



Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): Guidance for Businesses and Non-Health Care Settings

This document provides businesses and other non-health care settings with recommendations on how to help slow person-to-person transmission of COVID-19. This guidance may be updated as the situation is rapidly changing and new information becomes available.

Text “COVID” to 692-692 for the latest information or visit nyc.gov/coronavirus.

2019 Novel Coronavirus

Health officials are still learning about the spread and severity of a novel (new) coronavirus. The infection, called COVID-19, can be spread from person to person between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Separate Facts From Fear and Guard Against Stigma

A lot of information about coronavirus on social media and even in some news reports is not based on facts. Leaders in non-health care settings can help prevent the stigmatization or targeting of one group of people by proactively sharing the messages found in this document. The outbreak is absolutely no excuse to spread racism and discrimination. Leaders should encourage that staff stay informed, remain vigilant and take care of each other. For more information, visit nyc.gov/coronavirus.

Social Distancing

Non-health care settings can consider the following measures to support social distancing:

- Allow employees to telecommute if the job allows.
- Create staggered work hours. For example, instead of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., consider changing some work hours to 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. or 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Make work schedules flexible.
- Inform employees of paid sick leave policies.
- Emphasize that staff should stay home if sick and consider relaxing leave policies to accommodate staff following guidance to stay home until well.
- Encourage staff to help reduce overcrowding on public transportation:
 - Walk or bike to work, if they can.
 - When taking the subway, if the train is too packed, be patient and wait for the next one.

People at Higher Risk

- People over 50 years of age or who have underlying health conditions (lung disease, heart disease, cancer, diabetes and weakened immune systems) are most at risk for severe complications.
- People who are most at risk of severe illness should not attend large gatherings where they will be in close contact with others.

Creating an Outbreak Response Plan

- Review human resources policies and practices. Make sure they are consistent with current public health recommendations and state and federal workplace laws.
- Identify critical job roles and functions. Plan out business operations with less staff or interruptions in functions. Consider cross-training personnel to perform essential functions.
- Plan communication strategies with staff and business partners to share information and updates, and to reduce fear and misinformation.
- If you have more than one business location, allow your local managers to take appropriate actions based on the conditions in each location. Outline appropriate actions in your outbreak response plan.
- Share and discuss the outbreak response plan with your employees. Allow them to provide feedback and address any gaps in the plan.
- Reach out to other businesses in your community, chambers of commerce, associations and networks to create a unified plan.

Infection Prevention Strategies

Good personal hygiene practices remain the best method for slowing the spread of COVID-19. Non-health care settings should encourage staff do the following to prevent infection:

- Stay home if sick:
 - If you are experiencing cold or flu-like symptoms, **stay home**. Call your employer and let them know. If you don't feel better after three to four days, seek care from your doctor, but call ahead.
 - Do not go back to work until you have been fever-free for 72 hours without the use of fever-reducing drugs like Tylenol or ibuprofen.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when sneezing or coughing. Do not use your hands.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

- Avoid close contact (being within about 6 feet) with people who are sick.
- Do not shake hands. Instead, wave or elbow bump.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.
- Get the flu shot. Although the flu shot will not protect you from COVID-19, it will help prevent the flu which has similar symptoms to this coronavirus.

Disinfection Guidance

Cleaning alone does not kill germs, but it decreases the number of germs and therefore reduces the risk of spreading infection. Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces by using chemicals after cleaning.

Non-health care settings should follow these guidelines for disinfecting:

- Staff should wear and use appropriate personal protective equipment. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all products.
- Hand washing sinks should have clean running water, soap and paper towels at all times.
 - Wash your hands using clean running water (warm or cold), apply soap, scrub for at least 20 seconds, rinse your hands under clean running water, and dry hands with a clean towel or air dry.
 - Hand washing posters are available in 22 languages at: [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.nyc.gov/coronavirus) Place alcohol-based hand sanitizers in common areas to encourage hand hygiene.
- After handling trash, staff should wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Frequently touched surfaces such as drinking fountains, faucet handles, door hardware, elevator buttons and light switches, are to be wiped down daily with a disinfectant.
- When cleaning vehicles, staff should pay special attention to disinfecting surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as door handles, arm rests and seatbelts.
- When cleaning workspaces, cubicles, and other office areas, pay special attention to disinfecting surfaces and objects such as desks, chairs, keyboards, phones, printers and other common areas.
- Use regular disinfection products (e.g., Clorox, Purell, and Peroxide products). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, use of personal protective equipment).
 - New York State registered disinfectants based on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) list can be found by visiting http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/materials_minerals_pdf/covid19.pdf
- No special ventilation precautions are recommended for residential or commercial buildings.

About Face Masks

The NYC Health Department does not recommend the routine use of face masks if you are not sick. Face masks are not needed for general or routine tasks by staff — even those who have frequent interaction with the public. People wear face masks for many reasons, including seasonal allergies, pollution or to protect others from a common cold. In addition, some staff may be required to use either face masks or N95



respirators per their organization's protocol for reasons unrelated to the current COVID-19 outbreak. If so, staff should use face masks or N95 respirators as usual.

No coronavirus-specific precautions are recommended for interactions with the general public.

Information About Medical Care for Staff

- Staff with symptoms (fever, cough or shortness of breath), should stay home and call their doctor and tell them about any travel history.
- If staff do not have a doctor or health insurance, they can visit an NYC Health + Hospitals facility. To find health care, visit nychealthandhospitals.org/hospitals or call **311**.
- Hospital staff will not ask about immigration status.
- Receiving health care is not a public benefit by the public charge rule.
- Strict laws protect patient confidentiality.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What do I need to know if I have an employee who recently traveled to a country with ongoing spread of coronavirus?

People who arrived into the U.S. from [areas with ongoing spread of coronavirus](#) are required to stay home and self-monitor for 14 days after their last day in the area. These employees should be excused from work so that they may comply with this directive. There is no clearance process.

2. When should employees be asked to stay home?

If employees, regardless of recent travel history, have symptoms of an acute respiratory illness including cough, fever or shortness of breath, you should recommend that they stay home until they no longer have a fever for at least 72 hours without taking any fever-reducing medications (such as Tylenol, aspirin or ibuprofen).

3. Someone tested positive for COVID-19 at my place of business. What should my business do?

- There is no need to close down your business. Follow routine cleaning procedures outlined in this document under "General Disinfection Guidance."
- If you think you or your employees may have been exposed to COVID-19, monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.
- If you or your employees develop symptoms (cough, fever or shortness of breath), stay home and contact your medical provider. If symptoms develop during business hours, place the person that is ill in a private room away from others and ask them to wear a face mask. Sick employees should be sent home immediately.

4. What if my staff have family members who have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of coronavirus?

Staff who were **not** in an [area with ongoing spread of coronavirus](#) as identified by the CDC should continue to go to work if their family member who traveled from one of these areas has **no** symptoms.

5. Should I ask employees to wear face masks?

The NYC Health Department does **not** recommend wearing a face mask if employees are not sick. Face masks are only recommended if directed by a health care provider.

6. What if someone comes to my business and I think they have COVID-19? Should I report them?

- No. You do not need to report anyone who you think may have been exposed or be infected. The NYC Health Department is conducting thorough outreach and does not require assistance from the general public in identifying individuals.

7. My staff and I are feeling stressed or harassed because of the outbreak. What can I do?

- Emotional reactions to stressful situations such as feeling sad, anxious or overwhelmed, or having trouble sleeping, or other symptoms of distress are normal. If you or your employees are feeling stressed or anxious, contact [NYC Well](#) at 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355) or text “WELL” to 65173. NYC Well is a confidential help line that is staffed 24/7 by trained counselors who can provide brief supportive therapy, crisis counseling and connections to behavioral health treatment and support in more than 200 languages.
- If you or an employee is being harassed due to race, nation of origin or other identities, report discrimination or harassment to the [NYC Commission on Human Rights](#) by calling **311** and saying “human rights.”

For the latest information on COVID-19, visit nyc.gov/coronavirus or cdc.gov/covid19.