

## Novel Coronavirus: Businesses and Employers

### What steps can businesses and employers take to help slow or stop the spread of novel coronavirus?

Steps to prevent spread of flu and the common cold will also help prevent coronavirus. The following information may help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, in non-healthcare settings.

#### Working with employees

*Remember, employers are not expected to screen employees to identify cases of COVID-19. The majority of respiratory illnesses are not COVID-19. If your workplace has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow-up on next steps.*

- **Encourage sick employees to stay home when sick.** Ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
  - Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home.
  - Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with a respiratory illness to confirm their illness or to return to work. Healthcare providers may be extremely busy and may not be able to provide such documentation in a timely manner.
- Encourage employees to:
  - Wash their hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue in the trash.
  - Place posters that encourage staying home when sick and healthy hygiene practices including hand washing and covering coughs/sneezes at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
- **Ensure frequent cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched objects and surfaces.** When possible, provide disposable wipes for commonly used surfaces like keyboards, remotes, and desks can be wiped down by employees before each use.
  - The EPA has shared a list of products for use against novel coronavirus cleaning and disinfection. This list can be found at [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/sars-cov-2-list\\_03-03-2020.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/sars-cov-2-list_03-03-2020.pdf).
- To prevent stigma and discrimination in the workplace, use only the guidance from reputable sources. Do not make determinations of risk based on ethnicity, race, national origin, or travel history.
- Be sure to maintain confidentiality of people with respiratory illnesses or who may be part of an investigation.
- Remind employees of support services available to them such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) that can help them deal with any related anxiety.

*Be aware that during a respiratory disease outbreak, more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.*

## Planning and Preparing:

- Create, review, update, and implement your business emergency operations plans.
  - Plans should include strategies to prevent or reduce the spread of a variety of infectious diseases and should build on everyday policies and practices.
  - Plans should also emphasize common-sense preventative actions like those listed above.
- The plan should prepare for possible increased numbers of absences due to illness in employees and their family members, and closure of early childhood programs and schools.
  - Monitor and respond to absenteeism at the workplace.
  - Implement plans to continue essential business functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism.
  - Explore and consider planning strategies that can help limit face-to-face contact when possible.
- Share the plan with employees and explain what human resources policies, workplace and leave flexibilities, and pay and benefits will be available to them.

*Plans that were already developed for other respiratory illnesses like influenza may be easily updated for novel coronavirus.*

## Communication with community partners:

- Review OSHA information for protecting workers from potential exposures. Visit <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/> or call OSHA Omaha-Area Office Phone: 1-800-642-8963.
- Work with your local health officials and health department. If you are not sure of your local health department, please visit [www.dhhs.ne.gov/lhd](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/lhd) to find out.
- Share resources and information with employees from reputable sources like Nebraska DHHS, CDC, and World Health Organization (WHO) to promote the actions listed above and make them easily accessible.
  - Sharing resources with employees can help them understand when and why it is important to stay home if sick.

## Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps:

- Check the CDC's Traveler's Health Notices (<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which employees will travel.
- Ensure employees who become sick while traveling, especially with a respiratory symptoms, notify their supervisor and promptly contact a healthcare provider.

For more information please visit:

[www.dhhs.ne.gov/coronavirus](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/coronavirus)

[www.cdc.gov/COVID19](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>

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