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THE CITY OF COLUMBUS
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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
for City of Columbus Employees
(To accompany the City of Columbus COVID-19 Employee Safe Work Practices Guidance)

These FAQs have been developed by the Citywide Occupational Safety and Health Program (COSHP). They are designed to answer questions about the City of Columbus Safe Work Practices Guidance and are in addition to FAQs in the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Workplace Policy PO24-1 and Q&As distributed from the Department of Human Resources.

This document is a best management practice designed to supplement, NOT REPLACE, any Department/Division policies, procedures, or guidance.

1) What is coronavirus disease (COVID-19)?

   a. COVID-19, or coronavirus disease 2019, is a respiratory disease caused by one of the seven coronaviruses known to infect humans. It was first identified in humans in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in December 2019. The virus that causes COVID-19 is called SARS-CoV-2.

2) What can I do to protect myself and others from COVID-19?

   a. The following actions help prevent the spread of COVID-19, as well as other coronaviruses and influenza:

      - Wear a face covering or mask
      - Stay home except for essential activities.
      - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
      - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
      - Avoid shaking hands.
      - Stay home when you are sick.
      - Cover your cough or sneeze with your arm or inner elbow.
      - Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using household cleaners and EPA-registered disinfectants that are appropriate for the surface, following label instructions.
      - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol (see below for guidance if you don't have a sink or hand sanitizer available).
- Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

3) Who is at higher risk for becoming seriously ill from COVID-19?

   a. Though no one is invulnerable, older adults are at increased risk for severe illness or death from COVID-19. Underlying conditions, including heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, and individuals with compromised immune systems increase risk even further in those who are older. In addition, anyone with an underlying medical condition, regardless of their age, faces increased risk of serious illness.

4) When is someone defined as Quarantined or in Isolation?

   a. **Isolation** is reserved for those who have **tested positive or been clinically diagnosed with COVID-19**. It keeps infected people away from healthy people to prevent the sickness from spreading. Isolation time frame is determined by Columbus Public Health (CPH) ~~or,~~ your local health department, or sometimes your health care provider.

   b. **Quarantine** in general means the separation of a person or group of people reasonably believed to have been *exposed to a communicable disease, but not yet symptomatic*, from others who have not been so exposed, to prevent the possible spread of the communicable disease.

   c. COVID-19 symptoms could include: Fever ≥100.4°F, dry cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea.

      - This list does not include all possible symptoms. We will continue to update this list as we learn more about COVID-19.

5) When do symptoms appear?

   a. Symptoms generally appear 2-14 days after exposure. You are most contagious when exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.

6) How does COVID-19 spread?

   a. COVID-19 is believed to spread mainly from person to person between people who are in close contact (within about 6 feet) from one another and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It also may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

7) Should I get tested for COVID-19? (updated V10)

a. Currently, the CDC recommends COVID-19 testing for those who fall into the following categories:

- People who have symptoms of COVID-19
- *People who have had close contact (within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 cumulative minutes) with someone with confirmed COVID-19*
- People who have been asked or referred to get testing by their healthcare provider, local or state health department

b. Not everyone needs to be tested. If you do get tested, you should self-quarantine/isolate at home pending test results and follow the advice of your health care provider or a public health professional. Employees who are considered Critical Infrastructure Employees may have modified quarantine time frames, in accordance with the Department of Human Resources Procedures and Columbus Public Health

c. Please note, a COVID-19 test is an indication of the virus in your body ONLY at the time of the test. The incubation period of COVID-19 is 2-14 days; if you are tested too soon following exposure you could have a negative test but actually be carrying the disease.

d. Columbus Public Health does not recommend serial testing.

8) What is a close contact?

a. Any employee who was within **6 feet** of a laboratory-confirmed or clinically diagnosed case for **at least 15 minutes** of when the COVID+ person was symptomatic, asymptomatic, within 2 days prior to person being symptomatic, or within 2 days prior to the COVID+ person being tested. The 15 minutes of exposure within 6 feet is cumulative. These employees would be determined by their Department/Division HR working with CPH. ~~Use of preventative measures (i.e., face coverings, distancing, and barriers) may reduce the need to quarantine; however, this will ultimately be decided by Columbus Public Health.~~

b. Someone who provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19.

c. Someone who had direct physical contact with the COVID+ person (touched, hugged, or kissed them) while the person was symptomatic or within 2 days or the person becoming symptomatic or (if not symptomatic) within 2 days of the COVID+ person being tested

d. Someone who shared eating or drinking utensils with a COVID+ person while the person was symptomatic or within 2 days or the person becoming symptomatic or (if not symptomatic) within 2 days of the COVID+ person being tested.

e. A COVID+ person sneezed, coughed, or somehow got respiratory droplets on you while the person was symptomatic or within 2 days or the person becoming symptomatic or (if not symptomatic) within 2 days of the COVID+ person being tested.

9) What is a non-close contact?

a. Employees who work with or in the same area of the laboratory-confirmed or clinically diagnosed case employee, but are not considered close contacts.

b. Examples would be: employees who were on the same shift as the confirmed case (while symptomatic) but not within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes, or employees who work in the same area as the laboratory-confirmed or clinically diagnosed case employee, but not at the same time.

c. The non-close contact employees are ultimately determined by their Department/Division HR and should perform the daily monitoring (which everyone should be doing regardless) and be very vigilant to leave work or stay home from work if they begin experiencing symptoms. They should also call their healthcare provider and HR should be notified. They are not tracked by CPH in any way.

10) What if I was exposed to a close contact (i.e., I work with someone who is a close contact)?

a. There are currently **no additional guidelines** for anyone who was a close contact of someone else who has been determined to be a close contact. "Contacts of contacts" are not considered to be exposed by CDC. All employees reporting for work should continue to self-monitor daily prior to coming to work.

11) What if I've had a lingering cough? Should I be concerned I have COVID-19?

a. You should reach out to your primary care provider if you are concerned you have symptoms of COVID-19. **Do not report to work** if you have symptoms of COVID-19. Follow your healthcare provider's guidance about what to do next.

b. If you do not have a healthcare provider, you can call the CPH COVID-19 hotline at 614-645-1519.

12) Is there any guidance on "deep cleaning"? Who will perform this cleaning, how it is to be performed, any other protective measures besides basic personal protective equipment (PPE), and what cleaning agents are to be used?

a. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) guidance for cleaning (including recommended PPE) following a positive COVID-19 case can be found here: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html.

b. Please utilize your Department/Division's current process for performing cleaning or obtaining cleaning services

c. There are multiple UTC contracts for Coronavirus Cleaning and Disinfection Services that have been established. Please see the external catalog or reach out to your Department purchasing staff to determine the available contracts.

    - Prior to using, please review the scope of work of each contract in the PA

d. As a best practice, work areas can perform a deep clean if there is someone who was sent home with symptoms of COVID-19, but test results are not yet available.

e. It is critical that work areas/employees continue to perform cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces on a regular basis – particularly any shared surfaces.

f. Per current CDC guidance (5/26/20 update), If it has been more than 7 days since the person with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary.

13) What if I work in the field and cannot find any hand sanitizer to perform hand hygiene in the field?

a. In evaluating supplies of hand sanitizer or hand sanitizing wipes, departments and divisions should give priority to those employees who have the highest potential of contact with other people and do not have handwashing facilities available while they are working. If necessary, hand sanitizer or wipes that are currently in office settings can be re-purposed for those employees who do not have handwashing available to them.

b. Ensure you are using good hygiene practices in the field to prevent exposures:

    - Do not shake anyone's hand.
    - Do not touch anything you do not need to touch.
    - Use gloves and remove/dispose of them properly.
    - Be careful not to touch your face, mouth, or eyes.

c. Unfortunately there is not a safe DIY 'recipe' for making hand sanitizer. In the absence of running water and hand sanitizer, Citywide Occupational Safety and Health Program recommends utilizing portable handwashing alternatives. The portable handwashing alternatives could be as simple as an empty milk jug filled with clean tap water or a larger scale method of converting crew water coolers into handwashing mounted on the exterior of larger service vehicles. Liquid or foaming soap is preferable to a bar, and there is not a need for antibacterial varieties of soap. There is not one universal solution to creating

portable handwashing for all City crews. Please work with your Department/Division Occupational Safety staff to determine which is best for your specific situation.

14) We are running out of cleaning/disinfecting solutions to clean work surfaces and are having trouble purchasing more due to depleted stocks – how should we clean when premade EPA-registered disinfectants are no longer available?

a. Diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted. Diluted bleach solution should be used within 24 hours to provide the best disinfection.

b. Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:

- 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water - or -
- 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water

c. Many products recommend:
- Keeping the surface wet for several minutes to ensure germs are killed.
- Precautions such as wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) during mixing and use. PPE should include disposable gloves and eye protection including while mixing for splash protection.

d. Source: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html.

15) How should I clean my work truck/vehicle?

a. You should clean and disinfect your work truck both before and after use, particularly if it is a shared vehicle. Keep in mind, the areas of the vehicle that you should focus on when cleaning are the areas you will be touching with your hands. Don't forget to include key fobs and key boxes when performing disinfection related to vehicle use. These items are constantly touched and should be disinfected between uses as best you can.
b. Ensure the disinfectant is suited for the material on which it is being used.
c. Utilize disposable, nitrile gloves and safety glasses or goggles during disinfection.
d. Clean commonly used areas where dirt or mud is present with a wet towel prior to disinfection. This is an important step to ensure efficacy of the disinfectant.
e. Spray disinfectant on all areas used during the shift. (Note: Ensure that the area where disinfection will occur has proper ventilation.) This includes, but is not limited to the:

- Cab/driver's areas and all components. Ensure steering wheel, gear shifter, radio, armrest, power window buttons, seatbelt buckles, door handles and other areas regularly touched are sprayed.
- Exterior door handles
- Vehicle mounted tool box handles and doors
- Tools used during the shift (hand tools, power tools, ladders, carts etc.)

f. Allow disinfectant spray to self-dry or ensure 10 minute contact time prior to drying the surface
   - If drying the area, use a clean towel and a new pair of nitrile gloves.
g. Dispose of nitrile gloves in a trash receptacle after use.
h. Conduct proper hand washing as soon as feasible after disinfecting a vehicle.

16) How long should I stay home if I did not report to work or was sent home based on answering yes to questions during the health screening process outlined in the City of Columbus COVID-19 Safe Work Practices Guidance? This includes pre-shift self-screening or screening performed at work

a. If you do not report to work or you are sent home based on answering yes to any of the health screening questions, you must contact a health care provider for guidance that day.

b. If you or those in your immediate household receive a negative clinical or laboratory confirmed diagnosis and are symptom free, notify your supervisor verbally and return to work.

c. If you or those in your immediate household receive a clinical diagnosis or a laboratory confirmed diagnosis for COVID-19, contact your department/division Human Resources office to determine your return to work procedures.

   i. Laboratory confirmed diagnosis – a COVID-19 diagnosis based on FDA approved testing.

   ii. Clinical diagnosis – a presumed diagnosis of COVID-19 performed by a licensed health care professional. This diagnosis can be performed by assessing patient symptoms and is used in the absence of testing availability.

17) What if my job involves handling mail? Should I take any extra precautions?

a. COVID-19 is mainly spread person-to-person via respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. However, it may be possible that a person can be infected when touching a surface with the virus and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes. To minimize the risk employees can use the following steps:

   i. Wear disposable nitrile or vinyl gloves when handling mail
   ii. Never re-wear a pair of gloves you have previously taken off
   iii. Always wash hands with soap and water immediately after removing gloves

iv. Surfaces that have contact with mail should be disinfected regularly
v. Avoid touching your face
vi. Follow any additional guidance or procedures provided by your department

18) Do I need to wear a face covering to work?

a. **Except when an exception applies, a face covering is required at all times when working** and should be donned prior to entering your work building or work space. A face covering can be a cloth face covering or a surgical mask that meets CDC guidelines and its purpose is to reduce exhaled droplets in crowded settings when controls like physical distancing cannot be maintained. To reflect current CDC guidance, face shields and gaiters are no longer permitted to be used in lieu of a face covering unless the employee has a written exception documented on a face covering exception form.

b. Face coverings play an important role in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

c. Please refer to the City of Columbus COVID-19 Safe Work Practices Guidance for more information regarding face coverings.

19) I wear a disposable N95 respirator or face mask as a part of my job (based on direction from my Department/Division safety professional). Is it safe to re-use these disposable personal protective equipment items?

a. If employees wear disposable N95 respirators or surgical masks as recommended or required by their Department/Division safety professional, the CDC has guidance for re-use of these PPE items during supply shortages. Although the guidance is written for health care providers, Citywide Occupational Safety and Health believes the guidance can be used for other City employees as necessary.

b. Please refer to the City of Columbus Safe Work Practices Guidance (Most recent version) for further guidance on how to safely re-use N95 respirators or face masks.

20) Do I need to wear a face covering if I work in a cubicle?

a. This depends on how far you are separated from other people and the height of your cubicle walls. Generally, if you have high (approximately 5' or higher) cubicle walls (or other barrier) on three sides of you, ~~AND you are not facing the open side of the cubicle~~, AND there is an assurance that the foot traffic flow is limited, and visitors to cubicles are ~~minimized/~~eliminated this could be an approved exception to wearing a face covering.

b. **All exceptions to face coverings must have written justification that is kept on file in the department and with Citywide Occupational Safety and Health.** If someone walks into the cubicle, a mask would need to be donned. As soon as you stand up to leave the cubicle, a mask would need to be donned.

21) Can employees choose to wear plastic face shields, instead of face coverings, even without a medical exception? (question updated in Version 9)
   a. Per updated CDC guidance, a face shield is no longer permitted to be used in lieu of a face covering unless the employee has a medical exception documented on a face covering exception form.

22) What if I think or I am told I am a close contact to a COVID+ case **outside of work** but do not get contacted by my health department?

   a. Unfortunately, when local cases are surging, many local health departments are overwhelmed and there may be a lag in contact tracing.
   b. **Do not report to work, call your health care provider**. Your health care provider will provide guidance to you based on your contact with the COVID+ person. If you do not have a health care provider, please call Columbus Public Health (645-1519) to be connected with one.
   c. Call your human resources department. They may ask for verification of your health care provider's orders.

23) What if I get a positive test result for COVID-19 but do not get contacted by my health department?
   a. Unfortunately, when local cases are surging, many local health departments are overwhelmed and there may be a lag between when you receive a test result and when you are contacted by your local health department.
   b. **Do not report to work, call your health care provider**. Your health care provider will provide guidance to you based on your test result. If you do not have a health care provider, please call Columbus Public Health (645-1519) to be connected with one.
   c. Call your human resources department. They may ask for verification of your health care provider's orders.

24) If I am in quarantine, can I get a negative COVID-19 test to get out of quarantine early?
   a. No, you cannot test out of quarantine. Since the incubation range for COVID-19 is up to 14 days, ~~an earlier~~ a test may not be a good indication whether a person has COVID-19. If an individual ~~were~~ is quarantined, ~~they should monitor~~ and they develop symptoms ~~and~~ they should contact their health care provider ~~and~~ or local health department to determine the best course of action and if or when to get tested.
   b. Call your human resources department if there are any changes. They may ask for verification of your health care provider's orders.

25) What is the difference between a viral COVID-19 test and a COVID-19 antibody test?

   a. A viral test tells you if you have a current infection.

b. An antibody test might tell you if you had a past infection. An antibody test might not show if you have a current infection because it can take 1–3 weeks after infection for your body to make antibodies. Having antibodies to the virus that causes COVID-19 might provide protection from getting infected with the virus again. If it does, we do not know how much protection the antibodies might provide or how long this protection might last.

26) Can I wear a face covering or N95 respirator with an exhalation valve (i.e., a "vented" face covering or N95)?

a. Masks (or N95 respirators) with exhalation valves or vents are NOT recommended as they do not adequately prevent the person wearing the mask from spreading COVID-19 to others. If an N95 respirator with an exhalation valve must be worn because there are no alternatives, it should have an additional face covering or surgical mask over it covering the exhalation valve. Additional safety measures may need to be taken, including more frequent breaks, in instances where heat stress is a concern. Please note – face coverings with exhalation valves (vented) are NOT permitted.

For more information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  - https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html
- Ohio Department of Health
  - https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/Novel-Coronavirus
- Columbus Public Health
  - https://www.columbus.gov/coronavirus/