



## Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers

This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of [coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#). The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available. This document is intended to be statewide guidance to help both businesses and employers inform their decision making. Decisions made by businesses, employers and local public health officials should be determined by the specific circumstances in local jurisdictions.

This guidance provides:

- Prevention strategies to protect employees from COVID-19 transmission
- Response recommendations for employees with COVID-19 or at risk of infection

Please check the following links periodically for updated interim guidance:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [www.cdc.gov/covid19](http://www.cdc.gov/covid19).
- DHEC: <https://www.scdhec.gov/covid19>

### Background

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel virus that has been spreading worldwide. Community acquired cases have now been confirmed in South Carolina. DHEC is in the process of monitoring COVID-19, conducting testing, and providing guidance and resources to prevent, detect, and respond to the occurrence of COVID-19 cases in South Carolina.

To prevent stigma and discrimination in the workplace, use only the guidance described below to determine risk of COVID-19. Do not make determinations of risk based on gender, race, or country of origin and be sure to maintain confidentiality of people with confirmed COVID-19.

### Watch for Symptoms

Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed COVID-19 cases.

The following symptoms may appear **2-14 days after exposure**.

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

### What is the role of businesses and employers in responding to COVID-19?

There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. At this point, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes it. Stopping the spread of the virus through everyday practices is the best way to keep people healthy. More information on COVID-19 is available [here](#).

Businesses and employers, working together with DHEC, have an important role in slowing the spread of diseases to help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. Businesses and employers serve and host employees, customers, visitors, suppliers and others from throughout the community and beyond. All of these people may have close contact in the business setting, potentially sharing spaces, equipment, supplies or other points of contact.

Below DHEC and CDC have outlined recommendations businesses and employers should consider to protect employees and others. Remember to visit the CDC and DHEC links above for additional information.

## Prevention strategies

### Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:

- **Ill employees:** Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer) for at least 3 days without the use of fever-reducing medicines and at least 7 days have passed since their symptoms first began. Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
  - Sick employees concerned about COVID-19 illness should contact their healthcare provider to discuss the appropriateness of testing.
  - **Temporary employees:** Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- **Leave policy:** Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
  - Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work. Healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation timely to the employee.
  - Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.
- **High risk employees:** Some employees may be at high risk of severe disease if infected with COVID-19. This includes pregnant and elderly employees as well as people with heart or lung disease, diabetes, or weakened immune systems. Employers should use flexible policies to allow these employees to stay home or work from home when possible.

### Emphasize basic prevention steps for 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.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
- Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty.
- Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.

- Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.

#### **Perform routine environmental cleaning:**

- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
- No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

#### **Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps:**

- Check the [CDC's Traveler's Health Notices](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. Specific travel information for travelers going to and returning from high risk countries and information for aircrew can be found at on the [CDC website](#).
- Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of [acute respiratory illness](#) before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure employees who become sick while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor and should promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.
- If outside the United States, sick employees should follow your company's policy for obtaining medical care or contact a healthcare provider or overseas medical assistance company to assist them with finding an appropriate healthcare provider in that country. A U.S. consular officer can help locate healthcare services. However, U.S. embassies, consulates, and military facilities do not have the legal authority, capability, and resources to evacuate or give medicines, vaccines, or medical care to private U.S. citizens overseas.

## **Responding to ill employees**

#### **Separate sick employees:**

- CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) or fever (>100.4 degrees F with an oral thermometer) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately.
- Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available) and perform hand hygiene immediately afterwards.
  - If they are concerned about COVID-19 illness, they should contact their healthcare provider, or employee health, if appropriate, to discuss the appropriateness of testing.

#### **Employees with family members in isolation or quarantine**

- Information about isolation and quarantine are available on the DHEC website.
- **Isolation:** Employees who are well but who have a sick family member isolated at home because they are sick with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor. These individuals are asked to complete a quarantine period and should be excused from the office.\* The length of the quarantine period may vary depending on the length of the family member's illness.
- **Quarantine:** Some employees may have a family member at home who is being asked to complete a quarantine because the family member has been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. If the employee has not been around the person with COVID-19, they may work as long as they and the family member being asked to quarantine have no symptoms.

- If the family member develops symptoms, the employee may be asked to quarantine until it can be determined if the symptoms are due to COVID-19.
- If the family member tests negative or a healthcare provider does not consider the illness to be COVID-19, the employee could return to work.
- If the family member tests positive for COVID-19, the employee will need to complete a quarantine period and must be excused from the office\*.

### **COVID-19 in an employee**

- If an employee notifies their employer that they have been confirmed to have COVID-19, the employer should work with the employee to determine if they worked while they had symptoms.
- **Close contacts:** Together they should determine who had close contact (defined as being within six feet of the employee while having symptoms for at least 10 minutes). These close contacts should be excused from the office\* to complete a quarantine period ending 14 days after the last contact occurred. When notifying employees of potential contact, employers must maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
  - **Essential employees:** If these employees having close contact provide an essential service and must be present in the office, they could return to work if they are not having any symptoms. They should keep at least six feet away from others if possible, practice good hand washing throughout the day, and frequently clean any surfaces they touch often. If distancing from others is not an option with the essential job duties, they should consider wearing a facemask while working, if one is available.
  - Regardless, any employee who has symptoms of fever, cough, and difficulty breathing must immediately stop working and separate themselves from others.
- **Employees not in close contact:** Employers should consider informing other employees not determined to be close contacts of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace if the ill employee worked while having symptoms. Employers must maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
  - Being a close contact to a person having symptoms of COVID-19 presents the greatest risk of catching the virus, but it can spread throughout the workplace on surfaces touched by an ill person as well. This is the reason that it may be necessary to notify other employees.
  - Regardless, any employee who has symptoms of fever, cough, and difficulty breathing must immediately stop working and separate themselves from others.

**\*Note:** Employees being excused from the office could be asked to work from home if that is a possibility.

### **Notifying customers**

- Employers may need to make the decision to notify customers if an employee worked while ill with symptoms. The decision should be based on the likelihood that the ill employee would have had close contact with customers. Direct notifications to customers in close contact is the preferred method of notification when possible.

### **Cleaning**

- If any employee worked while ill, it may be necessary to clean the workplace. CDC provides [cleaning guidelines](#) that can be used when cleaning is indicated. Standard cleaning agents and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered disinfectants can be used to clean. See link for guidance on clean solutions.
- At a school, daycare center, office, or other facility that does not house people overnight:

- It is recommended to close off areas used by the ill persons and wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize the potential for exposure to respiratory droplets. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area. If possible, wait up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfection.
  - Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas (e.g., offices, bathrooms, and common areas) used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.
- At a facility that does house people overnight:
  - Follow Interim Guidance for [US Institutions of Higher Education](#) on working with DHEC officials to isolate ill persons and provide temporary housing as needed.
  - It is recommended to close off areas used by the ill persons and wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area. If possible, wait up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfection.
  - In areas where ill persons are being housed in isolation, follow [Interim Guidance for Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection for U.S. Households with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019](#). This includes focusing on cleaning and disinfecting common areas where staff/others providing services may come into contact with ill persons but reducing cleaning and disinfection of bedrooms/bathrooms used by ill persons to as needed.
  - In areas where ill persons have visited or used, continue routine cleaning and disinfection as in this guidance.