



## **Office of Congressional Workplace Rights Fact Sheet: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)**

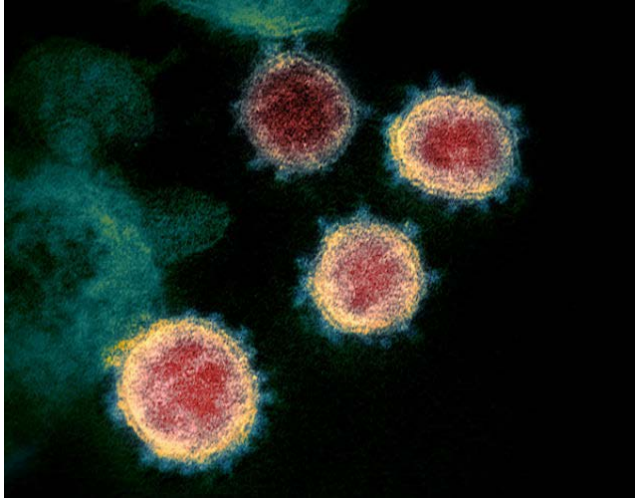
### **What is the novel coronavirus?**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

This virus was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The first infections were linked to a live animal market, and the virus is now spreading from person to person.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, declared the rapidly spreading coronavirus outbreak a pandemic, acknowledging that the virus will likely spread to every country on earth. As of this posting, 48 states and the District of Columbia have all declared states of emergency. On March 13, 2020, President Trump declared a national emergency.

The number of COVID-19 cases increases daily. For the most current infection, death, and recovery counts, please visit <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/> where the statistics are updated daily.



An electron microscope image of the new strain of coronavirus. Courtesy of NIAID-RML

### **What are the symptoms?**

The reported symptoms 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

If you develop symptoms such as fever, cough, and/or difficulty breathing and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or have recently traveled from an area with the ongoing spread of COVID-19, stay home and call your health care provider. **Older patients and individuals who have severe underlying medical conditions or are immunocompromised should contact their health care provider early, even if their illness is mild.**

### **People at risk for serious illness from COVID-19**

Per the CDC, COVID-19 data shows that some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness. These people include:

- Older adults (age 60 years and older)
- People who have serious chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and/or lung disease

Overall, the data suggest that older people and people with underlying health conditions “were about twice as likely to develop serious outcomes [of COVID-19] versus otherwise younger, healthier people,” said Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the National Center for Immunization

and Respiratory Diseases at the CDC. However, some younger people without underlying health conditions have developed serious complications from the virus and currently the outcomes for all people are unpredictable, which is why the CDC has urged that everyone take the recommended steps to avoid contracting or spreading the virus.

### **How does the coronavirus spread?**

According to the WHO, “the new coronavirus is a respiratory virus which spreads primarily through droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose.”

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby and possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
- Because the virus can survive on a surface from hours to days, depending on the type of material, it is believed to be spread by touching a surface contaminated with the virus, then touching your face, eyes, or mouth.

The virus that causes COVID-19 seems to be spreading easily and sustainably in the community (“community spread”) in many affected geographic areas. Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected. For some people the symptoms are minimal so they may be unaware that they are contagious, which is why everyone is being urged to take steps to avoid the person-to-person spread. It is important to note that person-to-person spread can happen on a continuum.

### **Classify worker exposure to COVID-19**

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the risk of exposure to COVID-19 varies from very high, high, medium, and lower risk. The level of risk depends on the type of industry, the need for person-to-person contact within 6 feet, or the interaction of people who are suspected of being infected or known to be infected with COVID-19. According to OSHA, most U.S. workers will fall into the lower exposure risk or medium exposure risk levels.

**Examples of very-high exposure risk:** Health care workers (doctors, nurses, medical technicians, dentists, etc.), those who are performing aerosol-generating procedures, health care laboratory personnel, and morgue workers.

**Examples of high exposure risk:** Health care delivery and support staff (doctors, nurses, and other medical staff) who must enter the rooms of patients who have been exposed or are suspected to have been exposed to COVID-19, medical transport workers, and mortuary workers.

**Examples of medium exposure risk:** Jobs in this category involve frequent and/or close contact with people who may be infected with COVID-19 but not known or suspected patients. In areas without ongoing community transmission, workers in this category may have frequent contact with travelers who return from locations with widespread COVID-19 transmission. In areas where there is ongoing community transmission, workers may have contact with the general public (such as in schools, high-population-density work environments, high-volume retail settings, etc.).

**Examples of lower exposure risk (caution):** Jobs in this category do not require contact with people known to be, or suspected of being, infected with COVID-19. There is minimal occupational contact with the public and other coworkers.

### **Protect yourself and others**

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Practice social distancing, also called physical distancing, by avoiding close contact with people outside of your immediate household. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk. Keep in mind that the disease may be spread by those who are not showing symptoms, so it is important to practice social distancing universally. Stay at home as much as possible. Follow the recommendations or requirements of your local or state government.

Follow the CDC guidelines regarding the use of face coverings when in public or when you must be in close proximity to others. Wearing a face mask does not substitute for social distancing (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>).

### **Protect yourself and your family**

Stay informed and get up-to-date information from your local public health officials.

Create an emergency contacts list to include friends, family, neighbors, teachers, doctors, the local health department, and other community resources.

Prepare for possible illness by deciding which room could be designated as a sick room if someone in your household becomes infected and must be isolated.

Continue using everyday preventative measures, which include but are not limited to: proper handwashing, disinfecting frequently used items and surfaces, and using a tissue or the bend of your elbow to cover your mouth when sneezing.

Stay home and contact your health care provider if you develop fever, cough, or shortness of breath.

Seek medical attention immediately if you develop COVID-19 symptoms.

If someone in your household becomes sick, follow CDC recommended precautions and monitor your own health.

Take care of the emotional health of your family members and yourself.

### **Protect your workplace**

During the COVID-19 outbreak, it may not be possible to eliminate the virus from the workplace because, as we have learned, a person may carry and transmit the virus without showing symptoms of the virus. In this case, workplace controls should be implemented in order to minimize the spread of infection between workers. Three types of workplace controls are engineering controls, administrative controls, and implementing the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

- *Engineering controls* involve isolating employees from work-related hazards and do not rely on worker behavior.
- *Administrative controls* require action by the employee or employer and usually involve a change in work policy or procedure to minimize the hazard.
- *PPE* is usually the last resort. The OSHA standards for PPE and for respiratory protection require employers to assess workplace hazard exposure. Employers must ensure that employees are properly trained in the use of PPE whether it is used during the pandemic or during normal work situations. Employers should consider whether their employees may be exposed to COVID-19 in any way while performing their duties, which include exposure from other employees or from the work environment.

### **Examples of engineering controls for COVID-19**

- Install high-efficiency air filters.
- Increase ventilation rates in the work environment.
- Install physical barriers if possible.

### **Examples of administrative controls for COVID-19**

- Managers should encourage employees who are sick or may have been exposed to the virus to work from home, the latter for a period of 14 days.
- Use videoconferencing for meetings when possible. When not possible, hold meetings in open, well-ventilated spaces, and have individuals sit at least 6 feet apart.

- Reduce the time employees are in contact with each other by permitting alternate work schedules.
- Minimize sharing pens, equipment, and tools. If they must be shared, sanitize them between users.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning: Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (such as doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks, etc.) can be wiped down by employees before each use.
- Consider if work projects can be done with fewer employees or if the task can be completed by rotating employees or spread over multiple shifts in order to minimize contact.

### **Personal protective equipment**

Examples of PPE include gloves, goggles, face shields/masks, and respiratory protection. Employers must train workers who need to use PPE on how to put it on, wear it, and take it off. PPE must be:

- Selected based on the risk of the employee being exposed to COVID-19.
- Properly fitted and periodically refitted (especially respirators).
- Consistently in working order and properly worn when required.
- Regularly inspected, maintained, and replaced when needed.
- Properly removed, cleaned, and stored or disposed of to avoid contaminating the employee or other employees.

Employees who dispose of used/contaminated PPE must be trained and provided with appropriate PPE.

### **OSHA standards to reference:**

There are no specific OSHA standards that cover COVID-19; however, OSHA's PPE standards (29 C.F.R. Part 1910, Subpart I) could apply, along with the General Duty Clause, section 5(a)(1) of the OSHAct of 1970, 29 U.S.C. § 654(a)(1). These apply to the legislative branch through section 215 of the Congressional Accountability Act, 2 U.S.C. § 1341.

Please go to the following websites for more information:

<https://www.coronavirus.gov/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

<https://www.loc.gov/about/pandemic-information/for-public/>

<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/covid-19/>

*This document was prepared using OSHA 3990-03, "Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19" (2020).*

# STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.



Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.



Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.



Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.



Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.



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



## Keeping the workplace safe

### Encourage your employees to...

#### Practice good hygiene



- Stop handshaking – use other noncontact methods of greeting
- Clean hands at the door and schedule regular hand washing reminders by email
- Create habits and reminders to avoid touching their faces and cover coughs and sneezes
- Disinfect surfaces like doorknobs, tables, desks, and handrails regularly
- Increase ventilation by opening windows or adjusting air conditioning

#### Be careful with meetings and travel



- Use videoconferencing for meetings when possible
- When not possible, hold meetings in open, well-ventilated spaces
- Consider adjusting or postponing large meetings or gatherings
- Assess the risks of business travel

#### Handle food carefully



- Limit food sharing
- Strengthen health screening for cafeteria staff and their close contacts
- Ensure cafeteria staff and their close contacts practice strict hygiene

#### Stay home if...



- They are feeling sick
- They have a sick family member in their home

What every American and community can do now to decrease the spread of the coronavirus

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/workplace-school-and-home-guidance.pdf>