What to Do When Someone at the Workplace Tests Positive for COVID-19

This step-by-step protocol provides guidance to employers when one or more people at the workplace tests positive for COVID-19. This protocol applies to employees as well as volunteers, contractors, or other people who work at the facility. In addition to this protocol, employers must comply with all applicable state and federal laws and any collective bargaining obligations. For non-English versions of all documents referenced in this guide, please go to Santa Clara County Public Health Business and Workplaces webpage.

When to Use this Protocol

If the person diagnosed with COVID-19 ever had symptoms, use this protocol if they were symptomatic while at work or developed symptoms within 48 hours of being at work.

If the person diagnosed with COVID-19 never had symptoms, use this protocol if they tested positive within 48 hours of being at work.

Step 1: Provide instructions to the COVID-19-positive worker

Work Exclusion & Isolation Period
Non-high-risk, non-congregate settings: The worker should be sent home immediately and instructed to isolate for 10 days from the date they tested positive AND, if symptomatic, 24 hours after resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medication and improvement in any other symptoms; (whichever is longer). The individual may return to the worksite after both of these criteria are met (10/1 rule).

Provide the COVID-19 positive worker with the Home Isolation and Quarantine Guidelines handout.

Employees are no longer considered contagious if they meet the criteria detailed in the Return to Work letter (see the Business and Workplaces webpage for more information). The County of Santa Clara discourages employers from requiring a medical note or a negative test to return to work as long as the criteria detailed are met.

Step 2: Identify all close contacts to the COVID-19-positive worker

If an employer learns that an employee has tested positive, the employer should try to determine which, if any, employees had close contact with the positive employee. A close contact is defined as someone who was within six feet from the person who tested positive for at least 15 minutes at any time beginning 2 days before the infected person had symptoms or tested positive. Close contacts include people who had 15 minutes of continuous contact with
the infected person, as well as people who had repeated short-duration interactions with the infected person. In addition, being considered a close contact does not depend on whether the contact or the infected person was wearing a face covering during their interaction.

**Maintain Confidentiality**
Employers should keep employees’ medical information confidential in accordance with federal and state laws. Do not disclose the identity of the COVID-19 positive worker in your effort to identify close contacts. Please consult with your attorney if you have any questions about applicable employment or privacy laws.

**Identify Close Contacts During the Exposure Period**
The employer should investigate and document the employee’s schedule and work location to determine: 1) the day their symptoms began (if applicable); 2) the date of their first positive test; and 3) the last day that the person diagnosed with COVID-19 was present at the workplace.

This information should then be used by the employer to identify all individuals who may have had close contact with the confirmed-positive employee during the exposure period.

The **exposure period** is defined as:

- **Start:** 2 days before the person had symptoms (or 2 days before date of first positive test for employees who are asymptomatic)
- **End:** last day the positive person was at work

Being “exposed” does not depend on whether the person exposed or the infected person was wearing a face covering during their interaction.

**Complete the Worksite Case and Contact Reporting Form**
The employer should go to the [Worksite Case and Contact Reporting Portal](#) to fill out the Worksite Case and Contact Reporting Form. The employer should gather the following information for all people who have been identified as close contacts (to be provided to the Santa Clara County Public Health Department), including any vendors/suppliers, visitors, or others who had close contact with the employee at the worksite.

- Name
- Phone number
- Address
- Language spoken (if not fluent in English)

Employers may also consider instituting a policy informing employees that if they are confirmed to have COVID-19, they will be requested to provide a list of other employees with whom they had close contact during the exposure period.
Step 3: Communicate with All Employees

Work Exclusion, Quarantine & Testing Recommendations for Close Contacts
Anyone who had close contact with the person diagnosed with COVID-19 during the exposure period (defined above) should not be allowed at the worksite and should stay at home for **10 days**, starting the last day that the person diagnosed with COVID-19 was at work.

All close contacts are recommended to be tested on Day 6 or later from last exposure if asymptomatic (and immediately if symptomatic). COVID-19 testing locations can be found on our website. Asymptomatic close contacts may discontinue quarantine after Day 10 from last exposure but should continue monitoring for symptoms for a full 14 days. Even if the test is negative, close contacts should remain in quarantine for the full 10 days. Test results, positive or negative, should be shared with the employer.

The general quarantine guidance above applies to healthcare workers under normal circumstances, and healthcare workers who have routine workplace exposures that are not high risk should continue to follow their employer’s guidance for returning to work. However, if critical staffing shortages exist, healthcare workers may follow the recommendations outlined in the latest [Updated Quarantine Guidance for COVID-19](#).

For workers who don’t get tested, they should go home until they have a negative test or a note from a doctor to explain why they did not get tested (i.e. alternative diagnosis). If an employee cannot get tested or get access to a note, then they should proceed with the 10/1 isolation protocol.

Provide the [COVID-19 Close Contact Advisory](#) to all close contacts identified.

General Advisory & Symptom Monitoring for All Other Employees
All others present at the workplace, but NOT identified as close contacts, should be advised to **self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days** after the last day that the person diagnosed with COVID-19 was at work. They may return to work, but if they develop symptoms, they should stay home (or if at work, go home immediately) and contact their healthcare provider to get testing. Everyone at the worksite should ensure they are following the business’s Social Distancing Protocol.

If the workplace is a “High-Risk Setting,” one where workers are at a high risk for exposure to COVID-19 due to frequent face-to-face interaction with members of the public and inability to maintain physical distancing at work, workers should **get tested at least every 30 days**. These “High-Risk Setting” workers include, but are not limited to, first responders, pharmacy employees, food service workers, delivery workers, public transportation operators, and grocery store clerks.
If desired, provide the COVID-19 General Exposure Advisory to all employees who were NOT identified as close contacts.

**Step 4: Report Case(s) to the Santa Clara County Public Health Department**

If a positive case is identified at your worksite, complete the worksite case and contact reporting form on the Worksite Case and Contact Reporting Portal. Under the Health Officer Order, reports must, as a matter of law, be made within four hours after the employer learns of the positive case(s). The information provided will remain confidential and does not affect immigration status. You may update the information you provide if you discover additional information after your initial report.

**Step 5: Report Any Hospitalizations or Deaths to the Local Cal/OSHA District Office**

Any serious injury, illness, or death occurring in any place of employment or in connection with any employment must be reported by the employer to the local Cal/OSHA district office immediately. For COVID-19, this includes hospitalizations and deaths among employees, even if work-relatedness is uncertain.

- Full details on what information needs to be reported ([https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/report-accident-or-injury.html](https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/report-accident-or-injury.html)), contact information for district offices ([https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/districtoffices.htm](https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/districtoffices.htm)), and the Title 8 section 342 requirement ([https://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/342.html](https://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/342.html)) are available online.

- Cal/OSHA prefers calls by phone but will also accept email reports ([caloshaaccidentreport@tel-us.com](mailto:caloshaaccidentreport@tel-us.com)).

**Step 6: Disinfection Recommendations After a Confirmed COVID-19 Case at the Workplace**

Until cleaning and disinfection are completed, close off areas visited by the ill person(s) if the person visited those areas within the last 48 hours. If safe, open outside doors and windows and use ventilating fans to increase air circulation in the area. Wait 24 hours or as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection. Using an EPA-certified cleaning agent, clean and disinfect all areas used by the ill person(s), including offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment (like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines), focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.
Continue routinely cleaning and disinfecting all high-touch areas throughout the day, following CDC guidelines. Clean visibly dirty surfaces and objects using soap and water prior to disinfection. Use an EPA-approved disinfectant product, and follow the instructions on the label for proper use, additional PPE needs, and any other special considerations when using the product.

**Step 7: Preventing Workplace COVID-19 Transmission**

**Strictly Enforce Face Covering Use**

Face coverings are now mandated in the State of California (CDPH, 2020). All persons must be instructed to wear their face covering at all times while at the workplace or performing work offsite, especially when interacting with or in a space visited by members of the public, working in a space where food is prepared or packaged, working in or walking through common areas, or in an enclosed area with others and where it is not possible to maintain 6-foot social distancing.

Face coverings are not required for workers while eating or drinking, for workers with a medical condition that prevents wearing a face covering, for communication by or with a person who is hearing impaired, or when the face covering would create a risk to the person related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

**As Appropriate, Restructure the Workplace to Better Support Social Distancing Measures**

Reconfigure, restrict, or close common areas to maintain social distancing. Minimum required social distancing measures are identified in the Social Distancing Protocol. Additional measures specific to other industries or activities are included in Mandatory Directives issued by the Health Officer.

Some basic, preliminary social distancing measures include the following:

- Maximize remote work, based on business functions. Under the Order, businesses must require all workers to work from home if they are able to perform their employer assigned work duties from home.
- For those who must remain at the workplace, maintain at least a 6-foot distance from everyone outside your household.
- Limit the number of workers allowed inside your facility at 1 worker per 250 square feet, and limit the number of customers/members of the public allowed inside your facility at a time to 1 person per 150 square feet. These density limitations are required under the Order.
- Desks and workspaces should be spaced at least six feet apart and arranged facing the same direction rather than facing each other.
- Any shared desk/work areas should be sanitized between each shift.
Use of common areas (such as conference rooms, cafeterias, and break rooms) should be minimized and avoided. Instead, individuals should be encouraged to eat meals at their desks and to join meetings virtually whenever possible. If such common areas are used, place additional limitations on the number of workers in enclosed areas to ensure at least six feet of separation between everyone in the area. Stagger personnel breaks, in compliance with wage and hour regulations, to maintain adequate social distancing. Minimize any in-person meetings, and opt for virtual meetings whenever possible; for meetings that must be in-person, arrange to ensure adequate social distancing.

**Actively Encourage Adherence to Hygiene Measures**
Actively encourage all individuals to increase hygiene measures (hand washing, avoiding contact with eyes/nose/mouth, covering coughs and sneezes), and provide frequent breaks for hand washing. Provide tissues, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes that can be easily accessed throughout the facility. Employers must ensure that hand sanitizer dispensers and handwashing facilities are always operational and stocked.

Print out and post educational materials throughout the workplace. Printable materials are available at: [https://www.sccgov.org/sites/covid19/Pages/learn-what-to-do-flyers.aspx](https://www.sccgov.org/sites/covid19/Pages/learn-what-to-do-flyers.aspx)

**Implement Routine Cleaning Measures**

**Clean**
- See the CDC guidance “Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility” for specific guidance in cleaning and disinfecting indoor and outdoor areas.
- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- All workers must wash hands regularly and be provided with frequent handwashing breaks.

**Disinfect**
- Employers should ensure that routine disinfection is conducted using one of the following:
  - EPA-registered household disinfectant, per manufacturer’s recommendations;
  - Alcohol solution with at least 60% alcohol; or
  - Diluted household bleach solutions (if appropriate for the surface)
- Routinely clean and disinfect high-touch items (door handles, handrails, light switches, telephones, keyboards, etc.) throughout the day.

**Additional Recommendations**
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks, other work tools and equipment) can be wiped down by employees before each use.
• Discourage workers from using other workers’ phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use.

**Ensure Strict Adherence to Social Distancing Protocol and Industry-Specific Directives**

All businesses are required to complete and implement a Social Distancing Protocol and submit it to the County using the [online form](#). Additional measures specific to other industries or activities are included in [Mandatory Directives](#) issued by the Health Officer.

Periodically revisit your facilities' Protocol to determine whether any measures should be updated to enhance workplace safety. Ensure that all personnel are properly trained on the Protocol and that the Protocol measures are being strictly implemented and followed.