

Safety and health guidelines for the employers and employees of essential work operations

COVID-19 is spread through respiratory droplets. Control measures should be employed to minimize exposure from transmission through basic activities, such as coughing, sneezing and even talking. The following are fundamental considerations for employers and employees during this time.

1. **Remember the basic responsibilities:** Employers have a fundamental obligation to protect their employees from known hazards; and both employers and employees must follow requirements set forth under the Occupational Safety and Health Act.
2. **Develop a plan:** Like any hazard, employers must ensure they are assessing the potential exposures of their employees and developing safe work-practices to minimize exposure. This applies to any workplace where employees are working with other people in the workplace.
3. **Community spread:** Assume everyone you come into contact with may be infected and contagious. Treat all encounters as a potential risk. Practice personal protective measures, such as social distancing when in public and washing your hands frequently.
4. **Work remotely, if possible:** Employees who may perform their work from a remote location, as opposed to having to leave their home and report to the office, should do so. Employees should not be required to leave their home to report to work unless the nature of their job necessitates it, such as when needed machines or equipment are at the facility.
5. **Limit travel:** Reduce the need for employees to travel for work. Employees assigned to be on the road should be limited to those who must do so as a part of their assigned job.
6. **Limit access:** Reduce the number of employees who report to the workplace and restrict the number of people who interact with the employees. Fewer people equals less risk.
7. **Limit use:** Reduce the number of operators or users for various tools and equipment. For example, designate one driver, one operator and one teller for a piece of equipment.
8. **Social separation:** Avoid having groups of employees, including work units and departments, share a work space. Coordinate, schedule and assign work to ensure employees can be separated. Stagger breaks and lunches.
9. **Barrier protection:** Employers whose employees are engaged with the public may want to consider barriers to minimize exposure during close-contact encounters, such as using teller windows, sneeze guards or speaking from behind partially opened windows.
10. **Social distancing:** Ensure employees who have to work closely to other employees, customers or clients maintain a distance of at least six feet. Delineate work areas to indicate adequate spacing for social distancing. For example, set up control lines or mark floors with tape.
11. **Hand hygiene:** Promote regular handwashing and the use of hand sanitizer. Everyone should wash their hands after touching any common surface, tool or piece of equipment. An average person touches their face between 16 and 24 times an hour.

12. **Sanitation:** Implement a regular and frequent schedule of sanitizing common-spaces and shared tools and equipment. Don't forget to include vehicles, forklifts, powered hand-tools, machines, keyboards, cash registers, telephones, doorknobs, ladders and railings.
13. **Personal protective equipment (PPE):** Employers must perform an assessment of the work activities conducted by their employees, and select and provide the proper personal protective equipment to their employees where other control measures cannot be implemented. Employers may need to provide proper PPE, such as gloves, gowns, face masks, face shields or goggles.
14. **Respirators:** Employers should evaluate whether respirators are necessary. Respirators can be effective to protect employees who have to work in close proximity to each other and can be provided on a voluntary basis. The OSHA respiratory protection standard details the requirements for each type of use.
15. **Training:** Employers must train their employees about the health hazards relative to COVID-19 exposure, including symptoms, modes of transmission and precautionary measures. Training resources are publicly available at www.osha.gov.
16. **Communication:** Employers should promote an open line of communication for employees to discuss concerns and report issues. Employees and employers need to be communicating and working together to minimize the spread of the virus.
17. **Wellness checks:** Employers should promote a regular practice of checking in with each employee daily and inquiring about their concerns, issues and well being. Consideration should not only be given toward physical symptoms, but to stress, anxiety and mental health also.
18. **Stay home when sick:** When you are ill, stay home. Be respectful of others by not sharing your symptoms at work.
19. **Report cases:** If you are working and you or someone you are around has been diagnosed with COVID-19, share this information with your employer. Employers may want to take extra precautions.
20. **Be patient:** Employers and employees must recognize these are not usual times and the stress of work is amplified by the current circumstances. Be prepared to slow down the demand placed on employees.
21. **You are protecting more than yourself:** Employers and employees must recognize safe work-practices do more than protect those within their business or worksite; they also protect the public, including the families and loved ones of the employees.

Further information

For further information, see OSHA's publication "Guidance on preparing workplaces for COVID-19," at www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf.

Employers and employees are encouraged to contact Minnesota OSHA Workplace Safety Consultation with workplace safety and health concerns at osha.consultation@state.mn.us, 651-284-5060 or 800-657-3776.

