Guidance for Office Workers at Offices Still Open During COVID-19

In the current COVID-19 outbreak, businesses and organizations that remain open must protect employees’ health and safety and limit the economic impact of the outbreak. Social distancing (staying at home when sick, keeping people 6 feet apart and minimizing the number of people you interact with) and hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol hand gel, and regular cleaning of high-touch surfaces are essential.

This guidance document will assist office workers at essential businesses and organizations to understand best practices in the current environment to prevent transmission of COVID-19 infection. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will provide up-to-date, reliable information on COVID-19 as the situation unfolds.

Engineering and Administrative Controls to Prevent Transmission

- Ask employees who are able to work remotely to do so.
- Substitute telephone or internet-based meetings for in-person staff meetings. If a meeting is held in person, limit the meeting to the fewest number of employees possible but not to exceed 10 employees at one time and maintaining social distancing of at least 6 feet.
- Post signage:
  - Asking people who are sick to not enter.
  - Encouraging people to cover coughs or sneezes.
  - Mandating social distancing of 6 feet for both customers and employees.
  - Mandating that all staff and any visitors wear masks.
  - Downloadable signage available [here](#)
- Provide employees access to regular handwashing with soap, hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes and ensure that common areas are cleaned on a regular basis, including between shifts.

Additions per the 4/15/2020 order by PA Secretary of Health Rachel Levine include:

- Additional cleaning protocols required upon discovery that the business has been exposed to a probable or confirmed case of COVID19.
- Employees who were in close contact with the case from the period 48 hours before symptom onset to the time at which the patient isolated must be informed.
- Ensure employees can maintain space of 6 feet from each other during their workday.
- Provide masks for employees and require employees and customers to mask while onsite, with an exception for meals.
- Limit occupancy to 50% of usual maximum.
- Schedule handwashing breaks for employees every hour.
• Provide masks for employees to wear during their time at work. Employers may approve masks obtained or made by employees in accordance with State Department of Health guidance.

• Require all staff to wear masks while at work except only:
  o As necessary for the employee to eat or drink during break times. The employee should be seated at least 6 feet from others when taking off his/her/their mask.
  o When seated alone in a private office or in a cubicle whose sides extend above the head of the employee.

• Prohibit non-essential visitors, require all visitors to wear masks while on the premises and deny entry to individuals who are not wearing masks.

• If the office remains open to the public, install sneeze guards or plastic barriers between staff and the public or take other measures to ensure social distancing of customers to employees.

• Stagger work start and stop times for employees when possible to prevent gatherings of large groups entering or leaving the premises at the same time. Stagger employee break times to reduce the number of employees on break at any given period of time to maintain social distancing.

• Provide a sufficient amount of space for employees to have breaks and meals so that social distancing can be maintained with a distance of at least 6 feet between employees. Arrange seating to have employees facing forward and not across from each other in eating and break rooms.

• Limit the number of persons in employee common areas such as locker rooms, break rooms, dining facilities, training and conference rooms so that employees can maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet between employees.

Implement cleaning protocols

• Maintain pre-existing cleaning protocols.

• In addition to maintaining pre-existing cleaning protocols, clean and disinfect high-touch areas routinely in accordance with CDC guidelines.

• Establish protocols to manage exposure to a person with probable or confirmed COVID-19, including:
  o Close off areas visited by the person with probable or confirmed COVID-19. Open outside doors and windows and use fans to increase air circulation in the area. Wait a minimum of 24 hours before beginning cleaning or disinfection. Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas and items used by the ill person (i.e. offices, bathrooms, electronic equipment, etc.), focusing on frequently touched areas. Ensure that cleaning staff is provided with appropriate PPE and guidance for cleaning and disinfecting.
  o Identify employees that were in close contact (within 6 feet for about 10 minutes) with the person with probable or confirmed COVID-19 including any employee who had contact with the case up to 48 hours prior to their symptom onset.
Promptly notify employees who were close contacts of any known exposure to COVID-19 at the business while respecting the confidentiality of the case;
- Send all employees who were close contacts of known cases home to quarantine for 14 days. If they remain asymptomatic, they may return after 14 days. If they develop symptoms, they should inform their supervisor and follow return to work instructions as above.
- Ensure that the business has enough employees to perform the above protocols effectively and in a timely manner.

Ensure that employees stay home when sick
- Employees who have symptoms (i.e. fever, cough, or shortness of breath) should notify their supervisor and stay home (see What to do if an employee has possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection, below).
- Sick employees should follow PDPH return to work guidelines as discussed above.
- Develop flexible policies for employees to stay home when they or their family members are sick, particularly:
  - Policies regarding unscheduled absences
  - Policies regarding use of sick time
  - Return to work policies
  - Paid sick time
- Suspend policies requiring physicians’ notes for extended sick leave.
- Educate employees about the availability of leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Educate employees on COVID-19 spread and preparedness
- Provide employees with links to COVID-19 information from the Philadelphia Department of Public Health and the CDC.
- Provide information to employees regarding your continuity of operations plan.
- Circulate information on respiratory etiquette and environmental cleaning procedures.
  - Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, doorknobs, elevator buttons, stairwell railings, refrigerator handles, and water fountains/coolers. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
- Provide disposable wipes so that frequently touched surfaces can be wiped down by employees before each use.
- Encourage employees to create personal or household emergency preparedness plans.
  - Include alternative childcare arrangements, where applicable.
  - Share PDPH information on COVID-19 preparation.
What to do if an employee has possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection

- Any employee with symptoms of COVID-like illness should not come to work. If symptoms occur while at work, the employee should be isolated and then sent home immediately. They should be advised to seek medical care if symptoms are severe.
- Symptoms of COVID-19 include cough, fever, shortness of breath, fatigue, chills, headache, sore throat, muscle pain, new loss of taste or smell and diarrhea.
- Employees may return to work when they meet BOTH of the following criteria:
  - at least 3 days after resolution of fever (off fever reducing medications like acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen) and improvement in respiratory symptoms
  - at least 10 days have passed since the symptoms started
- Employees who are household contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 case and do not become ill must stay home and self-isolate for 14 days after isolation has been discontinued for the ill household member (see note below re severe worker shortages in critical infrastructure).
- Employees who have had close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case in a non-household setting must stay home and self-isolate for 14 days after their last contact with the case even if they do not develop symptoms (see note below re severe worker shortages in critical infrastructure). Close contact is defined as:
  - Being within approximately 6 feet (2 meters) of a COVID-19 case for a prolonged period of time (10 minutes or longer)
  - Having direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g., being coughed on)
- Note: in the event of severe worker shortages, the CDC advises that critical infrastructure workers may be permitted to continue to work following potential exposure to COVID-19, provided they remain asymptomatic and additional precautions are implemented to protect them and the community. See CDC guidance for details on the additional monitoring needed.
- Employees who were in the same indoor environment with a COVID-19 case, but not meeting criteria for a close contact (i.e., being in a room more than 6ft away from the case) should self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days after their last contact with the case and isolate if symptoms develop.
- Employees who have had contact with someone who has been exposed to a case or possible case are not required to isolate unless that person develops symptoms or is diagnosed with COVID-19.
- People with mild illness due to suspected COVID-19 infection should stay home until at least 10 days after the onset of symptoms AND fever free for 72 hours AND respiratory symptoms are improving. They do not require testing. Please do not require proof of COVID-19 testing either to qualify for sick leave or to return to work. Testing supplies are not adequate to test all people with mild illness and a negative test may give false reassurance if it is done too soon after exposure.

Visit www.phila.gov/COVID for more information • Text COVIDPHL to 888-777 to receive updates to your phone
Call (800) 722-7112 to speak to a health care professional on the Greater Philadelphia Coronavirus Helpline
• Follow the cleaning protocols above if the employee with COVID-19 has been present in the workplace while sick or within 48 hours prior to developing symptoms.
• Note that PDPH approval is not required for re-opening after closures for cleaning.