

# COVID-19: Guidance for Businesses and Employers

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There is community-wide transmission of COVID-19 in Chicago. This means the risk of contracting COVID-19 is no longer only tied to high-risk travel or potential exposures at school or work. All Chicago residents should stay home as much as possible, consider themselves possibly exposed, and self-monitor their health for symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, or difficulty breathing). Most Chicago workers will likely experience low (caution) or medium exposure risk levels at their job or place of employment. All employers need to consider how best to decrease the spread of COVID-19 and lower the impact in their workplace.

## Reduce Transmission among Employees

### Send sick employees home:

- Employees who have symptoms (i.e. fever, cough, or difficulty breathing) should notify their supervisor, stay home and not return to work until:
  - at least 7 days have passed since their symptoms first appeared; and,
  - at least 3 days (72 hours) have passed their fever has resolved (i.e. no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications) and their other symptoms have improved.
  - *For example, if you have a fever and coughing for 4 days, you need to stay home 3 more days with no fever for a total of 7 days. Or, if you have a fever and coughing for 5 days, you need to stay home 3 more days with no fever for a total of 8 days.*
- Employees who are sick must follow [CDPH-recommended steps](#) to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available), throw out the tissue, and wash their hands or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to [CDPH's recommended precautions for exposed individuals](#).

### Separate sick employees:

- Employees who appear to have symptoms (i.e. cough, difficulty breathing) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees, customers, and visitors and sent home immediately.
- Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available), throw out the tissue, and wash their hands or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer.

### Employees at higher risk of severe illness should stay home as much as possible:

- Those at higher risk include:
  - People over 60 years of age. The risk increases significantly thereafter and escalates with age, with persons over age 80 in the highest risk category.
  - People, regardless of age, with underlying health conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, or chronic lung diseases like COPD, as well as those with severely weakened immune systems.

- Consider minimizing face-to-face contact between employees at higher risk for serious illness or assign work tasks that allow them to maintain a distance of six feet from other workers, customers and visitors, or to telework if possible.
- Employees at higher risk should avoid all non-essential travel and stay away from crowded social gatherings of people as much as possible. They should consider ways of getting food, supplies, and necessary medications brought to their house and have a plan if they get sick. If they develop symptoms, they should seek medical care right away.

### Implement policies and practices for social distancing:

**Social distancing** means avoiding gatherings and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others when possible (e.g., breakrooms and cafeterias). Businesses can:

- Establish policies and practices, such as flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts).
- Increase the physical distance among employees at the worksite and between employees and customers (e.g. drive through, partitions).
- For employees who are able to telework, supervisors should encourage employees to telework instead of coming into the workplace.
- Ensure that you have the information technology and infrastructure needed to support multiple employees who may be able to work from home.
- Use videoconferencing or teleconferencing when possible for work-related meetings and gatherings.
- Cancel, adjust, or postpone large work-related meetings or gatherings that can only occur in-person.
- When videoconferencing or teleconferencing is not possible, hold meetings in open, well-ventilated spaces.
- Postpone non-essential business travel.
- Downsize operations.
- Deliver services remotely (e.g. phone, video, or web).
- Deliver products through curbside pick-up or delivery.

**Employers with more than one business location** are encouraged to provide local managers with the authority to take appropriate actions outlined in their COVID-19 response plan based on local conditions.

### Prepare for possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace:

- Identify possible work-related exposure and health risks to your employees. See [OSHA COVID-19](#) webpage for more information on how to protect workers from potential exposures and [guidance for employers](#), including steps to take for jobs according to exposure risk.
- Encourage employees to self-report if they are diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Establish a process to communicate information to employees and business partners. Anticipate employee fear, anxiety, rumors, and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
  - Designate a person in your administration to receive employee self-reports.
  - Create a procedure so that if others in your organization get a self-report of a positive case, the reports are directed to this designated person, either directly by or with the consent of the positive case.
  - Ensure this designated person has access to accurate staff and client contact lists.
  - Human resources or medical staff should serve as the primary contact and resource for employees with personal COVID-19 questions that do not directly affect other individuals in the workplace. If your business does not have human resources or medical staff, or they are unable to answer the questions, refer the individual to contact CDPH at [coronavirus@chicago.gov](mailto:coronavirus@chicago.gov).
- Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation. Get up-to-date information about local COVID-19 activity at [chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://chicago.gov/coronavirus) and [sign up](#) to receive updated guidance from CDPH as it becomes available.

*This version was released on 03/26/2020. It may be updated with new guidance.  
Please visit [www.chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://www.chicago.gov/coronavirus) to find the latest version.*

## Take measures if a staff member, contractor, or a client is suspected/confirmed to have COVID-19\*:

- If someone in the workplace is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection and they self-report, interview them by telephone. Questions to ask include:
  - The last day they were at work.
  - The first day of their symptoms, and importantly, whether they were symptomatic while at work. *(If they were not symptomatic while at work, the risk of transmission to others is low.)*
  - Individuals at work or school with whom they had prolonged close contact (within 6 feet for more than 10 minutes, for example sharing a desk or workspace, riding and sitting closely within a vehicle) while symptomatic.
- Ensure the employee is aware that they should stay home and away from others for at least 7 days since their symptoms first appeared and at least 3 days (72 hours) with no fever (without using fever-reducing medications) and improving symptoms. Refer them to this [CDPH FAQ on what to do if diagnosed with COVID-19](#).
- Ensure the employee advises members of their immediate household to self-quarantine for 14 days. Refer them to this [CDPH FAQ on what to do if you have been exposed](#).
- Test results do not need to be confirmed by CDPH. It is advised that during your interview with the individual that you verbally confirm that they were in fact tested for COVID-19 and had a positive result.
- Inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The fellow employees should then self-monitor for symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, or difficulty breathing).
- Direct close contacts of the employee to stay home and monitor their health for 14 days. Refer them to this [CDPH FAQ on what to do if you have been exposed. Do not require close contacts to have negative test results prior to returning to work](#).
- Determine if workplace closure is warranted based on factors such as workplace setting, number of employees affected, or clients you serve.
- Develop communication plans for workplace closure to include outreach to staff, clients, and the community.
- Provide guidance to staff reminding them of the importance of community social distancing measures while workplace is closed.
- Perform enhanced cleaning and disinfection after persons suspected/confirmed to have COVID-19 have been in the facility. Follow the [CDC cleaning and disinfection recommendations](#).
- Ensure staffs' privacy to help prevent discrimination.
- Refer employees in need of mental health support to the [NAMI Chicago](#) helpline at 833-NAMI-CHI (833-626-4244) for a listening ear, mental health information or referrals.
- Contact the [Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection](#) or visit [chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://chicago.gov/coronavirus) to see what resources are available to businesses, consumers and employees impacted by the COVID-19 Outbreak.

*\*These guidelines do not apply to higher-risk settings like residential congregate settings, healthcare facilities, or agencies with first responders.*

## Maintain Healthy Business Operations

**Identify a workplace coordinator** who will be responsible for COVID-19 issues and their impact at the workplace.

### **Implement flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices:**

- Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
- Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member or take care of children due to school and childcare closures. Additional flexibilities might include giving advances on future sick leave and allowing employees to donate sick leave to each other.
- Employers that do not currently offer sick leave to some or all of their employees may want to draft non-punitive “emergency sick leave” policies.
- Employers should not require a positive COVID-19 test result or a healthcare provider’s note for employees who are sick to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or to return to work. Similarly, employers should not require a negative test results for employees with or without symptoms. Healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- Review human resources policies to make sure that policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are consistent with existing state and federal workplace laws (for more information on employer responsibilities, visit the [Department of Labor’s](#) and the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s](#) websites).
- Connect employees to employee assistance program (EAP) resources (if available) and community resources as needed. Employees may need additional social, behavioral, and other services, for example, to cope with the death of a loved one.

### **Assess your essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your services or products:**

- Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize existing customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed).
- Identify alternate supply chains for critical goods and services. Some good and services may be in higher demand or unavailable.
- Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- Talk with business partners about your response plans. Share best practices with other businesses in your communities (especially those in your supply chain), chambers of commerce, and associations to improve community response efforts.

### **Prepare for increased numbers of employee absences:**

- Determine how you will operate if absenteeism spikes from increases in sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who must stay home to watch their children if dismissed from school.
- Identify essential jobs or roles and critical elements within your supply chains (e.g., raw materials, suppliers, subcontractor services/products, and logistics) required to maintain business operations.
- Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions so that the workplace is able to operate even if key staff members are absent.
- Monitor and respond to absenteeism at the workplace. Implement plans to continue your essential business functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism.

- Set up authorities, triggers, and procedures for activating and terminating the company’s emergency operations plan, altering business operations (e.g., possibly changing or closing operations in affected areas), and transferring business knowledge to key employees.

## Maintain a Healthy Work Environment

**Improve the engineering controls using the building ventilation system.** This may include some or all of the following activities:

- Increase ventilation rates.
- Increase the percentage of outdoor air that circulates into the system.

### Promote enhanced respiratory and hand hygiene:

- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
- Provide soap and water in the workplace. If soap and water are not readily available, provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained.
- Place hand sanitizers in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.
- Instruct employees to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, when soap and water are not readily available. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty.
- Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, and hand hygiene at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen. Discourage handshaking – encourage the use of other noncontact methods of greeting.

### Perform routine environmental cleaning:

- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, keyboards, telephones, handrails, and doorknobs.
- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- For disinfection, most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available at [epa.gov](http://epa.gov). Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
- Discourage workers from using other workers’ phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks, other work tools and equipment) can be wiped down by employees before each use. To disinfect, use [products that meet EPA’s criteria for use against SARS-Cov-2](#), the cause of COVID-19, and are appropriate for the surface.

### Advise employees before traveling to take additional preparations:

- Check the [CDC’s Traveler’s Health Notices](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. Specific travel information for travelers going to and returning from countries with travel advisories, and information for aircrew, can be found on the [CDC website](#).

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- Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure employees who become sick while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor and promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.
- If outside the United States, sick employees should follow company policy for obtaining medical care or contact a healthcare provider or overseas medical assistance company to assist them with finding an appropriate healthcare provider in that country. A U.S. consular officer can help locate healthcare services. However, U.S. embassies, consulates, and military facilities do not have the legal authority, capability, and resources to evacuate or give medicines, vaccines, or medical care to private U.S. citizens overseas.

For the latest updates, visit [chicago.gov/coronavirus](https://chicago.gov/coronavirus) or [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus).