GRIP | A BETTER HANDLE ON WORKERS' COMP

COVID for Construction Guide

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Coronaviruses and the Workplace

Coronaviruses are fairly common and don't typically affect humans. When they do, their effects are usually mild, as in the case of the common cold. However, deadlier variations have cropped up in recent years. Two examples of these evolved strains are the SARS virus of 2003 and the novel coronavirus, which was first seen in 2019. In both instances, the viruses ravaged populations they infected, illustrating why employers must stay alert to developing outbreaks.

It's the responsibility of every employer to protect employees from these and other illnesses in the workplace. Taking even small precautions could save an organization countless hours of lost productivity.

Diagnosing a Coronavirus

More dangerous coronavirus strains elicit similar symptoms to the cold or flu (such as fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, or headache), so identifying the virus can be difficult. Employees suffering with flu-like symptoms, especially if they recently traveled to a country experiencing a coronavirus outbreak, should call their doctor immediately. Doctors typically request initial phone calls, rather than visits, to properly prepare for a coronavirus patient.

Precautions for the Workplace

Employers should protect against coronaviruses much like they protect against the flu: Offer on-site flu shots, stock cleaning wipes and hand sanitizer, and educate employees on prevention methods. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, individuals should take the following precautions to avoid person-to-person spreading of a coronavirus:

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with those who are sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water.

Unfortunately, there is no known vaccine for a human-contracted coronavirus, making precaution that much more critical.

Avoiding Potential Discrimination

As with any workplace policy, employers should be wary of inadvertent discrimination when it comes to a coronavirus prevention policy (e.g., ordering employees home when they seem sick). Just because an employee recently traveled to China and coughed in the elevator doesn't mean an employer can send them home.

Whatever policy a company decides to pursue, it must be equally enforced. Discriminating against employees—or asking illegal health-related questions—can introduce a host of legal concerns.

Summary

Employee education is one of the best lines of defense for a workplace. General preventive health practices, like washing hands, can safeguard workers even when they're at home.

Remind employees to keep up their hygiene and share their knowledge of coronavirus symptoms so they know what to look out for. Together, you and your employees can stay safe, healthy and productive.

Click here for updates on the coronavirus.

COVID-19 Prevention Tips for Builders

Over the past few weeks, the United States has seen a growing number in COVID-19 cases. Washington state is currently ground zero for the outbreak. New knowledge, new regulations, and new efforts to treat and find a vaccine for the virus occur on an almost daily basis. So, how does all this effect the construction industry?

Due to the fact that it's difficult if not impossible to know about the health or exposures of whoever's coming and going to a jobsite, whether that jobsite be a new home construction lot or an existing home in need of handyman repairs or remodeling, there are health risks to workers. Employees and employers are at still further risk due to continued transmission concerns as workers travel from jobsite to jobsite. For more detailed information of risks to construction, review the following article: 6 impacts to construction due to COVID-19.

To be as preventative as possible, here are tips for jobsites

In general, for any workplace, ask employees and anyone else on your job site to:

- Stay home if they feel unwell, have a cough or a fever
- Cover their cough or sneeze with something other than their hand
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, mouth
- Throw all tissues into designated trash can
- Refrain from sharing drinks and food
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap prior to eating and frequently throughout the day
- Post hygiene posters in common areas, job shacks, and portable toilets

More specific to construction and COVID-19:

- Every day for each person on the job site, take temperature and observe for cough or breathing difficulty. Do not allow anybody with an above normal temperature, or presenting cough or difficulty breathing to remain on site.
- Provide soap, water, disposable hand towels on-site and encourage workers to wash hands regularly.
- Provide gloves, hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes for all personnel arriving on-site
- Implement a "No hand-shaking policy"
- Require "social distancing"
    - No meetings of more than 10 people
    - Participants should keep at least 6 feet apart
    - Discourage those of higher risk of severe illness from attending in-person meetings
    - Conduct health checks, including temperature measurement and observation for cough or respiratory difficulty
- Disinfect high touch shared areas including the following multiple times per day:
    - Bathroom facilities, including portable toilets multiples times per day.
    - Shared tools, including power/hand tools, iPad, phones
    - Shared scaffolding
    - Rest areas
    - Crew vehicles, especially:
        - Door handles
        - Steering wheel and related components
        - Gear or stick shift
- Reduce all non-essential business travel
- Conduct bid walks/inspections via video, such as Skype
- Remind crews not to share water bottles, cups, etc.
- Hold planning meetings, toolbox safety meetings via teleconference
- Provide time for employees to sanitize and wipe down power/hand tools/iPad/phones at least daily
- Weather permitting, conduct meetings outdoors

- Do not permit contact with someone that has been infected with COVID-19
- Stagger shift hours between trades to prevent large gatherings on projects
- Educate employees on how to protect themselves and to prevent the spread
- Be mindful of home visits. If possible, communicate with clients via text, email, or phone
- Be mindful of your subs. Communication is very key. All employees and subs need to understand the severity. One crew member could spread it to the entire project.

For more information checkout COVID-19 Construction Industry: Tips for Employers Podcast.

COVID-19 Protocols for Builders

If you think you or someone around you have been exposed to laboratory-confirmed COVID-19, follow the steps below to monitor your health.

How do I know if I was exposed?

You have likely been exposed if any of the following conditions have occurred:

- Living in the same household as a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- Caring for a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- Being within 6 feet of a person diagnosed with COVID-19 for 10 minutes or more
- Being in direct contact with secretions from a person diagnosed with COVID-19

What should I do if I am a close contact to someone with COVID-19?

Assuming excellent hygiene practices, if you have been in close contact with a sick person with COVID-19, you are still considered to be at low risk for infection. You may continue to go to work, but you should monitor your health for 14-days and stay away from others if you become symptomatic (fever, cough, shortness of breath).

What should I do if I experience symptoms of COVID-19?

If you get sick with fever, cough or shortness of breath, you should stay home and remain away from people.

If something puts you at higher risk of severe illness, such as you are over the age of 60, are pregnant, have a compromised immune system, or underlying medical conditions, you should contact your physician.

If you are not at higher risk of severe illness, but want medical advice, you may call your healthcare provider and tell them that you are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19. Your healthcare provider will help you determine if you need to be evaluated in person.

There are currently no medications to treat COVID-19.

If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that you may have been exposed to COVID-19. If possible, put on a facemask before emergency medical services arrive.

For updates on COVID-19 click here.

COVID-19 and OSHA Recordkeeping

Q: Must employers record cases of COVID-19 on their OSHA 300 Logs?

A: OSHA requires certain employers to record work-related injuries and illnesses that meet certain severity criteria on the OSHA 300 Log, as well as complete the OSHA Form 301 equivalent or incident report form.

Is COVID-19 Considered an "Illness" under OSHA's Recordkeeping Rules?

OSHA's recordkeeping rules define a workplace illness as "an abnormal condition or disorder." Workplace illnesses include "both acute and chronic illnesses, such as, but not limited to, a skin disease, respiratory disorder, or poisoning." Despite this broad definition, OSHA has essentially excluded from coverage cases of the common cold or the seasonal flu. Nonetheless, OSHA determined that COVID-19 should *not* be excluded from coverage. Thus, OSHA considers COVID-19 an "illness" under the rule. However, **OSHA has stated that only confirmed cases of COVID-19 should be considered an illness under the rule**. Therefore, if an employee simply comes to work with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (but not a confirmed diagnosis), recordability would not be required at that time.

When is a COVID-19 Case Recordable?

If an employee has a confirmed case of COVID-19, the employer must assess whether the case was "work-related," and, if so, whether it met the rule's additional recordability criteria (i.e., did it result in a fatality, days away from work, restricted duty, or medical treatment beyond first aid?). Given current protocols for treating COVID-19, it is likely the additional severity criteria will be met for any confirmed case, as affected persons are instructed to self-quarantine and stay home. The primary issue for employers then becomes whether a particular illness is "work-related."

A particular illness is work-related if an event or exposure in the work environment either caused or contributed to the resulting condition or significantly aggravated a pre-existing illness. Work-relatedness is presumed for illnesses that result from events or exposures in the work environment, unless certain exceptions apply. One of those exceptions is that the illness involves signs or symptoms that surface at work but result solely from a non-work-related event or exposure that occurs outside of the work environment. Thus, if an employee develops COVID-19 solely from an exposure outside of the work environment, it would not be work-related, and thus not recordable.

The employer's assessment should consider the work environment itself, the type of work performed, risk of person-to-person transmission given the work environment, and other factors such as community spread. Healthcare work environments, where job activities are more likely to result in person-to-person exposure, would present a more likely scenario of work-relatedness than non-healthcare settings. Because each work environment is different, employers must conduct an individualized assessment when a confirmed case of COVID-19 presents. For more information on recordkeeping click here.

Washington State COVID-19 Resources

Washington Department of Health Call Center
(800) 525-0127

COVID-19 Dashboard
John Hopkins COVID-19 Dashboard

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Frequently Asked Questions CDC

Travelers Guide

Business Guide

Coronavirus.GOV

Washington State Health Departments
King County Health

Snohomish Health District

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department

Map of Local Health Departments in Washington

Washington State Department of Health

Workplace and Employer Resources & Recommendations

Washington State Updates on virus: updated at 11am daily

World Health Organization Resources
COVID-19 Resource Page

WHO Coronavirus Online Training

Resources
Hand Hygiene Posters

Coughing and Sneezing Etiquette

Hand Washing English

Hand Washing Spanish

Scrub Club

Risk Assessment

 OSHA Guidance

Local New Stations
KOMO 4 Resource Page

KING 5 News

Employment Security Department Resources
Employment Security Department Q&A COVID-19

COVID-19 Scenarios & Benefits

Twitter Feeds

KOMO 4 News @komonews

KING 5 News @KING5Seattle

Centers for Disease Control @cdc.gov

WA Emergency Management @waEMD

UW Virology @UWVirology

World Health Organization (WHO) @WHO

National Guard @USNational Guard

The FAA @FAANews

Washington State DOT @wsdot

Nextstrain @nextstrain

FEMA Region 10 @FEMARegion10

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department @TPCHD

TransportationGov @USDOT

US Food Safety @foodsafeguru

Labor & Industries @lniwa