

## Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), February 2020

### Louisiana Business,

This interim guidance is based on what is currently known [about the coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will update this interim guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available.

CDC is working across the Department of Health and Human Services and across the U.S. government in the public health response to COVID-19. Much is unknown about how the virus that causes COVID-19 spreads. Current knowledge is largely based on what is known about similar coronaviruses.

### CDC industry guidance

- [Resources for airlines](#)
- [Resources for the ship industry](#)

### Coronavirus

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in humans and many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people, such as with MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV. The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from person to person in China and some limited person-to-person transmission has been reported in countries outside China, including the United States. However, respiratory illnesses like seasonal influenza, are currently widespread in many U.S. communities.

The following interim guidance may help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, in non-healthcare settings. The guidance also provides planning considerations if there are more widespread, community outbreaks of COVID-19.

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 race or country of origin and be sure to maintain confidentiality of people with confirmed COVID-19. There is much more to learn about the transmissibility, severity and other features of COVID-19, and investigations are ongoing. Updates are available on CDC's webpage at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/covid19](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/covid19).

### Recommended strategies for employers to use now

- **Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:**
  - 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), signs of a fever and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of

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- fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
  - Ensure that your 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 and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave 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, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
  - 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.
- **Separate sick employees:**
    - CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) 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).
- **Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by 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% to 95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially 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.

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- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls and 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 China, 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.
- **Additional measures in response to currently occurring sporadic importations of COVID-19:**
  - Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.

If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.

### Planning for a possible COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S.

The severity of illness or how many people will fall ill from COVID-19 is unknown at this time. If there is evidence of a COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S., employers should plan to be able to respond in a flexible way to varying levels of severity and be prepared to refine their business response plans as needed. For the general American public, such as workers in non-healthcare settings and where it is unlikely that work tasks create an increased risk of exposures to COVID-19, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low. The CDC and its partners will continue to monitor national and international data on the severity of illness caused by COVID-19, will disseminate the results of these ongoing surveillance assessments and will make additional recommendations as needed.

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### Planning considerations

All employers need to consider how best to decrease the spread of acute respiratory illness and lower the impact of COVID-19 in their workplace in the event of an outbreak in the US. They should identify and communicate their objectives, which may include one or more of the following: (a) reducing transmission among staff, (b) protecting people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications, (c) maintaining business operations, and (d) minimizing adverse effects on other entities in their supply chains. Some of the key considerations when making decisions on appropriate responses are:

- Disease severity (i.e., number of people who are sick, hospitalization and death rates) in the community where the business is located;
- Impact of disease on employees that are vulnerable and may be at higher risk for COVID-19 adverse health complications. Inform employees that some people may be at higher risk for severe illness, such as older adults and those with chronic medical conditions.
- Prepare for possible increased numbers of employee absences due to illness in employees and their family members, dismissals of early childhood programs and K-12 schools due to high levels of absenteeism or illness.
  - Employers should plan to monitor and respond to absenteeism at the workplace. Implement plans to continue your essential business functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism.
  - Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions so that the workplace is able to operate even if key staff members are absent.
  - Assess your essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your services or products. Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed).
- Employers with more than one business location are encouraged to provide local managers with the authority to take appropriate actions outlined in their business infectious disease outbreak response plan based on the condition in each locality.
- Coordination with [state](#) and [local](#) health officials is strongly encouraged for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside. Since the intensity of an outbreak may differ according to geographic location, local health officials will be issuing guidance specific to their communities.

#### **Important considerations for creating an infectious disease outbreak response plan:**

All employers should be ready to implement strategies to protect their workforce from COVID-19 while ensuring continuity of operations. During a COVID-19 outbreak, all sick employees should stay home and away from the workplace, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene should be encouraged, and routine cleaning of commonly touched surfaces should be performed regularly.

- **Employers should:**

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- Ensure the plan is flexible and involve your employees in developing and reviewing your plan.
- Conduct a focused discussion or exercise using your plan, to find out ahead of time whether the plan has gaps or problems that need to be corrected.
- Share your plan with employees and explain what human resources policies, workplace and leave flexibilities, and pay and benefits will be available to them.
- Share best practices with other businesses in your communities (especially those in your supply chain), chambers of commerce and associations to improve community response efforts.

### Recommendations for an infectious disease outbreak response plan:

- Identify possible work-related exposure and health risks to your employees. OSHA has more information on how to [protect workers from potential exposures](#) to COVID-19.
- Review human resources policies to make sure that policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are consistent with existing state and federal workplace laws (for more information on employer responsibilities, visit the [Department of Labor's](#) and the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's](#) websites).
- Explore whether you can establish policies and practices, such as flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), to increase the physical distance among employees and between employees and others if state and local health authorities recommend the use of social distancing strategies. For employees who are able to telework, supervisors should encourage employees to telework instead of coming into the workplace until symptoms are completely resolved. Ensure that you have the information technology and infrastructure needed to support multiple employees who may be able to work from home.
- Identify essential business functions, essential jobs or roles, and critical elements within your supply chains (e.g., raw materials, suppliers, subcontractor services/products and logistics) required to maintain business operations. Plan for how your business will operate if there is increasing absenteeism or these supply chains are interrupted.
- Set up authorities, triggers and procedures for activating and terminating the company's infectious disease outbreak response plan, altering business operations (e.g., possibly changing or closing operations in affected areas) and transferring business knowledge to key employees. Work closely with your local health officials to identify these triggers.
- Plan to minimize exposure between employees and also between employees and the public, if public health officials call for social distancing.
- Establish a process to communicate information to employees and business partners on your infectious disease outbreak response plans and latest COVID-19 information. Anticipate employee fear, anxiety, rumors and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
- In some communities, early childhood programs and K-12 schools may be dismissed, particularly if COVID-19 worsens. Determine how you will operate if absenteeism spikes from increases in sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who must stay home to watch their children if dismissed from school. Businesses and other employers should prepare to institute flexible workplace and leave policies for these employees.

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- Local conditions will influence the decisions that public health officials make regarding community-level strategies; employers should take the time now to learn about plans in place in each community where they have a business.
- If there is evidence of a COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S., consider canceling nonessential business travel to additional countries per [travel guidance](#) on the CDC website.
  - Travel restrictions may be enacted by other countries which may limit the ability of employees to return home if they become sick while on travel status.
  - Consider cancelling large work-related meetings or events.

Engage [state](#) and [local](#) health departments to confirm channels of communication and methods for dissemination of local outbreak information.

### Resources

- For the most up-to-date information, visit [www.cdc.gov/covid19](http://www.cdc.gov/covid19).
- For more information about COVID-19 in Louisiana visit: [Http://www.ldh.la.gov/coronavirus](http://www.ldh.la.gov/coronavirus)
- For questions from the general public about COVID-19 call: (855)-523-2652

### CDC guidance

- [COVID-19 Website](#)
- [What You Need to Know About COVID-19](#)
- [What to Do If You Are Sick With COVID-19](#)

## **10 Frequently Asked Questions About Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

**Because the situation continues to evolve, this document will be regularly updated. The information below reflects the situation as of 03/02/2020.**

**Q: Are there any confirmed cases in Louisiana?**

A: As of 03/02/20, there are no confirmed cases in Louisiana.

**Q: What is the current situation?**

A: While the CDC now expect community spread in some parts of the U.S., the immediate threat to the U.S. remains low. We are not seeing the same level of spread other countries are seeing. That said, it is important to be prepared, which is what we have been doing since the outbreak in mainland China.

**Q: What is the protocol in place for responding to a pandemic like COVID-19?**

A: COVID-19 in many ways behaves similarly to influenza. The CDC recommends using the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness plan as our model for the response because COVID-19 in many ways behaves similarly to influenza. The Louisiana Department of Health has been working on our Pandemic Preparedness Plan for the last 15 years, and we have been preparing for COVID-19 since early January 2020. The Governor directed the formation of a COVID-19 Task Force with representation from state agencies and federal partners key to preparing for a COVID-19 outbreak to guide updating pandemic flu and continuity of operations planning documents and advise the Unified Command Group.

**Q: What have you been doing as far as monitoring people who may have been exposed?**

A: Our first priority was to ensure we were monitoring any travelers who returned to Louisiana from visiting China, where many of the cases have occurred, and especially Wuhan, the city that experienced the largest outbreak. We touch base with those travelers each day and ask about their symptoms during a 14-day period of observation. We are also ensuring that travelers know the destinations where non-essential travel should be avoided.

**Q: Do we have the capability to test?**

A: We do have the capability to test for COVID-19 in-state. Providers should contact the Office of Public Health Division's Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program (IDEpi). Testing is prioritized for individuals that meet clinical and risk criteria.

**Q: What's the next major step in the Department's plan for responding to an outbreak?**

A: Mirroring the federal government's response, we are moving from a 'containment' approach in which we focused on restricting travel from the outbreak area in Wuhan city and Hubei province in China and monitoring returning travelers from other parts of China, to a 'mitigation' approach in which we anticipate and plan for person-to-person transmission in the community somewhere in the United States and ensure state and local governments, health care providers, schools, businesses, and community members are adequately prepared to take action to reduce the spread of COVID-19. We don't want people to be alarmed, but we do want them to be prepared. We also want businesses and health care facilities to be prepared to make sure people are safe and protected so we can avoid an unnecessary spread, including planning now for actions that can be taken to avoid the spread of infections such as mandatory teleworking and canceling unnecessary large gatherings.

**Q: What are you doing to make sure hospitals are prepared?**

A: LDH has been working with Louisiana Hospital Association (LHA) and the ESF8 Network to prepare hospitals for an outbreak and ensure they have the proper supplies needed as well as protocols are in place for anyone treated who tests positive. We haven't had any indication that hospitals don't have what they need on the supply side.

**Q: Is it safe to receive a package from any area where COVID-19 has been reported?**

A: Yes. The likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low and the risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, traveled, and exposed to different conditions and temperature is also low.

**Q: Are you in regular contact with the federal government?**

A: Yes. We are in very regular contact with the CDC and HHS; we're currently averaging several calls per week just with the CDC. In addition we have standing calls across state health departments and a standing call internally in Louisiana. This is all very important so that we all have the latest data, are on the same page, and can adapt our plans as conditions change.

**Q: Should individuals and families have a plan if an outbreak occurs?**

There are actions we all can take as individuals to be prepared for COVID-19. The same actions you take to prevent the spread of flu put you in a good position for any respiratory illness - cover your cough, wash your hands (especially after being in public spaces, shaking hands), stay home if you are sick, and get your flu shot! Individuals and families should also monitor the CDC COVID-19 website for updated travel advisories before making plans to travel internationally.