinformation; there is no connection between COVID-19 and race, ethnicity, or national origin.

The guidance below is structured in three sections: **prior** to COVID-19 detection in your community, **once** COVID-19 is detected in your community, and **after** COVID-19 event in your community.



PRIOR to COVID-19 Detection in your community

- **Encourage personal hygiene and environmental cleaning practices to reduce the spread of disease:**
 - Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the [cleaning agents](#) that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
 - Businesses with significant customer turnover (tourist destinations, restaurants, movie theaters, museums, gyms) should consider more frequent than usual cleaning of surfaces most commonly touched by the public (doorknobs, etc.)
 - Provide soap, water, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace, including customer areas. Maintain adequate supplies; consider assigning these responsibilities to specific staff.
 - Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, and hand hygiene at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are visible.
 - Emphasize hand hygiene to all employees; wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or clean hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol when soap and water are not available.
- **Prepare for absenteeism and encourage sick employees to stay home or telework:**
 - Prepare for possible increased numbers of employee absences due to illness in employees and their family members, and dismissals of schools or childcare.

- Ensure you have a company culture and sick leave policies in place that will facilitate employees staying home when sick.
- Create plans to continue your essential business functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism. Consider cross-training personnel to perform essential functions so that the workplace is able to operate even if key staff members are absent.
- Consider applying 'Medium Severity' risk procedures for employees of higher risk;
 - Persons aged 60 or older or persons with underlying conditions
- Explore whether you can establish policies and practices, such as flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), to increase the physical distance among employees and between employees and others.
- **Assess your essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your services or products.**
 - Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed).
 - Coordination with state and local health officials is strongly encouraged for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside.
 - Share best practices with other businesses in your communities (especially those in your supply chain), chambers of commerce, and associations to improve community response efforts.



ONCE COVID-19 IS DETECTED in the community (low to high severity)

Once COVID-19 is detected in a community, health department recommendations addressing any change in normal operations will depend on a number of factors such as the number of cases detected, the severity of illness associated with those cases and how widespread infection is or is predicted to be based on case histories. Assessing these and other factors will help the health department determine the severity of the situation, which will help inform recommendations. In consultation with local officials, businesses and employers should consider implementing the following when COVID-19 is detected in their or neighboring communities.

- Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work; doctor's offices may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- Share absenteeism data with local health departments and community partners.
- Employers with more than one business location are encouraged to provide local managers with the authority to take appropriate actions based on the condition in each locality.
- If employees have cough or shortness of breath upon arrival to work, separate them from other employee and send them home immediately.
- Use teleconferencing instead of face-to-face meetings when possible, and allow teleworking for employees who are able to do so.
- Consider cancelling non-essential business travel, and if widespread community transmission is occurring, consider cancelling large work-related meetings or events



AFTER a COVID-19 event in your community

Once concern about COVID-19 has subsided, businesses and employers are encouraged to work with local officials to help scale back prevention efforts specific to COVID-19. Recommendations to consider in this phase of response include:

- Meet with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team for your company to discuss and note lessons learned.
- Maintain and expand your planning team.
- Participate in community-wide emergency preparedness activities.