

COVID-19 AND YOUR BUSINESS

# A GUIDE TO PROTECTING YOUR EMPLOYEES

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**COVID-19 AND YOUR BUSINESS: A Guide to Protecting Your Employees**

# PROTECTING WORKERS DURING CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK



IF YOU are one of the companies that has been deemed an essential employer and are remaining open during shelter-at-home orders, you should be doing all you can to protect your staff against contracting COVID-19.

While some workers are really on the front lines of fighting the disease, like health care workers and emergency services personnel, there are many other people working in factories, grocery stores, warehouse and transportation, among other industries, that are also at risk to varying degrees. Many construction sites are open, as are some professional services offices and printers.

Some employers have taken great steps to protect their workers. For example, some grocery stores have supplied cashiers with masks, face shields or plexiglass barriers between them and customers.

But not all employers are taking those steps, resulting in walkouts and other forms of protest.

## Legal crosshairs

Any employer that is not doing enough to protect on-site workers at this time could find themselves in hot water later and the target of lawsuits for failing to protect workers.

There are also OSHA regulations employers have to consider, including its General Duty Clause: "Each employer shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees."

OSHA and the Centers for Disease Control have issued a number of tips for keeping workers safe, and we present you with this special report to help you keep your employees safe.

## Challenges vary among workplaces

Every workplace is different and has its own risks, layouts and challenges. This report will cover the basics that apply for many businesses, but individual worksites may need to take additional measures due to the unique nature of their operations.

Facilities will vary in their own risks, but the following are some general areas that all employers should consider to reduce the risk or spread of infection in their workplaces, regardless of whether they are a large high-traffic facility like a food warehouse or a small hardware or specialty grocery store.

# BEST PRACTICES FOR A SAFE WORKPLACE

## Providing personal protective equipment

This can range from gloves and masks to face shields.

N95 masks are preferred as they do the best job of filtering, but they should be properly fitted. Masks should be thrown away after every shift, if possible. If resources are limited you can use reusable cloth masks, but they should be washed after every shift in hot water.

When employees remove masks after a shift, they should take care not to touch the mask part itself and instead try to hold the mask using the elastic.



## Protective barriers



These could be partitions made of plexiglass so workers can communicate and make eye contact.

In addition, you may want to abandon the popular open workspace concept and revert to using cubicles, which gained popularity in the 1980s and 1990s as a way to increase productivity by putting barriers between office workers.

Having that divider will make your staff feel safer and can offer some protection.

## Air circulation

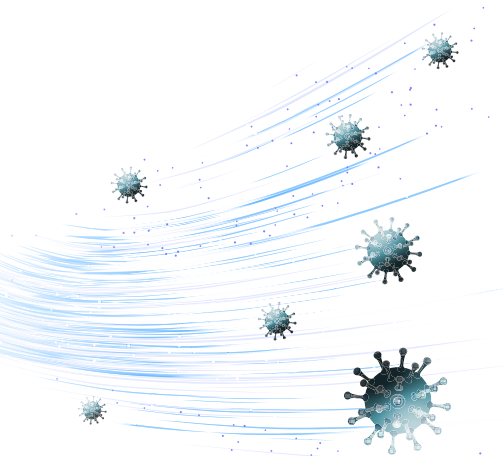
A recent research study that analyzed superspreading events showed that closed environments with minimal ventilation strongly contributed to a characteristically high number of secondary infections.

If you have fans or air conditioning units blowing, take steps to minimize air from fans blowing from one worker directly at another.

The Federation of European Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Associations (REHVA) recommends avoiding recirculation of air by closing the recirculation dampers (via the Building Management System or manually) in any building with a mechanical ventilation system.

Virus particles in return ducts can re-enter a building when centralized air handling units are equipped with recirculation sectors, according to REHVA.

Increase air supply and exhaust ventilation by extending operation times, like starting ventilation at nominal speed at least two hours before the building usage.



## Spacing



Require employees to work at least 6 feet apart. You may need to reorganize your office or workstations to ensure proper spacing.

In jobs where workers are on their feet, you can mark spots on the floor where they should stand to ensure social distancing between your staff.

Social distancing in breakrooms and supply areas (device such as charging stations and packaging supplies) may be addressed temporarily by spacing out tables, chairs and microwaves,

## Hygiene

Place handwashing stations, with hot water and soap or hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol in multiple locations, in order to encourage good hand hygiene.

Also urge workers to avoid touching their faces, shaking hands or sharing food.

If they sneeze or cough they should do so into a tissue, or if one is not available into their elbow, to prevent ejecting potential virus-tainted mucous droplets.



## Customer handling

Use rope-and-stanchion systems to keep customers from queuing or congregating near work areas. Mark spots on the floor spaced 6 feet apart to ensure social distancing.

Consider restricting the number of customers allowed inside the facility at any point in time. Also, consider options for increasing in-store pickup or delivery to minimize the number of customers shopping in store facilities.

Some stores have started taking customers' temperatures before they enter .

## Cleaning

Disinfect frequently touched surfaces in workspaces as well as doorknobs, buttons and controls. More frequent cleaning and disinfection may be required based on level of use.

Surfaces and objects in public places, such as shopping carts and point of sale keypads, should be cleaned and disinfected before each use.

Provide workers and customers with tissues and trash receptacles.

Employees who are cleaning and disinfecting should wear disposable gloves.

Clean surfaces using soap and water, then use disinfectant.

Cleaning with soap and water reduces the number of germs, dirt and impurities on the surface. Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces.



## Staggering schedules

Stagger workers' arrival and departure times to avoid congregations of employees in parking areas, locker rooms and near time clocks.

Stagger lunches as well, to avoid overcrowding in general areas where employees may often eat. If you have an area frequently used for lunches, make sure you enforce 6-foot spacing in that location too.

Add additional clock in/out stations if you use them. If possible, these should be spaced apart to reduce crowding in these areas.



## Keeping virus at bay



Actively encourage sick employees to stay home. Do not force or reprimand staff who call in sick if they are feeling unwell.

Consider checking temperatures of workers upon arrival – and checking customers' temperatures too.

If an employee is running a fever, they should be isolated and sent home and asked to call their doctor.

Try to have as many staff as possible work from home if you can. The fewer staff in your worksite, the lower the chances of COVID-19 spreading through your workforce.

### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

OSHA has a fantastic COVID-19 resource page that outlines safety procedures that employers in a number of industries can implement to reduce the chance of transmission between workers, as well as between workers and customers.

You can find it here.



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