



## Strategies for Employers Re: Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The World Health Organization recently announced that the official name for the disease that is causing the current outbreak of coronavirus disease is COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has recently updated its guidance and notes the following:

“The severity of illness or how many people will fall ill from COVID-19 is unknown at this time. If there is evidence of a COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S., employers should plan to be able to respond in a flexible way to varying levels of severity and be prepared to refine their business response plans as needed. For the general American public, such as workers in non-healthcare settings and where it is unlikely that work tasks create an increased risk of exposures to COVID-19, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low. The CDC and its partners will continue to monitor national and international data on the severity of illness caused by COVID-19, will disseminate the results of these ongoing surveillance assessments, and will make additional recommendations as needed.”

Employers have an obligation to ensure a safe and healthy workplace. With this in mind, the CDC has issued Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), February 2020 which we strongly recommend ALL EMPLOYERS review. The CDC recommends implementation of the following practices, which are equally applicable in the face of other contagious respiratory and communicable diseases and conditions, such as influenza which is widespread in many communities:

- Actively encourage sick employees to stay home
- Employer policies should ensure that employees, vendors, contractors and others who have symptoms of respiratory illness stay home and not come to the workplace until they are free of fever, signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines
- Separate sick employees (i.e., those who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms such as cough, fever or shortness of breath) upon arrival to work, or upon

becoming sick if this happens during the day, from other employees and send them home immediately.

- 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. (Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.)
- Encourage hand and other hygiene by providing tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by all in the workplace, and well as provide soap and water in restrooms and alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) in multiple locations or in conference rooms; ensure adequate supplies and instruct employees to clean their hands often using the hand sanitizer or washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning by cleaning frequently-touched work surfaces (work stations, countertops, door knobs). Provide disposable wipes for employees to use to do the same.

If your organization has employees who travel, advice from the CDC can be found [here](#) and we strongly encourage you to review it. Currently, the CDC recommends avoiding nonessential travel to Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Chinese officials have closed transport in and out of Wuhan, including buses, subways, trains, and the airport. Travelers to other parts of China will want to follow these precautions from the CDC:

- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid animals (alive or dead), animal markets, and products that come from animals (such as uncooked meat).
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

The CDC also recommends that travelers who visited China in the past 14 days and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, do the following:

- Seek medical care right away. Before going to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell the health professionals about recent travel and health symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Do not travel while sick.
- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve (not hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

There are additional resources and guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) to learn more about the disease, which we recommend employers review as well.