

# COVID-19

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Responding to COVID-19 in the Workplace

### Recent Updates:

1/13/21: Updated to reflect new policy requiring quarantine for 10 days and self-check for symptoms from Day 11 to Day 14 after known exposure to COVID-19 or after travel into Los Angeles.

As COVID-19 cases are increasing in Los Angeles County, people should stay home and avoid interacting with others. Many essential workers do still need to go into work, however, putting them at risk of catching and spreading COVID-19. Employers need to be prepared to respond when a case of COVID-19 is identified or when there is a possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace.

A case is a person who has a positive viral (swab or saliva) test for COVID-19 or has been told by a doctor that they have COVID-19. Employers should have a plan in place for when a case is reported among staff. The plan should include sending the case/s home to self-isolate as well as sending home anyone who has had close contact with a case or cases to self-quarantine. As part of the plan, the employer should have a process for assuring that all quarantined employees have a way to get tested, so the employer can find out how much spread there is in the workplace and how much risk there is to other employees or visitors.

### Workplace Prevention

The best way to avoid spread is to assure that everyone in the workplace follows basic rules for prevention:

- Physical distancing (employees, customers, and visitors all keep at least 6 feet away from each other, even when having conversations)
- Required [face coverings](#) for all employees, customers and visitors
- Promotion of frequent hand washing (this means restrooms must have enough soap, paper towels and other supplies) and employees must have time for handwashing
- Regular cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces that are touched often
- Making sure HVAC systems are in good working order and increasing flow, where possible. (See guidance on [ventilation](#) for more info.)
- Sick leave policies that allow employees to stay home when sick and to care for a sick household member(s) without risk of job loss or reduced hours. Make sure employees know about these policies.
- Symptom checks before employees enter the workplace

### When there is a case or someone is exposed at the workplace

If an employee becomes sick or has had contact with a case (as defined above), that person must be sent home right away to self-isolate if they are infected or to quarantine if they have been exposed. As soon as a supervisor hears that someone is sick or has been exposed they should use an identified space to separate the person who is a case or who has been exposed from other staff. This means having a place for the person to wait if needed until they are able to leave the site and return home. In addition:

- The person should have a mask on at all times
- If the person is sick enough to need care, others should be masked, should limit how long they stay close to the person, and should wear other protective personal equipment (gloves, a gown) if needed and available.

All employers should follow LAC DPH [business re-opening checklists](#) to prevent spread of COVID-19 in their worksite. In most situations, these measures can prevent or slow further spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.



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### Contact Investigation

Once a case is identified among employees, the employer should work to identify all close contacts (both employees and anyone else who spent time at the site) who were exposed to the case during the infectious period.

- A case is infectious from 2 days before their symptoms first started until their isolation ends (see [Home Isolation Instructions](#) for People with COVID-19).
- A person who does not have any symptoms but has had a positive COVID-19 test is considered to be infectious from 2 days before their test until 10 days after their test.

A close contact is anyone at the workplace who was near the case while they were infectious:

- Within 6 feet of the case for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, or
- Contact with the case's body fluids and/or secretions, for example, being coughed or sneezed on, sharing of a drink or food utensils.

Anyone who has had close contact with a case must quarantine at home for 10 days. Their quarantine can end after Day 10 if no symptoms have developed and if from Day 11 through Day 14, they monitor their health and are extra careful with regular COVID-19 precautions. All close contacts to a case are urged to test for COVID-19. Staff who must isolate or quarantine that cannot work from home should be given paid sick leave.

Note that quarantine for 10 days is also required for any staff person who traveled into Los Angeles County from anywhere outside Southern California whether they are a resident returning home or a new arrival. An employee who comes to work after travel should be instructed to return home to follow the rules for quarantine described just above. This rule applies whether or not the person has any symptoms of COVID-19 or any knowledge that they have been exposed to someone sick. See [Health Officer Travel Order](#) and FAQs for details related to the travel quarantine.

### Targeted Testing

Targeted testing can be used to assess spread after one or more cases has been identified at a workplace. By testing people who worked or had a connection to the case or cases, an employer can find out how far spread has gone in the workplace. Note that if targeted testing identifies a second case, a new investigation has to be started around the new case to see if there are more areas of spread.

### Testing Resources

- Employees with insurance should call their doctor to get tested and then report results to the employer.
- Employees with no insurance or whose doctors cannot provide testing, can visit [covid19.lacounty.gov/testing](https://covid19.lacounty.gov/testing) or call 2-1-1 for help finding a free testing site. Results from these tests must be reported to the employer.
- In large workplaces, Employee Health may be able to provide the testing or bring in a private testing company.
- Wherever testing of close contacts occurs, employees must report results to the employer. This allows the employer to carry out additional cycles of contact identification, quarantine and testing if a close contact of the original case tests positive.

### Role of Targeted Testing

It is important to know what targeted testing can and cannot do and how it should affect case management.

Targeted testing may help:

- Identify asymptomatic COVID-positive employees among those who are known or believed to have had contact with a case so that further spread can be limited or avoided.
- Targeted testing does NOT:
- Get rid of the need to investigate to see who has had contact with a case so that close contacts can be quarantined.



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- Give an exact picture of who was infected by the case. Testing tells you about a single point in time. A person may test negative a few days after having close contact with a case and become ill on Day 5 or 6 after contact. This means any close contacts will need to quarantine for the full 10-day period plus monitor their health while following precautions (wearing a mask, physical distancing, and hand washing) for 4 more days even if their test is negative.
- If there are three or more laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases identified at a workplace, the employer should report the cluster to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health at 1-888-397-3993.

### Return to Work

If a sick employee who is sent home with a fever or other symptoms that could be COVID-19, who tests negative on a COVID-19 test or is told by their doctor that they do not have COVID-19, may return to work 24 hours after their fever has gone away without the use of fever-reducing medications and their symptoms have improved.

If they fail to get tested or be seen by a doctor, they must stay home in isolation for at least 10 full days from the start of their symptoms and 24 hours after they are fever-free without fever-reducing medications and their symptoms have improved. If they are still sick on Day 10, they must continue to stay home under their symptoms have improved and they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the help of any fever-reducing medication.

Cases can return to work after their isolation ends. Contacts and people who have traveled may return after their quarantine ends as long as no symptoms developed while they were out. Staff who have completed the required isolation or quarantine period can return to work and resume usual activities. A letter from Public Health or a negative COVID-19 test is not needed for staff to return to work.

### Outbreak Response

If a cluster occurs at a worksite, LAC DPH will begin a cluster response. A cluster is defined as 3 or more cases of COVID-19 among people who may have had some contact at work. The cluster response includes providing infection control guidance and recommendations, technical support, and site-specific control measures. A public health case manager will be assigned to the cluster investigation to help guide the worksite response.

### Summary

With broad community spread of COVID-19, employers should act as if everyone in the workplace could be infected with COVID-19 and take responsibility for avoiding spread. This means ensuring that everyone wears a face covering and that employees keep at least 6 feet apart. The number of people in the workplace should be limited and cleaning and hand hygiene must be followed. Contact LAC DPH to manage clusters when they occur. Targeted testing of asymptomatic close contacts in the workplace is a recommended tool for employers to use to assess if additional workplace exposures may have occurred.

### Additional Information

- COVID-19 FAQs for Managers <http://www.ph.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/business/FAQ-Managers.pdf>
- Home quarantine instructions for close contacts to COVID-19 [ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine](http://ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine)
- Home isolation instructions for people with COVID-19 [ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation](http://ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation)

See the LAC DPH COVID-19 [website](#) for additional resources related to COVID-19.

