

# Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

For the most complete and up-to-date information on coronavirus disease (COVID-19), please visit the Department of Public Health (DPH) website at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus>.

## Managing Symptoms & Concerns in the Workplace

### What do I do when my employee shows up to work ill, even if their symptoms are mild?

If one of your employees comes to work ill, they should be directed to go home. If they are experiencing difficulty breathing or cannot keep fluids down have them contact their doctor right away. Remind your employees that COVID-19 is primarily a respiratory illness, but it is not the only one. Keep in mind that we are still in the regular cold and flu season, and COVID-19 symptoms are very similar to the symptoms seen in a typical cold or flu, but it is best to be cautious.

Telework options can be offered in these situations, and supervisors should be flexible to find options, even if the normal work assignments of a particular employee do not lend themselves to telework. In an emergency, alternate work assignments can be given, and it will not violate labor MOU agreements. Options to consider include on-line training, customer service calls, paperwork, reading assignments, email assignments, etc.

### Can I require my employee to go home?

Yes, you are legally allowed to require your employee to go home if they exhibit COVID-19 symptoms or the flu.

In the event that your employee refuses to go home, you have the option to require that they be evaluated by the County's contracted occupational health clinic.

You can find all the information you need about the Ill-at-Work Procedures at <http://employee.hr.lacounty.gov/occupational-health>. Online you can find "Ill-at-Work Evaluations" located under "Health Programs" on DHR's webpage.

As a reminder, managers and supervisors are reminded not to ask employees about their medical condition(s) or other protected health information (e.g., diagnosis).

### Our employees are concerned that a co-worker who is out on leave may have exposed them to COVID-19.

#### What steps do I need to take?

Remind staff that an employee can be out or working remotely for a number of reasons and that no one should jump to the conclusion that COVID-19 is the reason for their being on a telework assignment or on-leave.

Encourage employees to refer to the brochure issued by the Department of Public Health titled "**What If I Am Exposed**" found at: <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/FAQ-Exposure.pdf> and by the Departments of Mental Health and Public Health titled "**Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks**" found at: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/Media/coronavirus>.

You can also offer an EAP referral if they are struggling with fear or anxiety related to the pandemic; our EAP providers can be reached Monday through Friday at (800) 999-7222.

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## How do I deal with visitors or customers who are exhibiting symptoms of illness, such as coughing or sneezing?

As we are in a declared state of emergency, employees or visitors who exhibit signs of fever, or symptoms of respiratory illness, should be encouraged to leave and suggested to contact their healthcare providers. If they do not have a healthcare provider, they can call 211 to find one.

However, it is important to remember that we are public servants and that we have an obligation to treat members of the public with courtesy and respect. We need to show that same courtesy and respect to each other.

Remind your employees that COVID-19 is primarily a respiratory illness, but it is not the only one. Keep in mind that we are still in the regular cold and flu season, and COVID-19 symptoms are very similar to the symptoms seen in a typical cold or flu.

You and your employees should follow social distancing guidance that is provided on the DPH website for COVID-19 at <http://www.ph.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/>. Encourage staff to maintain at least a 6-foot distance when assisting customers that are having symptoms. If your employee must be closer to the customer, advise them to minimize time spent with symptomatic customers to less than 10 minutes if possible.

Be sure to provide the public with tissues and trash receptacles. Have no-touch hand sanitizer dispensers near customer entrances if feasible.

## Is it ok for me to take someone's temperature to make sure they are not running a fever?

Generally, measuring an employee's body temperature is a medical examination. Because the CDC and state/local health authorities have acknowledged community spread of COVID-19 and issued precautions, employers may measure employees' body temperature. However, employers should be aware that some people with COVID-19 do not have a fever.

At the current time, public health is not asking that all settings screen employees prior to entering their place of work. Fever screening recommendations are currently targeted at healthcare facilities.

## One of our employees just tested positive for COVID-19. What should I do?

Instruct the patient to stay home and self-isolate. They should not return to work for at least 7 days after symptoms first started **and** 72 hours after fever has resolved without the use of fever-reducing medicines **and** symptoms have improved. Offer telework assignments if the employee is well enough to work.

**IMPORTANT:** You must protect the confidentiality of your employee. Legally, you cannot identify the employee by name,

DO NOT disclose to other staff or third persons the name or other personal or health information of the employee who tested positive for COVID-19.

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Thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment and other elements of the work environment of the employee along with frequently touched surfaces and objects such as doorknobs/pushbars, elevator buttons, restroom doors, etc. Use cleaning chemicals with EPA-approved disinfectant labels with claims against emerging viral pathogens. If the employee had been working while ill, identify those co-workers and individuals that the employee may have come into contact with while ill and advise them to quarantine themselves for 14 days. A contact is defined as those individuals who had been within 6 feet of the affected employee for greater than 10 minutes while the employee had symptoms. If you have questions, please contact your Department's COVID-19 point of contact.

**One of our employees has a “suspected” (but unconfirmed) case of COVID-19. Should I send everyone home?**  
You would follow all of the same steps outlined above for an employee who tested positive for COVID-19.

Identify those co-workers and individuals that the employee may have come into contact with while ill and advise them to quarantine themselves for 14 days. A contact is defined as *those individuals who had been within 6 feet of the affected employee for greater than 10 minutes while the employee had symptoms*. Allow flexibility for the co-workers who may be concerned to telework as well. If you have questions, please contact your Department's COVID-19 point of contact.

**One of my employees has self-reported that they came into contact with someone believed to be positive for COVID-19. What should I do?**

Review the nature of the exposure. If the contact occurred within 6 feet of the ill individual for more than 10 minutes, then the employee should stay home in quarantine for 14 days from the date of the contact. Offer telework if feasible. Also refer to the Department of Public Health's guidance which is updated periodically: <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/FAQ-Exposure.pdf>.

**One of our employees just found out that they were exposed to COVID-19 after interacting with a member of the public (or vendor, or contractor). What steps do I take?**

Review the nature of the exposure. If the contact occurred within 6 feet of the ill individual for more than 10 minutes then the employee should stay home in quarantine for 14 days from the date of the contact. Offer telework if feasible.

Check to see if other employees may also have had similar exposure to the ill individual. If so, they should be quarantined for 14 days as well.

Also refer to the Department of Public Health's guidance which is updated periodically: <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/FAQ-Exposure.pdf>.

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## Time Off & Accrued Benefits

### **If my employee has exhausted their accrued sick leave, can they use other accrued leave benefits for their absence?**

Yes, if an employee has exhausted their sick leave allocation, they may use any other accrued and available time off. Contact your Department Human Resources Manager (DHRM) for guidance on how to handle a particular situation.

### **Are employees required to use up their accrued sick leave benefits before using other accrued leave time?**

We encourage you to be flexible and allow employees to take their paid benefit time to cover any time off during this emergency. Please note that part-time sick benefits cannot be used until all full-time sick benefits have been expended. In addition, sick time benefits cannot be used to cover time off to care for others.

Please check with your DHRM for guidance.

## Personal Health & Safety

### **What should I tell employees that ask if it is safe for them to be at work because they have concerns about their health due to an underlying health issue, medical condition, or because they are pregnant?**

Encourage your employees to consult with their healthcare provider. Be mindful that the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) that restricts access to an individual's private medical information including specifics about a medical condition, diagnosis, or treatment plan (prescriptions, care plans, etc.).

The most recent CDC guidelines state the older adults (65+), pregnant women, and individuals with compromised immune systems and chronic health conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease are considered vulnerable. Priority should be given to requests to telework or stay home for individuals in this group.

If an employee disclosed that their medical condition may require a work accommodation, an IPM may be triggered.

Please initiate a discussion with your DHRM.

### **What do I do if an employee wants to wear a facemask at work?**

Unless there is a **valid business reason** to not allow an employee to wear a facemask, department management should consider allowing employees to do so.

There are many reasons employees may want to wear a facemask, such as wanting to protect others, feeling safer in the work environment, or due to cultural norms.

Take the opportunity to remind your staff member that facemasks are recommended for people who are ill to help prevent the spread of disease to others; this includes protection from regular colds and flus. The CDC does not recommend that healthy people wear a facemask.

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## Travel-related Concerns

**My employee is returning from an area that is considered high-risk for the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID--19). What do I need to consider?**

Allow the employee to self-quarantine for 14 days before returning to the workplace. Offer telework assignments, if feasible.

**I'm not sure if my employee traveled to another country while they were on vacation. Can I require them to provide information about whether they traveled to countries considered to be high-risk for exposure to coronavirus or if they were exposed to novel coronavirus?**

Yes. During a pandemic, you do not have to wait until an employee develops symptoms to ask questions about exposure during recent travel. If the CDC, the County's Department of Public Health, or state public health officials recommend that people who visit specified locations remain at home after traveling, we may ask an employee what locations they have traveled to, even if the travel was for personal reasons.

It is always a good idea to consult your County Counsel for additional guidance.

## Telework Options

**Does my employee need to complete telework training prior to being allowed to start a telework assignment?**

During the COVID-19 response period, all telework pre-requisites have been suspended. There is no requirement that you or your employee complete telework training or that you complete a Telework Agreement prior to starting a telework assignment.

See the DHR website for guidance on telework: <https://employee.hr.lacounty.gov/telework-2/>.

**My teleworker has been diagnosed with COVID-19, will they still be able to telework?**

As with any other medical condition, your employee's doctor will let them know if there are any work restrictions. If this is the case, you and your return-to-work team will support your employee in exploring reasonable accommodations, including the option to telework. If an employee feels well enough to work, telework options should be provided if feasible.

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## How are we coding teleworking for COVID-19 telework assignments?

Use the standard telework reason codes that are already available:

*TW0: Other*

*TW1: Case Management*

*TW2: Data Analysis*

*TW3: Contract Administration*

*TW4: Audit Report*

*TW5: Conducting work by telephone*

*TW6: Data Entry*

*TW7: Project-Oriented Work*

*TW8: Reading and Writing*

*TW9: Word Processing*

Be sure to closely review submitted timesheets to ensure that telework time has been coded. Be sure to check in with your teleworker to ensure that they are using the appropriate code to account for their telework assignments.

We are currently working with the Auditor-Controller to get codes specific to telework during the COVID pandemic, and we will share this information once it is available.

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## FAQ Assistance for Employees

For the most complete and up-to-date information, please visit the Department of Public Health (DPH) website at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus>.

## Personal Health & Safety

### What should I do if I think I have the COVID-19 virus or if I want information on being tested?

If you believe that you have been exposed to COVID-19 and now have symptoms, you should call your healthcare provider to tell them about your symptoms and follow their direction. Keep in mind that COVID-19 is primarily a respiratory illness, but it is not the only one, and we are still in the regular cold and flu season. COVID-19 symptoms are very similar to the symptoms seen in a typical cold or flu.

Everyone is encouraged to call their doctor before going to their office or clinic. This will allow professional medical staff to assess your condition and provide guidance. Not everyone will need to be seen by a doctor, and by following this recommended practice, you will help to reduce the strain currently faced by medical providers and clinics. All County healthcare plans offer telemedicine services that you can access 24 hours a day/7 days a week in order to get assistance. You can immediately get access to certified physicians and other health professionals on-line, on your tablet, or smartphone. Please contact member services with your healthcare plan for available options. Contact telephone numbers for telemedicine are also found on the back of your membership card.

### How do I deal with visitors or customers who are exhibiting symptoms of illness, such as coughing or sneezing?

As we are in a declared state of emergency, employees or visitors who exhibit signs of fever or symptoms of respiratory illness, should be asked to leave. If the individual is coming in for a critical service that you are providing, then practice social distancing by staying at least 6 feet away from the individual, if possible. However, it is important to remember that we are public servants and that we have an obligation to treat members of the public with courtesy and respect. We need to show that same courtesy and respect to each other.

Remember that COVID-19 is primarily a respiratory illness, but it is not the only one, and keep in mind that we are still in the regular cold and flu season. COVID-19 symptoms are very similar to the symptoms seen in a typical cold or flu.

If you are worried, speak to your supervisor.

### My co-worker was diagnosed with COVID-19. Should I get tested?

Speak to your manager about what you should do. Only those individuals who were within 6 feet of the ill employee for more than 10 minutes are considered a contact and would have to go into self-quarantine. All others should just continue to practice everyday prevention methods like hand washing and continue to follow social distancing guidelines.



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## **What should I do if I think a co-worker is sick with COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is primarily a respiratory illness, but it is not the only one. Keep in mind that we are still in the regular cold and flu season, and COVID-19 symptoms are very similar to the symptoms seen in a typical cold or flu. If you are worried about their wellbeing, or yours, speak to your supervisor.

## **Should my department provide protective supplies such as hand sanitizers, tissues, and facemasks?**

Each department has a different practice in place about providing hand sanitizer, face masks, etc. Feel free to bring your own protective/preventative supplies with you.

## **What if my job requires me to interact with individuals from high-risk areas identified by the CDC?**

A person's risk for COVID-19 depends on many factors, but none of those factors are race, ethnicity or culture. As a reminder, County employees must treat everyone with courtesy and respect. When you interact with others, be sensitive to implicit bias that might affect how you perceive and/or react to them.

## **We share a refrigerator at work. Can the virus be spread through food, including refrigerated and frozen foods?**

According to the CDC, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food.

## **Taking Time Off**

There are many reasons that you may need to leave your workplace:

- Your doctor has mandated self-quarantine. You have chosen to self-quarantine.
- Due to school closures, you need to stay at home to care for children.
- You need to stay home to take care of an ill family member.

You may use all available accrued time off to cover your absence. However, be sure to check with your immediate supervisor to find out if teleworking is an option for you. If you are able to telework, you would not have to use your accrued benefit time.

## **Medical Leave / Disability (Return to Work)**

### **Do I qualify for disability leave if I am diagnosed with COVID-19?**

A diagnosis with COVID-19 does not necessarily mean that you are disabled.

However, in the event that you are placed on disability by your doctor (for this or any other medical condition), you can apply for disability benefits. Contact your DHRM for assistance with applying for disability benefits.

### **If I am sick and absent from work for 5 days or more, do I have to bring in a doctor's note to return to work?**

No, this policy requirement has been waived for the time being. However, if you do have a doctor's note available, definitely give it to your immediate supervisor.



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## Concerns About Medical Privacy

**I want to self-quarantine because I have an underlying medical condition. Do I have to disclose my health condition or other factors that would make me more vulnerable to the COVID-19?**

No. This is considered private and personal medical information and is protected by law. All you need to share is that you have an underlying condition and that you wish to be away from the workplace.

You and your manager can discuss your options, including the option to telework if it is available.

## Telework Options

**Do I need to complete telework training prior to being allowed to telework?**

During the COVID-19 response period, all telework pre-requisites have been suspended. There is no requirement that you or your manager complete telework training or that you complete a Telework Agreement prior to starting your telework assignment.

**If I am diagnosed with COVID-19, will I be able to telework?**

If you are diagnosed with any condition, your doctor will let you know if there are any work restrictions. Your return-to-work team will support you in exploring reasonable accommodations, including the option to telework if you are issued work restrictions.

**How do I code my time if I am not at work or am teleworking due to COVID-19?**

Use the standard telework reason codes that are already available:

*TW0: Other*

*TW1: Case Management*

*TW2: Data Analysis*

*TW3: Contract Administration*

*TW4: Audit Report*

*TW5: Conducting work by telephone*

*TW6: Data Entry*

*TW7: Project-Oriented Work*

*TW8: Reading and Writing*

*TW9: Word Processing*

Consult with your immediate supervisor to ensure that you are using the appropriate code to account for your telework assignments.

We are currently working with the Auditor-Controller to get codes specific to telework during the COVID pandemic, and we will share this information once it is available.