

## PROTECTING EMPLOYEES DURING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) OUTBREAK: A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES

The Private Sector Roundtable (PSRT) for Global Health Security is a cross-industry coalition that helps countries prevent, detect, respond to and prepare for health crises. PSRT members are companies that recognize the importance of global health security to their core business given impact on market sustainability and growth.

As major employers, the business community has a significant opportunity – and responsibility – to take action to protect its employees and ensure overall population health.

This guide is designed to help employers put safeguards in place during the coronavirus outbreak, especially smaller businesses that may not have access to emergency preparedness resources.

### Background

The recently named COVID-19 (the 2019 Novel Coronavirus) has been declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern with the number of identified cases rising rapidly and spreading beyond China. Major disruptions in business continuity are having global impact.

While much is unknown about the current outbreak, this document summarizes [interim recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the [U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#) and the World Health Organization (WHO), mainly for non-health care settings.

Employers should be mindful to avoid discrimination based on race or country of origin and ensure confidentiality for people infected. Employers should continue to check official sources for the latest updates on the spread and severity of the disease, including the [WHO](#) and the [CDC](#), as well as your public health agency's latest recommendations and policies.

### Best Practices

**Encourage sick employees to stay home** | Employees with acute respiratory symptoms should be encouraged to stay home and not come to work until they are free of symptoms for at least 24 hours. Employees should also be able to stay home to care for sick family members. If employees show up to work presenting with acute respiratory illness symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath), they should be sent home. Employers can help by ensuring that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance (e.g., do not require a doctor's note, ability to work remotely if appropriate).

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- Consider putting up posters in the office to encourage sick employees to stay home, such as this [CDC poster](#).

**Encourage hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette** | Encourage employees to wash their hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Employees should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they sneeze and throw away tissues immediately. Employers should provide and maintain soap and hand sanitizer supplies in the workplace, as well as tissues and no-touch waste receptacles.

- Consider putting up posters on cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene, such as [these from the CDC](#).

**Routinely clean workspace** | Employers should ensure that commonly used surfaces, such as workstations, countertops, sinks, and doorknobs are cleaned using the cleaning supplies normally used for these areas.

- Provide disposable wipes for employees to wipe down commonly used surfaces before each use.

**Issue advisories for employees before, during, and after travel** | Check the U.S. CDC's (or national equivalent ) [travel health notices](#) for the latest guidance on travel. As of February 21, 2020, a [level 3 travel notice is issued for China](#), recommending that people avoid any nonessential travel. Review recommendations for employees traveling to or from China. Employees should also consult the U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory website](#) for additional information before their trip.

- For employees who will be traveling to affected areas, advise employees to [check for symptoms](#) of acute respiratory illness before travel, and to stay home if they are sick.
- Provide basic information about how coronavirus is transmitted, its symptoms, and how to avoid exposure (see the [WHO Q&A page](#)). It would also be advisable to provide these employees with contact information for local health departments.
- Advise employees that if they become sick while traveling, to contact a health care provider if needed and alert their supervisor.

**If an employee is confirmed to have coronavirus, take appropriate precautions** | In the event that an employee has the coronavirus, the employer should inform the rest of its employees of possible exposure while maintaining confidentiality of the infected individual.

- Employees exposed to the infected individual can be directed to CDC guidance on [how to conduct a risk assessment](#), which includes self-observation and self-monitoring or consult a health care provider, as appropriate. Employees who are well but have a sick family member at home with coronavirus should also notify their supervisor.

**Prepare and plan for the event of an outbreak in your country or region** | Businesses should have a plan in place for responding to the coronavirus (or any disease outbreak) that reflects the

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severity of its potential impact on the workforce and the business overall. Employers should communicate the objectives of their response plan to employees to assure them that the business is prepared.

- Prepare for possible increased absenteeism due to illness and implement plans to ensure business continuity for essential functions (e.g., cross-train staff to perform essential functions). Consider suspending some of your operations if needed.
- Businesses with multiple locations should assign site managers to take appropriate actions outlined in outbreak response plans based on the condition at each location.
- Be mindful that certain employees, such as older adults and people with underlying health conditions, may be at increased risk.

**Be aware that employees in certain industries are at higher risk |** Workers in industries such as health care, laboratories, airlines, border protection, and waste management could be at elevated risk for severe disease as a result of infection and should consult relevant guidance.

- Health care employers should review the [WHO's interim guidance for infection prevention and control strategies](#) for when coronavirus is suspected in the health care setting, and consult [CDC's interim guidance for health care personnel](#) who have faced potential exposure.
- Those working in the commercial airline industry may refer to CDC's interim guidance for airlines and airline crew, which includes requirements to report travelers with certain symptoms to the CDC, as well as how cabin crew can protect themselves and other passengers, manage sick travelers, and take actions after a flight.

## Helpful resources

[WHO situation reports](#)

[CDC situation summary](#)

[Full CDC interim guidance for business and employers to plan and respond to COVID-19](#)

[CDC information for health care professionals](#)

[CDC interim guidance for airlines and airline crew](#)

[OSHA's overview and resources for workers and employers](#)

[CDC travel health notices](#)

[CDC poster - "Stay Home If You're Sick"](#)

[CDC communication resources](#)

For more information on the PSRT, please contact the [Secretariat](#).

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