

Coronavirus and Workplace Preparedness

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(Note: This is Part 1 in a series of alerts for employers concerning the coronavirus focusing on being prepared in the workplace. Check back for additional alerts coming soon.)

With Governor Tom Wolf confirming Pennsylvania's first two presumed cases of COVID-19 - commonly dubbed coronavirus - employers should be taking precautionary measures now to protect their employees and business.

While [the cases in Delaware County outside Philadelphia and Wayne County in northeastern Pennsylvania](#) were not community spread - both had recently traveled to areas where the virus is present - the time is optimal for businesses to be prepared.

First, stay informed, and follow the advice of federal, state and local health officials. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [maintains an updated web page on the Coronavirus](#), with helpful guidance and resources for employers.

Second, consider these CDC recommended strategies for employers to use 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 or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a 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). Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance. Make sure 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 health care provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as health care provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- Employers should maintain 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.

Separate sick employees.

The CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms - 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 as well as 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.

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.
- 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](#).
- The CDC currently recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to China, Iran, South Korea and Italy. Entry of foreign nationals from China and Iran has been suspended. In addition, there is sustained community transmission of COVID-19 in Japan, and the CDC recommends that older adults or those who have chronic medical conditions consider postponing travel to Japan.
- Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of [acute respiratory illness](#) before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure employees who become sick while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor and should promptly call a health care provider for advice if needed.
- If outside the United States, sick employees should follow your company's policy for obtaining medical care

or contact a health care provider or overseas medical assistance company to assist them with finding an appropriate healthcare provider in that country. A U.S. consular officer can help locate health care services. However, U.S. embassies, consulates, and military facilities do not have the legal authority, capability, and resources to evacuate or give medicines, vaccines or medical care to private U.S. citizens overseas.

Attorneys across Barley Snyder's various practice groups - including the Employment Practice Group - are well positioned and prepared to assist clients in crafting strategies to prepare for the coronavirus. Please contact me or any member of the group for more information.

COMING SOON: Consider a risk assessment to prepare for employees at risk of exposure to coronavirus or exhibiting symptoms.

More on the legalities of Coronavirus:

BUSINESS: [Is COVID-19 a "Force Majeure" Event?](#)

SENIOR LIVING: [Coronavirus and Senior Living Facilities](#)

EDUCATION: [Schools Already Planning for Coronavirus](#)

BUSINESS: [Planning for Coronavirus: A Necessary Business Exercise](#)

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