

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Responding to COVID-19 in the Workplace

As COVID-19-related restrictions relax, more people will congregate outside the home, including in the regular workplace, resulting in increased likelihood of transmission and disease. Employers need to be prepared to respond when a case of COVID-19 is identified or when is a possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace.

A case can mean either a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 or who has symptoms consistent with COVID-19. Each employer should have a plan in place in advance, so that when a case is reported among employees anyone who may be infected is sent home to self-isolate, and any close contacts among employees are sent home to self-quarantine. The employer should consider including a protocol for access to COVID-19 testing for all quarantined employees as part of the plan in order to clarify the extent of spread in the workplace and possible risk to other employees.

Effective strategies for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace include, but are not limited to the following:

- Physical distancing (separation of all employees, customers, visitors by at least 6 feet)
- Universal face covering for source control
- Promotion of frequent hand washing
- Environmental cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces
- Ensuring HVAC systems are in good working order, and ventilation has been increased, where possible.
- Establishing non-punitive sick leave policies that allow employees to stay home when ill and to stay home to care for sick household members. Make sure that employees are aware of these policies.
- Symptom checks before employees enter the workspace.
- Immediate exclusion from work of symptomatic staff and immediate quarantine of all workplace close contacts.

All employers should follow LAC DPH business re-opening checklists to prevent spread of COVID-19 in their settings. In most situations, these measures can successfully prevent and curb further spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

Contact Investigation

Once a COVID-19 case is identified among employees, the employer should conduct an investigation to identify all close contacts associated with the workplace (both employees and non-employees who spent time at the site) who had exposure to the case during the infectious period. A case is considered to be infectious from 48 hours before symptoms first appeared until at least 10 days after their symptoms first appeared and 3 days after recovery, defined as the resolution of fever and reduction in respiratory symptoms. Asymptomatic persons with laboratory confirmed COVID-19 are considered infectious 48 hours before the date of their first positive molecular test (sometimes called a PCR test) until 10 days after that initial positive test.

A close contact is any individual within the workplace with the following exposures to a case while the case was infectious:

- Presence within 6 feet of the case for more than 15 minutes, or
- Contact with the case's body fluids and/or secretions, for example, being coughed or sneezed on, sharing of a drink or food utensils.

Any contact who is symptomatic should immediately be considered a case and should be sent home to self-isolate and tested for COVID-19. All asymptomatic close contacts are required to self-quarantine for 14 days from exposure. Staff instructed to self-isolate or self-quarantine who cannot work remotely should be given paid sick leave.



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Targeted Testing:

Targeted testing is an important strategy for preventing uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 at the site and should be part of each employer's response plan. Targeted testing focuses on close contacts of a COVID-19 case, testing them even in the absence of symptoms. If testing identifies additional asymptomatic cases, a new contact investigation is initiated around the newly confirmed case so that their close contacts can be identified and tested. This protocol is repeated for each identified case at the facility. In certain situations where individual close contacts cannot be identified, such as when physical distancing was not maintained for any of a variety of reasons, the entire workplace may be considered exposed and quarantine and testing will occur for the entire workplace.

If there are three or more laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases identified at a workplace, the employer should report the cluster to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health at 888-397-3993.

Role of Targeted Testing:

It is important to recognize the utility and the limitations of targeted testing and to understand how targeted testing will and will not affect case management.

Targeted testing may help:

- Identify unrecognized, asymptomatic COVID-positive employees among those who have had contact with a case so that further spread can be limited or averted.

Targeted testing does NOT however:

- Eliminate the need for investigation to determine who has had contact with a case or for quarantine of close contacts. An individual may test negative soon after exposure and then go on to develop infection, placing those around them during the interval at risk.
- Reveal if a close contact to a COVID-19 case will develop disease. Testing provides information at a single point in time. A person who tests negative during the incubation period (the time period between exposure to disease and disease onset) may subsequently develop disease. This means identified close contacts will need to quarantine/take appropriate precautions for the full 14-day recommended period even if testing is negative.
- As a result, testing does not expedite return to work for close contacts. As mentioned above, a negative test in a close contact does not mean they are not infected. Close contacts may not leave quarantine until they have remained symptom free for 14 days. Asymptomatic employees with a positive COVID-19 test may be released from isolation and return to work 10 days after the initial positive test, barring the development of symptoms.

Return to Work:

After completion of isolation or quarantine according to Health Officer orders, staff can return to work and resume usual activities. Neither Public Health clearance nor a negative COVID-19 test is required for return to work.

Outbreak Response:

If a cluster is identified at a worksite (defined as 3 cases of COVID), the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health will initiate a cluster response which includes providing infection control guidance and recommendations, technical support and site-specific control measures. A public health case manager will be assigned to the cluster investigation to help guide the facility response.

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Testing Resources:

- Employees with insurance can be instructed to call their provider and arrange for testing and then report results to the employer.
- Employees with no insurance or whose providers cannot provide testing, can call 211 for help locating a free testing site. Here again, results must be reported to the employer.
- In large workplaces, Employee Health may be able to provide the testing.
- Wherever testing of close contacts occurs, employees must report results to the employer. This permits the employer to carry out additional cycles of contact identification, quarantine and testing if a close contact of the original case tests positive.

Summary

With widespread community transmission of COVID-19, employers should assume everyone in the workplace is possibly infected and therefore require adherence to face coverings for source control, physical distancing (for employees that cannot work remotely), limiting the number of people in the workplace, environmental cleaning, and promoting good health/hand hygiene. Contact LAC DPH to manage clusters when they do occur. Targeted testing of asymptomatic close contacts in the workplace is a recommended tool for employers to use to assess if additional workplace exposures may have occurred.

Additional Information:

- COVID-19 FAQs for Managers <http://www.ph.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/business/FAQ-Managers.pdf> See the LAC DPH COVID-19 [website](#) for additional resources related to COVID-19.