

2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Guidance for Businesses

Stanislaus County Health Services Agency – Public Health Division

Updated on 3.4.2020

Dear Partners,

Stanislaus County Health Services Agency – Public Health Division is offering this resource to assist you in preventing the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and to help you begin to prepare in the event we have case. We understand that many are concerned about this new Coronavirus and unfortunately, there are a lot of misinformation. With this document, we will provide an overview of the latest information on the virus, share best practices for preventing the spread of disease, and tips on how to plan and prepare in case there is a community transmission.

This information should help provide guidance and understanding of COVID-19, how to prevent the spread, and ways to prepare for a possible community transmission. It is based on the directives from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and what is currently known about the transmission and severity of COVID-19. For More information and tips on how you can plan and prepare, refer to [CDC's Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease](#).

What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus, and we are learning more about it every day. Diseases from COVID-19 in people typically cause mild to moderate illness. Symptoms are very similar to the flu, including:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

In some cases, COVID-19 can cause more severe respiratory illness. There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. At this point, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes it. **Stopping transmission (spread) of the virus through everyday practices is the best way to keep people healthy.** Updated local information on COVID-19 is available at [Stanislaus County Health Services Agency website](#).

Like other respiratory illnesses, such as flu, human coronaviruses most commonly spread to others from an infected person through:

- Coughing and sneezing
- Close personal contact, such as caring for an infected person
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands

COVID-19 is new, and we are learning more each day about how it spreads and how long it takes for people to become sick. As information becomes available, we will keep you informed.

Do not assume that someone is at risk for coronavirus disease based on their race/ethnicity or country of origin. Do not show prejudice to Stanislaus County residents of Asian descent or assume that someone of Asian descent is more likely to have COVID-19. Do not discriminate against people wearing a facemask or assume that they are ill. People wear masks for a variety of health and cultural reasons. For more information on this subject, please review the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's 2009 Pandemic Preparedness in the workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (at present COVID-19 has not been declared a pandemic).

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What preventive measures can be taken to help reduce the spread of respiratory viruses, like COVID-19?

Public Health recommends that employers increase education on respiratory hygiene at their facilities. As with any other respiratory illnesses, there are steps that everyone can take daily to reduce the risk of getting sick or infecting others:

- Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
 - It is especially important to wash your hands:
 - Before, during, and after you prepare food
 - Before you eat and after you use the bathroom
 - After handling cash
 - More frequently when someone in your house is sick
 - Before/after smoking/vaping
 - Before/after using public computers
- Using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- Covering your coughs and sneezes with your arm
- Frequent cleaning of doorknobs, light switches, and other commonly touched areas with disinfectant wipes
- Avoiding contact with people who are ill
- Staying away from work and other people if you become sick with respiratory symptoms like fever and cough
- Facemasks are most effective when used appropriately by health care workers and people who are ill
- Get a flu shot – it's not too late to be protected against influenza

What can businesses do to prepare for a community transmission?

Recommended strategies for employers to consider now:

- **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 (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater).
 - Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
 - **Consider the use of telecommuting, flexible scheduling, or other non-traditional locations for employees to perform work where possible**
 - **Communicate expectations and requirements to supervisors and make sure they understand their role in regard to sick leave policies and practices.**
 - Consider not requiring a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
 - Employers can consider flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.

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- **Emphasize 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.
 - Recommend 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.
 - Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.
- **Increase routine environmental cleaning procedures:**
 - Clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs **regularly**
 - Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label
 - No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time
 - Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use
- **Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps:**
 - Check the [CDC's Traveler's Health Notices](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. Specific travel information for travelers going to and returning from China, and information for aircrew, can be found at on the [CDC website](#).

How can businesses plan and prepare in case there is an exposure to COVID-19?

All employers need to consider how best to decrease the spread of acute respiratory illness and lower the impact of COVID-19 in their workplace in the event of an outbreak in the community. They should identify and communicate their objectives, which may include one or more of the following:

- a) reducing transmission among staff,
- b) protecting people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications,
- c) maintaining business operations,
- d) minimizing adverse effects on other entities in their supply chains,
- e) providing correct and current information to employees minimizing the spread of anxiety and panic, and
- f) consulting with human resources staff and legal counsel to make thoughtful employment-related decisions related to COVID-19

OSHA has more information on how to [protect workers from potential exposures](#) to COVID-19. Please review human resources policies to make sure that policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are consistent with existing state and federal workplace laws.

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All employers should be ready to [implement strategies](#) to protect their workforce from COVID-19 while ensuring continuity of operations. During a COVID-19 outbreak, all sick employees should stay home and away from the workplace, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene should be encouraged, and routine cleaning of commonly touched surfaces should be performed regularly.

Do business events need to be canceled?

At this time, there is no need to cancel business or social events. There is no current threat to the general public in our community, and there are no restrictions on public gatherings. Remind and support employees that part of good health hygiene is staying home from business-related events and other social events when they are ill.

How is Public Health implementing the directives and how will businesses be informed?

Local business organizations will be informed by Public Health if there is an identified case of COVID-19 in their school community that resulted in exposures at the school. Public Health staff will work with the designated staff from the business to identify who was in contact with the case and to begin the process to track and monitor contacts. **Public Health will work with businesses to develop messaging for communication in case there is an exposure.**

Who do I Contact for more information?

For most up-to-date guidelines on COVID-19, please visit [CDC's Coronavirus Website](#)
For local information, please call **(209) 558-7535**

