Preventing the Spread of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

This WorkCare Fact Sheet provides guidance on preventing the spread of 2019 novel coronavirus. It was updated on Feb. 12, 2020.

The 2019 novel coronavirus that has caused an outbreak of a pneumonia-like illness in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province, China has rapidly spread to other parts of China as well as other countries.

Thousands of cases of illness have been confirmed in China. Deaths attributed to the virus have primarily occurred among older people and those with underlying medical conditions. On Feb. 11, the World Health Organization, in collaboration with the World Organization for Animal Health and the Food and Agriculture Organization, named the illness COVID-19: CO for corona, Vi for virus, D for disease and 19 for the year it was first reported in China. The virus itself is now named SARS-CoV-2 to indicate genetic similarities to severe acute respiratory syndrome.

The situation is being closely monitored by WHO, the United Nations, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health organizations around the globe. WHO declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on Jan. 30.

CDC officials are investigating a limited number of cases in the U.S. as well as potential exposures. Isolation is believed to be the most effective way to stop the spread of disease by anyone who may have been exposed to the coronavirus, which is believed to be contagious up to 14 days before symptoms develop.

No vaccine or specific treatment for COVID-19 infection is available; care is supportive.

The coronavirus is believed to have originated in a bat. It is now being spread by human-to-human contact while the original source remains under investigation.

Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of infection may include:

- Fever above 100.4 F
- Cough
- Headache
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Body aches
- Fatigue

These symptoms are non-specific and may have another cause, such as a cold or seasonal influenza virus. Most people who experience these symptoms are likely to have a common viral upper respiratory infection, not COVID-19 infection, which typically begins with a fever followed by a dry cough. A laboratory test is required to confirm whether an illness is caused by SARS-CoV-2 or another type of virus.
Health screening upon entering a country or workplace where there is a risk of infection include having your temperature taken and answering questions about exposure risk and symptoms. Travelers and workers with symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, difficulty breathing) receive a follow-up health assessment and are advised to isolate themselves and seek immediate care.

What Should You Do?
The following are recommendations for employers with employees at risk of exposure or who develop symptoms:

1. Avoid non-essential travel to China per CDC recommendations.

2. Monitor for the development of signs/symptoms of respiratory or flu-like illness for two weeks in people who:
   - work in or have recently been to China
   - have close contact with a family member who has recently returned from China
   - have had close contact with someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19. Close contact includes being in the same room.

3. Allow employees with exposure risk but without symptoms to work remotely for two weeks as a precautionary measure, as feasible.

4. If symptoms develop after travel or potential exposure is suspected, wear a face mask and immediately consult a medical professional by phone before visiting a clinic or doctor’s office. This helps prevent the spread of disease.

5. Employees who have a fever accompanied by respiratory symptoms such as cough and congestion should not come to work until they are feeling better and for 24 hours after fever has resolved, or until they have been cleared by their doctor to return to work.

6. Monitor developments on the spread of novel coronavirus and follow public health recommendations as new information is obtained.

Employees who work in China are advised to:

- Avoid animals (alive or dead), animal markets and products that come from animals, such as uncooked meat.
- Wear a face mask to decrease the likelihood of spreading the virus via droplets.
- Avoid close contact with people and touching their face, especially in public places.

If work travel to China is necessary, follow CDC recommendations. WorkCare advises against travel to China for employees who are advanced in age, or who have a compromised immune system; been treated in the past for leukemia or lymphoma; use a corticosteroid inhaler; are pregnant; or have active HIV or hepatitis C infection.
Emergency Response and General Prevention

Emergency medical care should be sought for:

- Difficulty breathing or feeling short of breath
- Chest pain or abdominal pain
- Signs of dehydration, such as dizziness with standing or absence of urination
- Confusion
- Acute worsening of underlying medical conditions, such as diabetes, emphysema or asthma

General preventive measures to help stop the spread of disease include:

- Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Covering coughs and sneezes and throwing away tissues.
- Wearing an N95 respirator when assisting someone suspected of having coronavirus.
- Staying healthy by getting enough sleep, eating nutritious foods, drinking fluids to stay hydrated and being physically active.
- Providing adequate ventilation and disinfecting surfaces and shared equipment, such as keyboards or phones.
- Monitoring developments on the spread of novel coronavirus and following public health recommendations as new information is obtained.

The CDC advises medical professionals assessing patients with symptoms to have the patient wear a mask and conduct the evaluation in a private area with the door closed, optimally in an airborne infection isolation room. Personnel entering the room should use standard precautions, contact precautions and airborne precautions, and wear eye protection (goggles or a face shield).

Related Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
- [2019 Novel Coronavirus](#)
- [Infection Control](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Healthcare Professionals](#)
- [Travel notices](#)
- [Health Alert: Travelers from China](#)
- [Business continuity planning checklist](#)

Occupational Safety and Health Administration:
- [2019 Novel Coronavirus](#)
- [Existing OSHA exposure protection standards apply.](#)
- [COVID-19 Updates:](#)
- [2019 nCoV outreach and daily updates](#)