What to Do If You Have COVID-19 Confirmed Positive or Exposed Workers in Your Food Production, Storage, or Distribution Operations Regulated by FDA

FDA | U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION

The Food and Agriculture Sector is designated as critical infrastructure, and it is essential that these operations continue during the pandemic. Workers are the backbone of this critical infrastructure, and we are providing this information to ensure employers have information to help support their workers and protect their health. This summary, derived from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations, outlines key steps that employers and workers can take to help stay open, prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19, and support continuity of essential operations if workers are diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19, or show symptoms associated with COVID-19. Links to more detailed practices and recommendations are also included.

What plan does CDC recommend employers have in place to address sick workers and continuity of operations?

In consultation with their occupational health professionals, employers should conduct worksite assessments to identify COVID-19 risks and prevention strategies, even before having a sick or exposed worker.

Employers should identify a qualified workplace coordinator who will be responsible for COVID-19 issues, help develop plans for implementing infection control procedures, and help assess the impact of COVID-19 on the workplace, including absenteeism at work.

- For further information, consult CDC's Interim Guidance for Business and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 and General Business Frequently Asked Questions, which are frequently updated, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19.

What precautions does CDC recommend employers adopt to continue operations after workers are suspected to have COVID-19 or have been diagnosed with COVID-19?

Sick workers should stay home or go home if they develop symptoms during the work day.

- Workers who have symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, or shortness of breath) should notify their supervisor and stay home or go home.

- Sick workers should follow CDC-recommended steps. Workers should not return to work until they meet all the criteria to end home isolation, in consultation with healthcare providers.

Employers should:

- Close off areas used by the person who is sick.

- Clean and disinfect a sick worker's workspace. Wait 24 hours or, if 24 hours is not possible, as long as practical before you clean or disinfect.

- Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the exposed area, if reasonable given food safety regulations.

- Collect information about the worker's contacts among co-workers, up to 2 days prior to symptom onset, to identify other workers who could be considered exposed.

  - If a worker is confirmed infected, inform fellow workers of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The employer should instruct fellow workers about how to proceed based on the CDC Public Health Recommendations for Community-Related Exposure.

For further information, consult CDC's Interim Guidance for Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19, What to Do If You Are Sick, and Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility.

What precautions does CDC recommend employers consider adopting if they remain open with workers who have had a potential exposure to COVID-19 but are symptom-free (i.e., asymptomatic)?

To ensure the continuity of operations, CDC advises that critical infrastructure workers may be permitted to continue work following potential exposure to COVID-19, provided they remain symptom-free and additional precautions are taken to protect them and the community.

- Employers should follow CDC guidance for Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19.

Critical infrastructure businesses have an obligation to limit, to the extent possible, the reintegration of in-person workers who have been exposed to COVID-19 but remain symptom-free in ways that protect the health of the worker, co-workers, and the general public. An analysis of core job tasks and workforce availability can allow the employer to match core activities to available skilled workers who have not been exposed.

Workers who have been potentially exposed to COVID-19 at work, home, or elsewhere should notify their employers.

- A potential exposure means being a household contact or having close contact within 6 feet of an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. The timeframe for having contact with an individual includes the period of time of 48 hours before the individual became symptomatic as set out in CDC's Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19.

Employers should:

- Check temperatures and assess symptoms of workers, ideally before entering the facility or operation.
- If no fever (>100.4°F) or COVID-19 symptoms are present, workers should self-monitor for onset of symptoms during their shift.

What other precautions does CDC recommend to help reduce transmission?

Basic infection control information and training should be provided for all workers in a language and at literacy level they understand.

Employers should ensure that workers who have had a potential exposure, use an employer approved face mask or cloth face covering at all times while in the workplace for 14 days after the last potential exposure to COVID-19. Use of Respirators, Facemasks, and Cloth Face Coverings in the Food and Agricultural Sector During Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic on the FDA website provides more information.

Employers need to make sure exposed workers can practice social distancing.

Employers need to make available facilities and materials for worker hygiene so exposed workers can practice CDC recommended handwashing.

Employers should clean and disinfect workplaces/stations at necessary intervals.

- Consult CDC's Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19 and Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility.

NOTE: These worker and employee safety practices are recommended, even if there are no known exposed workers.

Is the food supply safe if food workers are exposed to or sick from COVID-19?

The U.S. food supply remains safe for both people and animals.

- There is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19 regardless of the status of the worker in a plant.
- FDA does not anticipate that food products will need to be recalled or be withdrawn from the market should a person that works on a farm or in a food facility test positive for COVID-19.

Federal Government Resources

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) www.cdc.gov, including:

- CDC's Interim Guidance for Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19;

- CDC's Interim Guidance for Business and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019, which is frequently updated; and

- General Business Frequently Asked Questions, which is likewise updated frequently.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), https://www.osha.gov, including Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19 that includes information on how a COVID-19 outbreak could affect workplaces and steps all employers can take to reduce workers' risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19).

Additional Resources

Businesses are strongly encouraged to coordinate with state and local health officials so timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses. Local conditions will influence the decisions that public health officials make regarding community-level strategies. CDC has guidance for mitigation strategies according to the level of community transmission or impact of COVID-19.

The Food and Beverage Issues Alliance has developed protocols for (1) when an employee of a firm is a confirmed or presumptive case of COVID-19, and (2) when a facility employee/facility visitor/customer has been in close contact with an individual with COVID-19. These protocols are specific to food manufacturing facilities, distribution centers, and wholesale and retail outlets.