

What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a new respiratory disease initially detected in Wuhan, China. An outbreak of COVID-19 has spread throughout China and to 31 additional countries, including the United States. There has been one confirmed case of CoronaVirus in Massachusetts. As of March 2, 2020, a second potential case has been identified and is awaiting further CDC testing to confirm the diagnosis.

How Does it Spread? What Are its Symptoms?

Since COVID-19 is a new disease previously unknown to medical science, research is still being conducted to determine the nature of this illness, exactly how it spreads, its severity, and its cure.

COVID-19 is thought to be transmitted primarily through person-to-person contact, particularly by people within close proximity (less than 6 feet or 2 meters), as well as through respiratory secretions expelled by the sneeze or cough of an infected person.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include **fever, coughing, and shortness of breath.**

The CDC estimates that symptoms can occur **2–14 days after exposure.** This estimation is based on the COVID-19 data collected so far, and the current the incubation period of other known coronaviruses, such as SARS and MERS.

The severity of COVID-19 can vary, but it is believed that older adults and individuals with underlying health conditions or compromised immune systems are at higher risk for developing severe illness if exposed to the virus.

How Can I Protect My Workplace? ([CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov))

Actively Encourage Sick Employees to Stay Home:

- Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
- 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.

- Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.

Separate Sick Employees:

- CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be 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).

Emphasize Staying Home When Sick, Respiratory Etiquette and Hand Hygiene by ALL Employees:

- 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.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
- Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
- Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.
- Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.

Perform Routine Environmental Cleaning:

- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
- No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

Advise Employees Before Traveling to Take Certain Steps:

- 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 China, and information for aircrew, can be found at on the [CDC website](#).
- Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of [acute respiratory illness](#) 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 should promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.

- If outside the United States, sick employees should follow your company's 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.

Additional Measures in Response to Currently Occurring Sporadic Importations of the COVID-19:

- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.
- If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should 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). Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.