



Coronavirus: Key Issues for Employers

As the deadly new Coronavirus, recently named COVID-19, continues to spread, employers need to be prepared for the challenges this new health issue may bring to their workplace.

Health authorities are still learning about transmissibility, severity, and other issues associated with COVID-19. [According to the CDC](#), the spread from person-to-person is most likely among close contacts (about 6 feet). Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. It is currently unknown if a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching his or her own mouth, nose, or eyes.

OSHA

While there is no specific OSHA standard covering COVID-19, workers have the right to working conditions that do not pose a risk of serious harm; and to receive information and training about workplace hazards. As such, OSHA can use the General Duty clause to cite employers if a known serious health condition is caused by the virus in the workplace. The General Duty Clause requires employers to furnish to each worker "employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm." Therefore, employers should continue to monitor the development of the coronavirus and analyze whether employees could be at actual risk of exposure at work.

Employers should take some basic steps to help prevent the spread of disease and keep employees healthy, such as the following:

- Encouraging workers to stay home when ill;
- Sending symptomatic employees home;
- Providing adequate lavatory stations and hand sanitizer;
- Educating and training employees in proper hand hygiene, cough etiquette, and social distancing techniques;
- Understanding and developing work practice and engineering controls that could provide additional protection to your employees and customers;
- Ventilating work environments properly; and
- Selecting, using, and disposing of personal protective equipment properly.

These are not comprehensive recommendations. The most important part of planning for COVID-19 is to work with your employees, as well as local and state agencies and other employers, to develop cooperative plans to maintain your operations and keep your employees and the public safe.

Other Employment Consideration

While an employer may have elevated concerns with respect to an employee who has recently returned from the Wuhan area of China or another impacted area, care should be taken that general concerns will not lead to actions directed toward an ethnic minority (employees of Chinese descent, for example). Likewise, insensitive comments or jokes aimed at workers of Chinese descent should not be tolerated.

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