

# What to Do if an Employee Tests Positive: Guidance for Essential Businesses and Organizations

In the current COVID-19 outbreak, businesses and organizations must protect employees' health and safety and limit the economic impact of the outbreak. **Social distancing (staying at home when sick, keeping people 6 feet apart and minimizing the number of people you interact with) and hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol hand gel, and regular cleaning of high-touch surfaces are essential.**

This guidance document will assist essential businesses and organizations in understanding best practices in the current environment to keep you and your staff safe. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will provide up-to-date, reliable information on COVID-19 as the situation unfolds.

## What to do if an employee has possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection

- Any employee with cough, fever, or shortness of breath should not to come to work. If symptoms occur while at work, the employee should be isolated and then sent home immediately. They should be advised to seek medical care if symptoms are severe.
- Employees may return to work when they meet BOTH of the following criteria:
  - at least 3 days after resolution of fever (off fever reducing medications like acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen) **and** improvement in respiratory symptoms; **and**
  - at least 7 days have passed since the symptoms started
- Employees who are household contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 case and do not become ill must stay home and self-isolate for 7 days after isolation has been discontinued for the ill household member.
- Employees who have had close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case in a non-household setting must [stay home and self-isolate](#) for 14 days after their last contact with the case even if they do not develop symptoms. Close contact is defined as:
  - Being within approximately 6 feet (2 meters) of a COVID-19 case for a prolonged period of time (10 minutes or longer)
  - Having direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g., being coughed on)
- Employees who were in the same indoor environment with a COVID-19 case, but not meeting criteria for a close contact (i.e., being in a room more than 6ft away from the case) should self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days after their last contact with the case and isolate if symptoms develop.



- Employees who have had contact with someone who has been exposed to a case or possible case are not required to isolate unless that person develops symptoms or is diagnosed with COVID-19.
- People with mild illness due to suspected COVID-19 infection should stay home and do not require testing. Please do not require proof of COVID-19 testing either to qualify for sick leave or to return to work. Testing supplies are not adequate to test people with mild illness and a negative test may give false reassurance if it is done too soon after exposure.

### **Other Recommendations**

#### **Develop or review a Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan**

- Identify and cross-train employees to perform essential roles in the case of severe staffing shortages.
- Plan how to communicate and coordinate with employees, customers/clients, and suppliers if sudden changes are necessary (change in hours, etc.).
- Consider what you would do if you need to further:
  - Reduce operations to core activities with a reduced staff
  - Temporarily reduce services
  - Shorten hours of operation
- Consider on-site housing arrangements for employees performing critical roles, if this were to become necessary.
- Ensure plans allow for social distancing (6 feet distance among people).

#### **Identify strategies for social distancing, both between employees and with the public.**

- Ask employees who are able to work remotely to do so.
- Substitute telephone or internet-based meetings for in-person staff meetings
- Consider offering delivery options to your customers.
- Post signage:
  - Asking people who are sick to not enter.
  - Encouraging people to cover coughs or sneezes.
  - Reminding people to keep 6 feet of distance between themselves and others.
  - Downloadable signage available [here](#)

- Place and secure tissues and hand sanitizer so that customers can access but not steal them.
- Install sneeze guards or plastic barriers between staff and the public.
- Place produce and other non-packaged food behind barriers and have staff handling these wear gloves.
- Consider offering curb service rather than have customers come into stores, taking care to keep customers spaced 6 feet apart if possible.
- Consider limiting the number of people on premises at one time. If this could create a line, plan for a staff person to be outside promoting social distancing among those waiting.
- Consider seniors-only hours or other strategies to protect those who are most vulnerable.

#### **Ensure that employees stay home when sick.**

- Develop flexible policies for employees to stay home when they or their family members are sick, particularly:
  - Policies regarding unscheduled absences
  - Policies regarding use of sick time
  - Return to work policies
  - Paid sick time
- Suspend policies requiring physicians' notes for extended sick leave.
- Educate employees about the availability of leave under the [Family and Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#).
- Consider mandatory sick leave for employees with fever or respiratory symptoms.
- Consider reassigning employees who are at an increased risk for severe complications associated with COVID-19, or who have household members at high risk away from direct contact with customers and clients. If reassignment is possible, ask employees to notify you if they or their household members fall in a high-risk category:
  - People over age 50
  - People with chronic conditions including diabetes, heart disease, and lung conditions

#### **Educate employees on COVID-19 spread and preparedness.**

- Provide employees with links to COVID-19 information from the [Philadelphia Department of Public Health](#) and the [CDC](#).
- Provide information to employees regarding your continuity of operations plan.
- Circulate information on [respiratory etiquette](#) and [environmental cleaning procedures](#).
  - Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, doorknobs, elevator buttons, stairwell railings, refrigerator handles, and water fountains/coolers. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.



- Provide disposable wipes so that frequently touched surfaces can be wiped down by employees before each use.
- Encourage employees to create personal or household emergency preparedness plans.
  - Include alternative childcare arrangements, where applicable.
  - Share [PDPH information on COVID-19 preparation](#).

**Ensure availability of essential hygiene products, technology and supplies.**

- Identify supply needs for 2-5-week periods.
- Make sure you have handwashing products (soap, towels, hand sanitizers), and tissues.
- If applicable, work with IT to support continued communications (e.g., email, remote access, conference calls, webinars, etc.).

**Limit non-essential travel.**

- Cancel business trips.
- Avoid affected [areas with active COVID-19 transmission](#).
- Limit non-essential personal travel.