

COVID-19: *Staying Safe at Work for Employers*

FACT SHEET

LENGTH: 24 MINUTES

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

The recent pandemic outbreak of the virus that causes COVID-19 temporarily brought the entire world to a halt, with many workplaces shut down, schools closed, people confined to their homes and medical facilities overwhelmed. Now, for many employers, it's time to ramp up operations and allow employees to return to work. The good news is we can stay safe at work. This program explains the control measures found in a typical workplace infection control plan and explains how those measures are put into practice to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at work. In addition to explaining the virus's symptoms and its modes of transmission, the program also covers the screening process when entering the workplace, creating an infection control plan and following the CDC's guidelines on control measures and vaccinations.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

After watching the program, the participant should be able to explain the following:

- Which factors employers must consider when determining control measures;
- How the screening process works for preventing potentially contagious people from entering the workplace;
- What the modes of transmission for COVID-19 are;
- What physical distancing is and where it may be required;
- Why wearing face coverings is so important and how policies regarding their use can differ;
- How to deal with the COVID-19 vaccine, your business and your employees;
- What OSHA's categories of worker risk related to COVID-19 exposure are.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:

OUR WORLD HAS CHANGED

- When we watch the news or look around our communities and workplaces, we can't help but notice that our world has changed.
- The recent pandemic outbreak of the virus that causes the respiratory illness known as COVID-19 temporarily brought the entire world to a halt, with many workplaces shut down, schools closed, people confined to their homes and medical facilities overwhelmed.
- Now, for many employers, it's time to ramp up operations and allow employees to return to work, but things have changed.
- It's possible that some things will never return to the way they were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- One thing that hasn't changed: the need for your employees to earn a living and provide for their loved ones without placing their health and safety at risk and as an employer, that is your responsibility.

FACTORS IN DETERMINING INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES

- One thing we all need to understand is that different geographic regions will experience different levels of outbreaks, resurgence or the appearance of more contagious variants of the virus at different times.
- The infection control measures put into place by employers in one region may look quite different than those required by employers in other regions at any particular time.
- When determining the infection control measures to implement in your workplace, you should perform a hazard analysis and take into account the amount of infection risk associated with your operations, the amount of risk presented by any particular job task as well the infection statistics in your local community and the guidance being given by governmental agencies and regulations.
- One important factor to consider is whether or not there is ongoing "community spread" of the virus in your local area.
- Community spread occurs when people in the local community are becoming infected with the virus, even with no known contact with a sick person.
- During the early days of the pandemic, the guidance being issued to prevent the spread of COVID-19 was constantly changing, seemingly from one day to the next, as the medical community learned more about this new or "novel" coronavirus named SARS CoV-2.
- But now, the virus is better understood, as are the measures we must take in order to stay safe at work.
- One important development is that vaccines are now available for COVID-19. People are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their final dose of vaccine.
- However, because of the virus's ability to mutate into other variants, the available vaccines may need to be updated and/or booster shots given to remain effective.
- In addition, people who are vaccinated, as well as other exposed people who have no outward symptoms, may still be able to spread the virus to others.

- People who are contagious without showing any symptoms are called “asymptomatic carriers.”
- This is why the CDC currently advises that people with no symptoms and people who have been vaccinated follow all mandatory prevention practices that have been put into place.
- As an employer, you should stay informed on any updated guidance issued by the CDC, OSHA or other authorities as it relates to vaccinated people and ensure that your vaccinated employees continue to follow the same mandatory prevention measures as unvaccinated employees.
- According to the EEOC, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, employers can **require** all employees to be vaccinated when it can be demonstrated that it is a business necessity and that unvaccinated employees would pose a direct threat to the safety of the employee or others.
- However, employers may be legally required to provide reasonable accommodation to those employees who refuse to be vaccinated based on medical reasons or strongly held religious beliefs.
- As an employer you must fully research your legal obligations before making any employment decisions related to COVID-19 vaccinations.
- In addition, those employers who do not require vaccinations of all employees may not to penalize or discriminate against unvaccinated workers.
- And while it is permissible to ask employees their vaccination status, it is generally not permissible to ask any medical related follow up questions. Any vaccine related information obtained from an employee should be treated with the same level of security and confidentiality as other medical records or information.
- People who are infected with COVID-19 are thought to be **most** contagious when they are the **most** symptomatic, such as when they have a fever, a dry cough, a sore throat or shortness of breath
- Employers should make all employees aware of these symptoms through training as well as by posting signage and encourage everyone not to report to the workplace when they are symptomatic.
- Employees will be more likely to stay home when they are sick or contagious when their employer has flexible and consistent sick leave policies, does not require a doctor’s note to validate their illness and permits employees to stay home to care for a sick family member.

THE SCREENING PROCESS FOR PREVENTING ENTRY BY POTENTIALLY CONTAGIOUS PEOPLE

- During times of ongoing community spread, or when other risk factors are present, employers should take steps to prevent employees, visitors and customers who may be contagious from entering the workplace.
- This will likely include a screening process that requires questions to be answered and temperatures taken before anyone is allowed to enter the facility.
- Some common screening questions include:
 - Are you experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19?
 - Is there anyone in your home that is sick or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19?
 - Have you visited or been in close contact with anyone experiencing symptoms of COVID-19?
- Anyone who has a fever, or answers yes to these questions, has an elevated risk of being contagious with COVID-19 and should not be allowed to enter the workplace unless additional precautions are taken.
- The Centers for Disease Control, the CDC, considers a fever to be a temperature over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius.

RESPONDING TO COVID-19 SYMPTOMS

- Symptoms of COVID-19 appear between two and 14 days after exposure.
- Employees should be encouraged to self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms and employers should have a plan in place for the reporting and evaluation of symptoms; as well as a means of isolating potentially infected people in an area away from co-workers, customers and visitors.
- Employees who are symptomatic should put on a surgical mask or similar face covering to protect others.

MODES OF TRANSMISSION

- In order to control the spread of the virus in our workplace, we must understand the various ways the virus can spread, or its “modes of transmission.”
- When an infected person sneezes or coughs, droplets of fluid containing the virus can be expelled into the air for a considerable distance and infect others if inhaled or by contacting a mucus membrane, such as the eyes, mouth or nose. This is known as “droplet transmission.” Droplet transmission is believed to be the primary means by which COVID-19 is spread.
- People infected with COVID-19 can also expel very tiny fluid particles called aerosols when they speak or breathe. These tiny aerosols may contain the coronavirus and can linger in the air for a considerable period of time and infect others if enough of these particles are inhaled or come into contact with a mucus membrane. This is known as “aerosol transmission.”

- The COVID-19 virus can survive on certain surfaces for several hours or days. When a person touches a contaminated object and then touches his or her face, eyes, nose or mouth, that person may become infected. This mode of transmission is referred to as “contact transmission.”

THE INFECTION CONTROL PLAN

- As an employer, OSHA recommends that you develop an “infectious disease preparedness and response plan,” sometimes called an “exposure control plan” or “infection control plan.” This plan will contain the procedures and process your company will use to mitigate the virus’s modes of transmission and prevent it from spreading into the workplace.
- This plan, also called a COVID-19 Prevention Program, should be assigned a workplace coordinator who is responsible for COVID-19 issues. The COVID-19 prevention program should include hazard assessments to determine when and how workers might be exposed to COVID-19.
- Also included in the COVID-19 Prevention Program should be the education and training of employees on COVID-19 policies and procedures, a process for enhanced cleaning and disinfection and the implementation of employee protections against retaliation for COVID-19 related reporting or complaints.
- Employers are also responsible for properly recording and reporting to OSHA any work-related COVID-19 infections or deaths.
- A typical workplace infection control plan for COVID-19 will include a physical distancing policy, a face covering policy, a sanitization and hygiene policy as well as administrative and engineering control measures and PPE requirements.
- It’s important that all employees understand the purpose of each of these prevention methods as well as their important role in making them successful.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- During times of community spread, or when other risk factors are present, local governmental agencies may mandate the practice of social distancing for anyone who goes out in public.
- When this is the case, your employees and anyone visiting your facility should also be required to practice social distancing by maintaining a physical separation of at least six feet, or two meters, whenever possible.
- This amount of physical distancing or “social distancing” can reduce the risk of aerosol and droplet transmission between employees.
- When this type of distancing is required, the number of people allowed into certain areas of the facility may be restricted and some work areas removed from service in order to obtain adequate spacing.
- Employers can use training, signage and floor markings to encourage employees to maintain social distancing while standing in lines, visiting breakrooms and cafeterias and when approaching co-workers performing their job duties.

FACE COVERING POLICY

- In addition to requiring employees to maintain physical distancing, employers may also require the wearing of a face covering.
- A face covering, or face mask can be used to reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the distance that infected droplets or aerosols travel when expelled.
- The CDC recommends a multi-layer, cloth face-covering without valves or vents be worn over a disposable “surgical type” or “flat-mask” face covering.
- During times of community spread, or when other risk factors are present, local governmental agencies may mandate the use of a face covering for anyone who goes out in public.
- When this is the case, your employees and anyone entering your facility will be required to wear a face covering.
- Wearing a face covering provides some protection for the wearer but its primary benefit is to reduce the likelihood of spreading the virus to others.
- Think about wearing a face covering the same way you think about covering your cough with a tissue or sneezing into your elbow. It is not only good social etiquette, but it protects others from getting sick. When everyone wears one, everyone is better protected.
- This is why many employers will choose to implement some type of face covering policy even in areas where there is no regulatory requirement to do so.
- In our new world after COVID-19, not wearing a face covering when one is required is a social faux pas and inconsiderate to others around you.
- Keep in mind that the face covering policy you put into place should be determined by local infection statistics and governmental guidance, the risk factors specific to your unique workplace and the specific job tasks performed by your employees. It’s okay for your policies to change as conditions change.
- Workers who perform tasks deemed to be “low risk” and are able to perform their work while maintaining a safe distance from co-workers and the general public may not be required to wear a face covering while performing their job or while remaining in their personal workspace.

- Even when this is the case, these workers may still be required to wear a face covering when leaving their personal workspace and moving about the facility. This is because it may be hard to maintain physical distancing in aisleways, stairways and similar high traffic areas.
- Employees should also be asked to wear a face covering anytime they must work closer than six feet, or two meters, from others, when visiting the nurse or reporting the onset of symptoms, during the prework screening process or any other time they must be in close proximity to a co-worker or the general public.

PUTTING ON AND TAKING OFF A FACE COVERING PROPERLY

- This is why all employees need to know how to properly put on and take off a flat mask face covering.
- Before putting on any face covering, first make sure your hands are clean.
- Then, inspect it for any tears or holes and locate the metal strip in the mask.
- Orient the mask so the colored side faces outward, or away from you.
- Place the top part of the mask on the bridge of your nose and form the metal strip to the shape of your nose. Then, place the bands behind your ears.
- While holding the mask against your nose, pull the bottom of the mask down to ensure that it covers your nose, mouth and chin.
- Once adjusted, try to avoid touching the mask while you're wearing it. If you must touch or adjust your mask, be sure to clean your hands immediately afterward.
- To take off the mask, unloop the bands from behind your ears and carefully remove the mask without touching the front.
- Dispose of used masks in a closable trash bin and immediately wash your hands.

A 100 PERCENT FACE COVERING POLICY

- As you can see, frequently putting on and taking off a face covering during the workday is not optimal. This is one reason why many employers will choose to implement a 100 percent face covering policy for all workers, all the time.
- A 100 percent face covering policy provides maximum protection for everyone, eliminates any confusion about when and where a face covering should be worn and reduces the risk of cross contamination by workers frequently handling a used mask.
- The rules regarding face coverings can be confusing and sometimes controversial. Make sure the face covering rules you establish are well understood by all employees and visitors and enforced fairly and consistently.

THE SANITIZATION AND HYGIENE PROGRAM

- Your infection control plan should include a sanitization and hygiene program designed to prevent contact transmission of the virus.
- The plan should encourage and implement basic hygiene control measures such as frequent employee hand washing, respiratory etiquette such as covering coughs and sneezes, providing employees and customers with tissues and trash receptacles and the periodic cleaning of commonly touched surfaces.
- To prevent picking up and spreading the COVID-19 virus, employees, customers and visitors need to wash their hands, a lot.
- As an employer, you should provide a place for hand washing to occur and provide dispensers of hand sanitizer or other hand hygiene products when soap and running water are not readily available.
- Employees should be trained in proper hand hygiene techniques and encouraged to frequently do so through training and the posting of signage.

CLEANING COMMONLY TOUCHED SURFACES

- Another aspect of the sanitization and hygiene program is cleaning commonly touched surfaces.
- The infection control plan should include a list of commonly touched surfaces to be cleaned such as door handles, light switches, phones and similar items. The current guidance suggests that commonly touched items be cleaned routinely.
- Cleaning and sanitizing the workplace is a very visible aspect of the overall infection control program and helps employees and customers feel safe while at work or visiting your facility.
- The custodial staff or a contractor will likely take on this role; however, your employees should also be encouraged to clean and sanitize their primary work area and related tools or equipment at the beginning of their shift.
- There are a variety of sanitizing and disinfecting agents approved for this purpose. The Centers for Disease Control also recommends a solution of one quarter cup bleach per gallon of water as a sanitizing agent.
- Workers should be encouraged not to use other workers' phones, desks, work tools and equipment, if at all possible.

ESTABLISHING A MEANS FOR EMPLOYEES TO VOICE THEIR CONCERNS

- As an employer, you are responsible for performing a hazard analysis to help determine the type of infection control policies you will implement.
- Your policies related to physical distancing, face coverings and hygiene will be based on regulations or local ordinances, infection statistics in your community and the risk factors at your particular facility. This is why the control measures we are showing in this video may not align 100 percent with the policies you decide to put into practice.

- You do need to recognize that some employees may not feel adequately protected by the infection control measures you put into place. Employers should establish a means for employees to communicate their concerns.
- Those workers who are at higher-risk for developing a severe illness from COVID-19, such as being older or having a serious underlying medical condition, may require additional protective measures be put into place.

OSHA'S FOUR CATEGORIES OF WORKER RISK

- OSHA has created the following categories of worker risk related to COVID-19 exposure: high-risk and very high-risk workers, medium risk workers and lower risk workers.

Lower Risk Workers

- Lower risk workers are those who do not have prolonged occupational contact with the general public or other co-workers. These workers seldom get within six feet, or two meters, of anyone. Their risk of becoming infected at work is low, regardless of the existence of community spread or not.
- OSHA's current guidance is that lower risk workers should follow basic infection control measures such as physical distancing, covering coughs and sneezes, practicing frequent hand washing, staying home when sick and following their company's face covering policy.

Medium Risk Workers

- Medium risk workers are those who, periodically, do have prolonged occupational contact with co-workers or the general public at distances closer than six feet, or two meters, where these contacts are not suspected to be infected with COVID-19.
- OSHA's guidance for medium risk workers is that, in addition to following basic infection control measures, their employer should implement administrative and engineering controls to reduce face-to-face contact.
- Some examples include the installation of physical barriers or "sneeze guards" at workstations to help prevent droplet transmission, install high efficiency air filters and increase the ventilation rate of the work environment, limit the number of people allowed in certain areas at any one time and encourage remote work, provide drive-through services or use online meetings to reduce face-to-face contacts.
- OSHA also recommends that employers perform a hazard analysis to determine if these medium risk workers should wear additional protective equipment.

High & Very-High Risk Workers

- High and very-high risk workers are those who have occupational exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19.
- Generally, this category is made up of workers involved in the facility's screening process, industrial nurses and other healthcare workers who perform specific medical or laboratory procedures.
- These types of workers will be required to wear additional protective equipment.
- This additional PPE may include some combination of a disposable smock or gown, disposable medical gloves, eye protection and/or a face shield. This type of PPE provides contact protection from blood and body fluids as well as the expelled respiratory droplets that can carry COVID-19.
- In addition, a NIOSH-approved N95 respirator may be required to prevent inhaling aerosols and to protect the mucus membranes of the nose and mouth from droplet transmission.
- Employees who are required to wear a respirator may not have any facial hair that interferes with a proper seal.
- Keep in mind that an N95 respirator has increased breathing resistance and employees should be enrolled into the respiratory protection program which includes a written program, medical evaluation, respirator fit testing and employee training to ensure employees are able to wear the facepiece or respirator safely and are well trained in its proper care and use.

COVID-19-RELATED PPE TRAINING

- Employees must be trained in the proper donning and doffing of all COVID-19-related PPE such as smocks, gloves, eye protection, face protection and respiratory protection.
- Employees should be trained how to prevent cross-contamination while removing PPE as well as in the proper disposal and decontamination methods.
- Employees should also be trained to practice proper hand hygiene immediately prior to donning PPE as well as immediately after removing PPE.

SUMMARY

- Yes, the post pandemic world is different and it's likely to stay this way for quite some time. It's going to take a group effort for us to stay safe at work while COVID-19 remains a threat in our community, but the good news is, yes, we can stay safe at work.
- Here's a quick review of how we do it. As an employer, your responsibilities include:
 - Creating a screening process to prevent those likely to be contagious from entering the workplace.
 - Encouraging all employees to stay home if they are sick or likely to be contagious.
 - Creating an infectious disease preparedness and response plan to mitigate the virus's modes of transmission. This plan should include a physical distancing policy, a face covering policy and a sanitation and hygiene program.

- As an employer, you should also implement administrative and engineering controls and require employees to wear appropriate PPE when a hazard analysis indicates an increased risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Here is one final thing you need to remember. As an employer, the policies and procedures you put into place related to COVID-19 or other contagious illnesses must change in accordance with changes in the level of infection risk in your community or as new regulatory requirements are enacted or as updated guidance from governmental agencies is issued.
- The list of items that may change includes the guidance related to vaccinated people. Employers should stay up to date on the latest CDC and OSHA guidance related to vaccinated people and ensure that vaccinated people continue to follow all mandatory prevention policies while in the workplace.
- In addition, employers must still comply with existing OSHA regulations related to PPE, Bloodborne Pathogens, the Respiratory Protection Standard and the general duty clause; all of which contain sections relevant to the safety and health issues related to COVID-19.
- Perhaps one day soon, the type of protections mentioned in this video will no longer be necessary and your company's infection control efforts can be scaled back to reflect a reduced risk.
- Until then, we must all continue to do our part to stop the spread of COVID-19 where we work and in our communities.

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ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW QUIZ

1. b
2. c
3. b
4. c
5. b
6. a
7. a
8. b
9. a
10. b

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REVIEW QUIZ

The following questions are provided to determine how well you understand the information presented in this program.

Name _____ Date _____

1. _____ carriers of COVID-19 are contagious without showing any symptoms.
 - a. Symptomatic
 - b. Asymptomatic
 - c. Characteristic

2. The Centers for Disease Control considers a fever to be a temperature over _____ Fahrenheit.
 - a. 98.6 degrees
 - b. 99.6 degrees
 - c. 100.4 degrees

3. Symptoms of COVID-19 appear between _____ days of exposure.
 - a. 1 and 7
 - b. 2 and 14
 - c. 6 and 12

4. _____ is believed to be the primary means by which COVID-19 is spread.
 - a. Aerosol transmission
 - b. Contact transmission
 - c. Droplet transmission

5. When social distancing is required, you should require employees and visitors to maintain a physical separation of at least _____.
 - a. 3 feet
 - b. 6 feet
 - c. 10 feet

6. A face covering or face mask can be used to reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the distance that infected droplets or aerosols travel when expelled.
 - a. True
 - b. False

7. Even if vaccinated and have no outward symptoms, you may still be able to spread the virus to others.
 - a. True
 - b. False

8. The Centers for Disease Control recommends a solution of two cups of bleach per one gallon of water as a sanitizing agent.
 - a. True
 - b. False

9. According to the EEOC, employers can require all employees to be vaccinated when it can be demonstrated that it is a business necessity and that unvaccinated employees would post a direct threat to the safety of the employee or others.
 - a. True
 - b. False

10. As an employer, you are no longer required to comply with existing OSHA regulations related to PPE, bloodborne pathogens, the Respiratory Protection Standard and the general duty clause as long as you have an infection control plan in place.
 - a. True
 - b. False