Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): General Guidance for Businesses and Non-Health Care Settings

This document provides businesses and other non-health care settings with recommendations on how to help mitigate person-to-person transmission of COVID-19. This guidance may be updated as the situation is rapidly changing and new information becomes available.

Text “COVID” to 692-692 for the latest information or visit nyc.gov/coronavirus.

2019 Novel Coronavirus

Health officials are still learning about the spread and severity of a novel (new) coronavirus. The infection, called COVID-19, can be spread from person to person 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.

Separate Facts From Fear and Guard Against Stigma

A lot of information about coronavirus on social media and even in some news reports is not based on facts. Leaders in non-health care settings can help prevent the stigmatization or targeting of one group of people by proactively sharing the messages found in this document. The outbreak is absolutely no excuse to spread racism and discrimination. Leaders should encourage that staff stay informed, remain vigilant and take care of each other. For more information, visit nyc.gov/coronavirus.

Social Distancing

Non-health care settings can consider the following measures to support social distancing:

- Allow employees to telecommute if the job allows.
- Create staggered work hours. For example, instead of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., consider changing some work hours to 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. or 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Make work schedules flexible.
- Inform employees of paid sick leave policies.
- Emphasize that staff should stay home if sick and consider relaxing leave policies to accommodate staff following guidance to stay home until well.
- Encourage staff to help reduce overcrowding on public transportation:
  - Walk or bike to work, if they can.
  - When taking the subway, if the train is too packed, be patient and wait for the next one.
High-Risk Individuals

- People over 50 years of age or who have underlying health conditions (lung disease, heart disease, cancer, diabetes and weakened immune systems) are most at risk for severe complications.
- High risk individuals should not attend large gatherings where they will be in close contact with others.

Creating an Outbreak Response Plan

- Review human resources policies and practices. Make sure they are consistent with current public health recommendations and state and federal workplace laws.
- Identify critical job roles and functions. Plan out business operations with less staff or interruptions in functions. Consider cross-training personnel to perform essential functions.
- Plan communication strategies with staff and business partners to share information and updates, and to reduce fear and misinformation.
- If you have more than one business location, allow your local managers to take appropriate actions based on the conditions in each location. Outline appropriate actions in your outbreak response plan.
- Share and discuss the outbreak response plan with your employees. Allow them to provide feedback and address any gaps in the plan.
- Reach out to other businesses in your community, chambers of commerce, associations and networks to create a unified plan.

General Infection Prevention Strategies

Good personal hygiene practices remain the best method for preventing the spread of COVID-19. Non-health care settings should encourage staff do the following to prevent infection:

- Stay home if sick
  - If you are experiencing cold or flu-like symptoms, STAY HOME. Call your employer and let them know. If you don’t feel better after 24-48 hours, seek care from your doctor.
  - Do not go back to work until you have been fever-free for 72 hours without the use of fever-reducing drugs like Tylenol or ibuprofen.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when sneezing or coughing. Do not use your hands.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
• Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
• Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
• Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.
• Get the flu shot. Although the flu shot will not protect you from COVID-19, it will help prevent the flu which has similar symptoms to this coronavirus.

General Disinfection Guidance

Non-health care settings should follow these guidelines:

• Staff should wear and use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment, such as gloves, according to existing policies and procedures, as well as following label directions for cleaning products.
• Have soap and paper towels in bathrooms at all times. Additionally, custodian and facilities staff should ensure that all handwashing sinks are in a state of good repair.
• Consider having alcohol-based hand sanitizers in common areas to encourage hand hygiene.
• Frequent hand washing, gloves and use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer by staff handling waste can support good personal hygiene practices.
• Pay special attention when cleaning to frequently touched surfaces in common areas and bathrooms. Frequently contacted items such as drinking fountains, faucet handles, door hardware, push plates and light switches are to be wiped down regularly with cleaners.
• Use regular cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., Clorox, Purell and Peroxide products). A full list of cleaners can be found on the New York State Registered Disinfectants Based on EPA List.
  o Cleaning and disinfectant products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims are recommended for use against COVID-19. These products can be identified by the following claim: “[Product name] has demonstrated effectiveness against viruses similar to COVID-19 on hard non-porous surfaces. Therefore, this product can be used against COVID-19 when used in accordance with the directions for use against [name of supporting virus] on hard, non-porous surfaces.”
  o This claim or a similar claim, will be made only through the following communications: technical literature distributed exclusively to health care facilities, physicians, nurses and public health officials, “1-800” consumer information services, social media sites and company websites (non-label related). Specific claims for “COVID-19” will not appear on the product or master label. If there are no available EPA-registered products that have an approved emerging viral pathogen claim for COVID-19, products with label claims against human coronaviruses should be used according to label instructions.
  o See additional information about EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims.

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• When cleaning vehicles, staff should pay special attention to disinfecting surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as door handles, arm rests and seatbelts, as appropriate.
• No special ventilation precautions are recommended for residential or commercial buildings. Check working windows and both supply and exhaust ventilation systems for proper operation per usual procedures.

About Face Masks

The NYC Health Department does not recommend the routine use of face masks if you are not sick. Face masks are not needed for general or routine tasks by staff — even those who have frequent interaction with the public. It is important to note that people wear face masks for many reasons, including seasonal allergies, pollution or to protect others from a common cold. In addition, some staff may be required to use either face masks or N95 respirators per organization’s protocol for reasons unrelated to the current COVID-19 outbreak. If so, such staff should use face masks or N95 respirators as usual. No coronavirus-specific precautions are recommended for interactions with the general public, including people showing no symptoms who have visited affected parts of the world.

Information About Medical Care for Staff

• Staff with symptoms (fever, cough and/or shortness of breath), should stay home and call their doctor and tell them about any travel history.
• If staff do not have a doctor or health insurance, they can visit an NYC Health + Hospitals facility. To find health care visit nychealthandhospitals.org/hospitals or call 311.
• Hospital staff will not ask about immigration status.
• Receiving health care is not a public benefit by the public charge rule.
• Strict laws protect patient confidentiality.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What do I need to know if I have an employee who recently traveled to a country with ongoing spread of coronavirus?
   People who arrived into the U.S. from China, Iran, Italy, Japan or South Korea (all are areas with ongoing spread of coronavirus as identified by the CDC) are required to stay home and self-monitor for 14 days after their last day in the area. These employees should be excused from work so that they may comply with this directive. There is no clearance process. People without symptoms are not tested for the virus.

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2. **When should employees be asked to stay home?**
   If employees, regardless of recent travel history, have symptoms of an acute respiratory illness (including cough, fever and/or shortness of breath), you should recommend that they stay home until they no longer have a fever for at least 72 hours without taking any fever-reducing medications (like Tylenol, aspirin or ibuprofen).

3. **Someone tested positive for COVID-19 at my place of business. What should my business do?**
   - There is no need to close down your business. Follow routine cleaning procedures outlined in this document under “General Disinfection Guidance.”
   - If you think you or your employees may have been exposed to COVID-19, monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.
   - If you develop symptoms (cough, fever and/or shortness of breath), stay home and contact your medical provider. If symptoms develop during business hours, place the person that is ill in a private room away from others and ask them to wear a face mask. Sick employees should be sent home immediately.

4. **What steps can we take to prevent respiratory illnesses like COVID-19 and the flu?**
   See above under “General Infection Prevention Strategies.”

5. **What if my staff have family members who have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of coronavirus?**
   Staff who were not in an [area with ongoing spread of coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/healthcare-guidance.html) as identified by the CDC should continue to go to work if their family member who traveled from one of these areas has no symptoms.

6. **Should I ask employees to wear face masks?**
   The NYC Health Department does not recommend wearing a face mask if employees are not sick. Face masks are only recommended if directed by a health care provider. People wear protective face masks for many reasons, including seasonal allergies, pollution or protecting those around them from a common cold. They should not be harassed or targeted for wearing one.

7. **What if someone comes to my business and I think they have COVID-19? Should I report them?**
   - **It is illegal** to turn someone away from your business (restaurants, stores, hospitals and other public accommodations) and refuse service to people or make them feel unwelcome because of actual or perceived race and nation of origin.
   - **It is illegal** to harm or harass a person because of their race or the country they are from. Treat all people with respect and do not single them out based on their race, ethnicity or what country they are from.

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• You do not need to report anyone who you think may have been exposed or be infected. The NYC Health Department is conducting thorough outreach and does not require assistance from the general public in identifying individuals.

8. **What can I do to help decrease fear and discrimination related to COVID-19?**
   • There is a lot of information circulating about coronavirus on social media and even in some news reporting that is not based in the facts. Stay informed and obtain information from trusted sources like the NYC Health Department, the CDC and the World Health Organization (WHO).
   • Implement good personal and public health practices to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses.
   • Avoid stigmatizing people who have recently traveled from an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.

9. **My staff and/or I are feeling stressed or harassed because of the outbreak. What can I do?**
   • Emotional reactions to stressful situations such as feeling sad, anxious or overwhelmed, or having trouble sleeping, or other symptoms of distress are normal. If you or your employees are feeling stressed or anxious, contact [NYC Well](https://nyc.gov/html/nycwell/html/home/home.shtml) at 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355) or text “WELL” to 65173. NYC Well is a confidential help line that is staffed 24/7 by trained counselors who can provide brief supportive therapy, crisis counseling and connections to behavioral health treatment and support in more than 200 languages.
   • If you or an employee is being harassed due to race, nation of origin or other identities, report discrimination or harassment to the [NYC Commission on Human Rights](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/html/oic/index.page) by calling 311 and saying “human rights.”

For the latest information on COVID-19, visit [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/html/oic/index.page) or [cdc.gov/covid19](https://www.cdc.gov/covid19).