

2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQ for Businesses

Updated: 3/10/2020

Q: What is 2019 Novel Coronavirus?

A: 2019 Novel Coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a new respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. The virus has now been detected in multiple locations internationally, including in the United States.

Q: How does the virus spread?

A: Many of the initial patients in the outbreak had a link to a large seafood and live animal market in Wuhan, China, suggesting animal-to-person spread. However, the virus is now being spread person-to-person. Most often, spread from person-to-person happens among close contacts (about 6 feet), mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Q: Is COVID-19 the same as other coronaviruses?

A: It is important to understand that there are seven different coronaviruses known to infect humans. Four of the seven coronaviruses are very common, cause milder symptoms (similar to the common cold), and most people will be infected with at least one of these in their lifetime. The other three of the seven coronaviruses are rare and can cause more severe illness; these include the COVID-19.

Q: Is there a risk for COVID-19 from products or packages shipped from China?

A: People receiving imported goods from China are not at risk of contracting COVID-19. Coronaviruses do not survive long on objects such as letters or packages.

Q: We have employees scheduled to travel internationally. Should they go?

A: CDC provides a list of destinations where travel notices have been issued. These travel notices are based on the potential high risks involved with traveling to a certain area. Travelers should avoid all nonessential travel to destinations with a level 3 travel notice. Older adults and those with chronic medical conditions should talk to their healthcare provider and consider postponing travel to destinations with a level 2 travel notice. A list of destinations with travel notices is available [here](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>).

Q: What if an employee recently returned from travel to China or Iran?

A: Individuals returning to the U.S. from the People's Republic of China or Iran may require symptom monitoring and home-quarantine, as directed by state and local public health officials. Note: this does not include travel from the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, or the island of Taiwan. Individuals with recent travel to a COVID-19 affected area for which a Level 3 or Level 2 Travel Health Notice has been issued should voluntarily self-isolate for 14 days after returning. Self-isolation means staying home the majority of the time, not going to public areas, using public transportation, or attending large gatherings. Individuals should watch for fever and cough or difficulty breathing. If they develop either of these in the 14 days after returning, they should call ahead to their doctor and tell them about their recent travel and symptoms. As always, it is recommended individuals ill with any infectious disease stay home while ill to prevent spread to others.

Q: What if an employee has a spouse or other close contact with recent travel to COVID-19 affected area, even though the employee did not travel?

A: Contacts of recent travelers to a COVID-19 affected areas who did not travel are free to go to work, school and conduct normal, daily activities. In the event a case of COVID-19 is identified in Iowa, contacts of the case will be evaluated for risk by public health and potentially monitored, isolated, or tested, per CDC guidance.

Q: What is the risk of the COVID-19 to lowans? Are certain groups of people more likely to be infected with COVID-19 than others?

A: Currently, the risk for COVID-19 is associated with recent travel to China or Iran, not race or country of origin. Overall, the COVID-19 risk to lowans remains low at this time.

Q: What can employers do to reduce the risk of spread of respiratory illness within the workplace?

A: CDC recommends the following as best practices for reducing the spread of illness in the workplace:

- **Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:**
 - Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g., cough suppressants).
 - Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance, and that employees are aware of these policies.
 - Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
 - Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work.
 - Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member.
- **Separate sick employees:**
 - CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e., cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available).
- **Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all employees:**
 - Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and [hand hygiene](#) at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
 - Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
 - Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
 - Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.
- **Perform routine environmental cleaning:**
 - Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
 - Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

Q: Who should I call if I have questions?

A: Please contact 211