

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions for Businesses

If you manage a business, you may have concerns about how to handle issues related to COVID-19 in regards to your staff and clients or customers. Below are answers to common questions we've received from managers of public agencies and private companies about confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 at their worksites.

For more information about the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/. For the most recent updates on COVID-19 in Ohio, please visit the Ohio Department of Health at <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/>.

For more COVID-19 resources from Columbus Public Health – including resources for businesses – please visit www.columbus.gov/coronavirus (see under Resources > For Businesses).

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 are having trouble breathing or cannot keep fluids down, have them contact their doctor. If the symptoms are mild, 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 www.columbus.gov/coronavirus.

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 being within 6 feet for a period of 15 minutes or more depending upon the exposure. In healthcare settings, this may be defined as exposures of greater than a few minutes or more 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. Data is insufficient to precisely define the duration of exposure that constitutes prolonged exposure and thus a close contact.
- **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 6-foot, person-to-person distance; advise workers to clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces; and actively encourage employees to stay home if they are sick.

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

If your worksite must receive 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 15 minutes.

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.

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 until at least 10 days have passed after the symptoms first appeared AND at least three days after recovery. Recovery means that fever is gone for 72 hours (three days) without the use of fever-reducing medications and respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath) have improved.

Employees who have been in close contact with a suspected or known case of COVID-19 while that individual was ill or at any time starting two days before symptoms appeared should be in quarantine at home for 14 days. A Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet for a period of 15 minutes or more depending upon the exposure or had unprotected, direct contact with body fluids of the ill employee (e.g. cough or sneeze on face, or sharing of a drink or a food utensil).

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 self-quarantine at home for 14 days from the time of their last close contact with the infected worker while the worker had symptoms and two days (48 hours) before symptoms appeared. If they don't get sick within 14 days, the time span over which the virus generally appears, they can come back to work safely. In the meantime, they may be able to work remotely. Employees can learn more about self-quarantining at home after exposure from this 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 (seven days after symptoms started and three days after fevers have resolved and symptoms improved)

One of our employees has 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.

- 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.

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.

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- If the employee was within 6 feet of the ill individual for more than 15 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.
- Check to see if other employees were exposed and may also meet the criteria for self-quarantining at home. 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.

Under what circumstances are we able to bring an employee back to work after a known exposure to a COVID-19 positive individual or when the employee themselves have testing positive for the COVID-19 virus?

Non-test-based strategy. Exclude from work until (use when testing not widely available).

- At least three days (72 hours) have passed since recovery defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and,
- At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared

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 15 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.

I am a landlord with questions regarding my rights surrounding COVID-19?

Please reach out to Todd Dillard in the City Attorney's office at 614-645-5650 for questions regarding your rights as a landlord during the COVID-19 pandemic.