

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

If you manage a workplace of any kind, you may have concerns about how to handle issues related to COVID-19 among your staff and/or your clients or customers. Listed below are answers to questions we've received from managers of public agencies and private companies about confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 at their worksites.

If you would like more information about novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) or the most recent updates on the virus, please visit the Department of Public Health (DPH) website:

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus>.

1. I manage a county office with a large workforce. An employee shows up sick. They don't know if they have the virus – their symptoms are mild, and they inform me about their illness before spending time with other staff.

Send the sick employee home right away. If they have symptoms of serious illness such as trouble breathing, pressure or pain in chest, bluish lips or appear confused, call 9-1-1. If the symptoms are mild, ask employee to call their doctor for medical advice. Consider alternative work options like teleworking or other arrangements to work remotely if the employee is able to do so. Guidance about home care for people with respiratory illnesses like COVID-19 can be found at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/docs/HomeisolationenCoV.pdf>

Other employees should assess their previous contact with the symptomatic employee.

- If they have had close contact with the symptomatic employee while that person had symptoms or within two days (48 hours) before symptoms appeared, they need to go home and start a 14-day period of self-quarantine. Close contact is defined as any contact closer than 6 feet for more than 10 minutes OR unprotected exposure to body fluids, for example when a person coughs or sneezes close by or when two people share a drink or eating utensil.
- Employees who have not had close contact with symptomatic employee while that employee had symptoms or during the two days prior to the start of symptoms can stay on the job. Do remind them to follow general steps to prevent the spread of respiratory infections. All managers should promote frequent handwashing, discourage workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, remind employees to practice social distancing by maintaining a six-foot person-to-person distance, advise them to clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces, and actively encourage them to stay home if they are sick.

2. What if it is a customer or client who shows up with symptoms of illness?

If your worksite gets customer or client traffic, make it easy for visitors to practice good hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Post signs requesting that people who are ill visit you online. Provide tissues, trash receptacles, and no-touch hand sanitizer dispensers near entrances. And make sure your employees follow social distancing guidance, keeping a safe six feet between themselves and visitors whether or not they seem sick. If your employee must be closer to the customer, make sure they minimize time together to less than 10 minutes.

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After the customer or client leaves, use cleaning chemicals with EPA-registered disinfectant labels with claims against emerging viral pathogens to wipe down doorknobs/push bars, elevator buttons, restroom doors, etc. that the visitor may have touched.

3. An employee calls in to report that they have tested positive for COVID-19. They didn't have any obvious symptoms when they were on the job, but they work closely with other people and may have exposed them to COVID-19. What steps do I need to take?

This employee must stay home and self-isolate. If they continue to have no symptoms, they must be home for at least 10 days after their test. If they develop symptoms at some point, they have to self-isolate for at least 10 days from their test PLUS at least 3 days after recovery. Recovery means that fever is gone for 72 hours (3 days) without the use of fever-reducing medications and respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath) have improved.

Individuals without symptoms that test positive are considered to be infectious from the date of the test. Employees who have been in close contact with an individual known to be infectious at the time of contact must self-quarantine at home for 14 days from the point of contact. This applies whether their infected coworker never developed symptoms or developed symptoms after being tested. If the test showed that they were infected with COVID-19 when they were at work, the 14 day quarantine rule applies.

A close contact is any person who was within 6 feet for more than 10 minutes of the ill individual or had unprotected direct contact to body fluids of the ill employee (e.g. cough or sneeze on face or sharing of a drink or a food utensil).

Do note that you cannot legally tell other employees who is sick. It is a violation of patient rights to reveal private medical information about someone. Employees may guess who the infected person is, but even if they do it is illegal for you to divulge that information. That said, there are steps you can take to protect your other workers and your customers:

- Assess who has had close contact as described above with this employee, on the job, during breaks or at lunch. Those individuals are at risk and should home quarantine for 14 days from the time of their last close contact with the infected worker while the worker was known to be infectious (via test or symptoms) with COVID-19. If employee who had contact does not get sick within fourteen days, the time span over which the disease generally appears, they can come back to work safely. In the meantime, they may be able to work remotely. Employees can learn more about home-quarantine after exposure from a Department of Public Health guide for people exposed to COVID-19 (<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/docs/COVHomeQuarantine.pdf>).
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment and surface in the workplace that the employee may have touched, such as doorknobs/push bars, elevator buttons, restroom doors, copiers or other office machines, etc. Use cleaning chemicals with EPA-registered disinfectant labels with claims against emerging viral pathogens.

If one of your other employees develops symptoms while in quarantine, then they should follow the return to work guidelines noted above (10 days after symptoms started and 3 days after fever has resolved and symptoms improved).

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4. One of our employees is a suspected case of COVID-19 but hasn't been tested.

In this situation, you would follow all of the same steps outlined above for an employee who tested positive for COVID-19. During the current COVID-19 outbreak it is likely that many people with cold and flu-like symptoms have COVID-19. Most people do not need to see a doctor or get a test for COVID-19 because they will have a mild illness and get better at home. As above, the employee needs to self-isolate while any colleagues who had close contact remain home for a full 14 days following their last contact with the infected person while that person was symptomatic or in the two days (48 hours) before the onset of symptoms. To help us avoid overburdening the health system, you should not require a healthcare provider's note either to justify the absence of an employee who is sick with respiratory disease or to permit the employee to return to work.

5. One of our employees was exposed to COVID-19 after interacting with a member of the public – a customer, client or business associate – who contacted us to report that they'd found out they were infected. What steps do I take? What about other people besides staff who may have been exposed?

Review your employee's interaction with the visitor. If the employee was within 6 feet of the ill individual for more than 10 minutes or had unprotected direct contact to respiratory secretions of the ill individual (e.g. cough or sneeze on face), the employee should stay home in quarantine for 14 days from the date of the contact. As in previous scenarios, you may be able to offer telework as an option. Do check to see if other employees were exposed and may also meet the criteria for home quarantine. If no one on your staff had close, prolonged contact with the infected visitor you do not need to take any steps to protect staff other than continued infection control.

However, even if the staff are safe, other customers may have been close to the visitor, and you should take steps to protect them. Remember that this may have occurred on an outdoor line to get into your facility, on a line inside your facility, in a waiting room outside your office, or at a standing desk where customers stood side-by-side to fill in forms or carry out other business. If you know the identities of people who visited your facility at the same time and may have had close contact with the infected individual, you should contact them and inform them that they need to home quarantine. Please refer them to the DPH guidance on home quarantine listed at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/docs/COVHomeQuarantine.pdf>. If you do not know the identities of people who may have been exposed, the next best thing is to post a notice on your website or social media page, letting people who visited your facility when the infected person was there know about the risk and the need to monitor their health – refer them to DPH guidance for exposed individuals at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/about/FAQ-Exposure.pdf>

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6. I manage a government social service agency that served clients at our offices until we were instructed to close and now does home visits to serve especially vulnerable clients. One of our clients has a confirmed case of COVID-19.

If you served this client at your office, you will need to find out who had close contact (less than six feet, more than 10 minutes) with them at any time while the client had symptoms and in the two days (48 hours) before the client's symptoms appeared. As in the previous scenario (Number 5), you need to review who on your staff had contact with the sick individual and for how long. Those with prolonged contact will need to home quarantine.

If you have served this client at home during the symptomatic period or within two days before their symptoms appeared, the risk would be to their home visitor. The home visitor should home quarantine for 14 days from the last contact with the ill client, again with the option to work from home. Other staff of your program may continue with regular work assignments.

7. I direct a public safety agency. One of my employees worked while ill and exposed other frontline public safety workers. I can't send them all home – what do I do?

As with any sick employee, this individual must stay home and self-isolate until at least 10 days have passed after the symptoms first appeared AND at least 3 days after recovery. Recovery means that fever is gone for 72 hours (3 days) without the use of fever-reducing medications and respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath) have improved.

Meanwhile, identify those co-workers or members of the public with whom the sick employee came into close contact (closer than six feet, more than 10 minutes) while the employee had symptoms as well as two days (48 hours) before the symptoms appeared. Instruct the close contacts to quarantine themselves for 14 days from the date of last contact. If this directive causes staffing shortages that will increase overall public risk, exposed employees who show no signs of illness may return to work with twice-daily temperature and symptom checks and wearing protective masks. Infection control guidance should be carefully reviewed, to prevent exposed individuals from putting additional coworkers or members of the public at risk.

8. I am the director of a homeless shelter that provides overnight accommodation to 50 people. One of our frequent guests spiked a high fever and became very short of breath and had to be transported by ambulance to a hospital last night. What should I do to protect staff and other guests?

Steps should be taken immediately to identify other guests who had close contact with the infected individual while symptomatic or in the two days (48 hours) before the onset of symptoms. This could include those who were near the individual in line to enter, those who sat within six feet or otherwise came into close contact during an evening meal, and those in beds within a six-foot radius of the person's bed. Anyone with close contact should be quarantined from other guests to the extent feasible. A separate bedroom with an individual toilet for each individual would be the best solution; if that is not feasible, other means of separating exposed individuals from others should be implemented. You can find suggestions for creating a protected space in the document called "Guidance for Homeless Shelters" on the Department of Public Health website.

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If it is impossible to adequately isolate exposed guests, contact the Department of Public Health Quarantine and Isolation Intake Call Center for Persons Experiencing Homelessness at (833) 596-1009 to see if there are beds available at that site and if the guests you are concerned about meet eligibility guidelines.

Exposed staff should also be sent home to home quarantine if at all possible. If that is not feasible, exposed staff should be equipped with masks and instructed on social distancing guidelines and general infection control. Every feasible effort should be made to limit client contact.

9. I manage a retail business. We have done a good job managing entry into the store so we don't get crowds, but how should we practice social distancing between staff and customers at the cash register?

Public health guidance around social distancing aims for a space of 6 feet and contact of no more than 10 minutes between any two people. In general, the briefer the contact, the better. You should aim to comply as closely as possible on both counts. Consider placing markers on the floor near the register in your store to keep the paying customer at the far end of the conveyor belt with other customers 6 feet back from them. Each customer would then need to come forward only when it is time to bag purchases and pay. An alternative, in case it is hard to get customers to comply with the 6-foot guideline, is to set up a see-through barrier at each register that physically separates the cashier from the customer. You are encouraged to make use of any strategy you can to reduce close face-to-face contact between staff and between customers and staff.