COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus): Guidance for Employers

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a coronavirus strain that began infecting people in December 2019. Health experts are concerned because little is known about this new virus and it has the potential to cause severe illness and pneumonia in some people.

How does COVID-19 spread?

Health experts are still learning the details about how this new virus strain spreads. Other coronaviruses spread from an infected person to others through:

- the air by coughing and sneezing
- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes
- in rare cases, contact with feces

How severe is COVID-19?

Experts are still learning about the range of illness caused by COVID-19. Reported cases have ranged from mild illness (similar to a common cold) to severe pneumonia that requires hospitalization. So far, deaths have been reported mainly in older adults who had other health conditions.

What are the symptoms?

People who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 have reported symptoms that may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure to the virus:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
Who is at risk for COVID-19?

Currently the risk to the general public is low. At this time, there are a small number of individual cases in the U.S. To minimize the risk of spread, health officials are working with healthcare providers to promptly identify and evaluate any suspected cases.

Travelers to and from certain areas of the world may be at increased risk. See wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel for the latest travel guidance from the CDC.

How can I protect my workforce from infection?

If employees travel overseas (to China, but also to other places) follow the CDC’s travel guidance: wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel. The CDC now recommends restricting all non-essential travel to the People’s Republic of China.

As of now, COVID-19 has not been spreading widely in the United States, so there are no additional precautions recommended for the general public. Steps you can encourage your employees to take to prevent spread of flu and the common cold will also help prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- encourage hand washing often with soap and water. If not available, use hand sanitizer.
- encourage employees to avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
- encourage employees to stay home when sick
- instruct employees to cover mouth/nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing
- surgical masks are not needed at this time, except in health care settings

Currently, there are no vaccines available to prevent COVID-19.

How is COVID-19 treated?

There are no medications specifically approved for coronaviruses. Most people with mild coronavirus illness will recover on their own by drinking plenty of fluids, resting, and taking pain and fever medications. However, some cases develop pneumonia and require medical care or hospitalization.

For more information, go to: