

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): What employers need to know

We're all doing whatever it takes to stay healthy and protect others from coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). To prevent the spread of COVID-19 it's important for all of us to limit contact with others – and it's especially important if you're sick. Here's what you need to know about protecting the health and safety of your workforce during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Frequently Asked Questions

What can my employees do to protect themselves and each other?

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, we encourage employees to:

- **Stay home** when they are sick, especially if they have symptoms of COVID-19.
- **Practice good hand hygiene** by washing hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- **Avoid touching the face** with gloved or unwashed hands.
- **Disinfect** office equipment and mobile electronic devices frequently and avoid using another workers' equipment as much as possible.

What are the common symptoms of COVID-19?

Common symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Cough
- Fever
- Loss of taste and/or smell
- Shortness of breath

If an employee has any one of these, they should not come to work!

- **Review HR Policies and its language to ensure they encourage sick workers to stay home.**

What do I do if an active employee on the worksite becomes symptomatic?

Immediate action to take with the symptomatic employee:

- If your employee has a **fever, cough, shortness of breath, or loss of smell and/or taste**, separate the employee from others, gather their belongings and send them home. Most cases of the virus involve mild symptoms and can be safely managed at home. If they're experiencing severe symptoms, such as **difficulty breathing**, have them go to the ER – and please call ahead so teams can prepare. If their symptoms are life-threatening, call 911 immediately.
- At home, the employee should do **ONE** of the following: call 704-468-8888 to get a free phone assessment, call their doctor, complete a [Virtual Visit](#) or if they are an Atrium Health patient, complete an [e-Visit](#) to see if further action is needed.
- Employees with flu-like/COVID-19-like symptoms should stay out of work until the following have been satisfied:
 - At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since:
 - Their fever is gone without using any medicines to reduce it such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil) or naproxen sodium (Aleve)
 - Their respiratory symptoms (cough, shortness of breath) are better
AND
 - At least 7 days have passed since their symptoms first appeared

Management of on-site workforce in close contact with the symptomatic employee:

If an employee has been in close contact (a lot of face-to-face contact) with another employee or family member/friend who has COVID-19 they need to:

- Stay home for 14 days. Start to count from the last day they had contact with them.
- Limit their contact with others in their house. Stay at least 6 feet away from others in their house.
- Watch for signs of COVID-19 such as fever, new cough, shortness of breath or loss of taste/smell. If they have any of these, isolate (stay away from others) in their home until:
 - At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since:
 - Their fever is gone without using any medicines to reduce it such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil) or naproxen sodium (Aleve)
 - Their respiratory symptoms (cough, shortness of breath) are better
AND
 - At least 7 days have passed since their symptoms first appeared

What do I do if an employee is at home experiencing symptoms or has been exposed to another person on/off the job that has a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19?

- The employee should stay home until they speak with a healthcare provider and get further instruction. If they have any symptoms of COVID-19, they will need to do **ONE** of the following: call 704-468-8888 to get a free phone assessment, call their doctor, complete a [Virtual Visit](#) or if they are an Atrium Health patient, complete an [e-Visit](#) to see if further action is needed.

How should I clean and disinfect the employee's work area?

- Follow the CDC's recommendations [here](#).
- Wear gloves and use a **household disinfectant registered by the EPA for use against the virus**.

What do I do if an employee tells me that they tested positive for COVID-19?

- Contact your leadership team and follow the CDC's COVID-19 protocols related to surveillance, disinfection and contact tracing.

When can a sick employee return to work?

Follow guidance referenced above for symptomatic or exposed employees.

According to the CDC, employers should not require a COVID-19 test result or a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave or return to work.

This situation is still evolving, and guidance is subject to change. For the latest recommendations, we encourage you to reference the following resources for businesses and employers:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control](#)

