

COVID-19: *Staying Safe at Work for Employees*

FACT SHEET

LENGTH: 24 MINUTES

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

The recent pandemic outbreak of the virus that causes COVID-19 temporarily brought the entire world to a halt, with many workplaces shut down, schools closed, people confined to their homes and medical facilities overwhelmed. Now, for many of us, it's time to restart our lives and get back to work. The good news is we can stay safe at work. This program explains the control measures found in a typical workplace infection control plan and explains how those measures are put into practice to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at work. In addition to explaining the virus's symptoms and its modes of transmission, the program also covers maintaining appropriate physical distancing, washing hands and cleaning commonly touched objects, selecting the correct PPE and information regarding vaccines.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

After watching the program, the participant should be able to explain the following:

- How the screening process works for preventing potentially contagious people from entering the workplace;
- What the modes of transmission for COVID-19 are;
- What physical distancing is and where it may be required;
- Why wearing face coverings is so important and how policies regarding their use can differ;
- How to wash your hands effectively to reduce the risk of infection;
- What OSHA's categories of worker risk related to COVID-19 exposure are;
- What to do once vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine;
- How to properly put on and take off medical PPE and clothing.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:

OUR WORLD HAS CHANGED

- When we watch the news or look around our communities and workplaces, we can't help but notice that our world has changed.
- The recent pandemic outbreak of the virus that causes the respiratory illness known as COVID-19 temporarily brought the entire world to a halt, with many workplaces shut down, schools closed, people confined to their homes and medical facilities overwhelmed.
- Now, for many of us, it's time to restart our lives and get back to work, but things have changed. It's possible that some things will never return to the way they were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- One thing that hasn't changed: the need to earn a living and provide for our loved ones without placing our health and safety at risk.

FACTORS IN DETERMINING INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES

- One thing we all need to understand is that different geographic regions will experience different levels of outbreaks and resurgence at different times.
- The infection control measures put into place by employers in one region may look quite different than those required by employers in other regions at any particular time.
- One factor your employer will use to determine appropriate infection control measures is whether or not there is ongoing "community spread" of the virus in your local area.
- Community spread occurs when people in the local community are becoming infected with the virus, even with no known contact with a sick person.
- Your employer will also consider the level of risk associated with the worksite and the specific job tasks being performed.
- During the early days of the pandemic, the guidance being issued to prevent the spread of COVID-19 was constantly changing, seemingly from one day to the next, as the medical community learned more about this new or "novel" coronavirus named SARS CoV-2.
- Now, the virus is better understood, as are the measures we must take in order to stay safe at work.
- One important development is that vaccines are now available for COVID-19. People are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their final dose of vaccine.
- However, because of the virus's ability to mutate into other variants, the available vaccines may need to be updated and/or booster shots given to remain effective.
- In addition, people who are vaccinated, as well as other exposed people who have no outward symptoms, may still be able to spread the virus to others.

- This is why people with no symptoms and people who have been vaccinated must still follow all mandatory prevention practices that have been put into place.
- People who are contagious without showing any symptoms are “asymptomatic carriers.”
- People who are infected with COVID-19 are thought to be **most** contagious when they are the **most** symptomatic, such as when they have a fever, a dry cough, a sore throat or shortness of breath.
- If you have these symptoms, stay home. Do not come to work.
- If you begin to feel sick **after** reporting to work, report your symptoms right away so you can be properly evaluated and isolated if your symptoms are confirmed.

THE SCREENING PROCESS FOR PREVENTING ENTRY BY POTENTIALLY CONTAGIOUS PEOPLE

- When certain risk factors are present, such as ongoing community spread, your employer will take steps to prevent employees, visitors and customers who may be contagious from entering the workplace.
- This will likely include a screening process that requires questions to be answered and temperatures taken before anyone is allowed to enter the facility.
- For example, you may be asked:
 - Are you experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19?
 - Is there anyone in your home that is sick or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19?
 - Have you visited or been in close contact with anyone experiencing symptoms of COVID-19?
- If you have a fever, or if you answer yes to certain questions, you will not be allowed to enter the workplace.
- The Centers for Disease Control, the CDC, considers a fever to be a temperature over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius.
- When answering these types of questions, it’s important to be honest with your answers.
- If you have been exposed to someone who is infected, you can be contagious before showing any symptoms.
- Symptoms of COVID-19 appear between two and 14 days after exposure.
- Again, do not report to work if you are sick or likely to be contagious.
- Certain employers may require all employees to be vaccinated before physically entering the workplace. When this is the case, you may be asked to provide documentation of your COVID-19 vaccination.
- The CDC advises that a person is fully vaccinated for COVID-19 two weeks after receiving the vaccine's final dose.

MODES OF TRANSMISSION

- In order to control the spread of the virus in our workplace, we must understand the various ways the virus can spread, or its “modes of transmission.”
- When an infected person sneezes or coughs, droplets of fluid containing the virus can be expelled into the air for a considerable distance and infect others if inhaled or by contacting a mucus membrane, such as the eyes, mouth or nose. This is known as “droplet transmission.” Droplet transmission is believed to be the primary means by which COVID-19 is spread.
- People infected with COVID-19 can also expel very tiny fluid particles called aerosols when they speak or breathe. These tiny aerosols may contain the coronavirus and can linger in the air for a considerable period of time and infect others if enough of these particles are inhaled or come into contact with a mucus membrane. This is known as “aerosol transmission.”
- The COVID-19 virus can survive on certain surfaces for several hours or days. When a person touches a contaminated object and then touches his or her face, eyes, nose or mouth, that person may become infected. This mode of transmission is referred to as “contact transmission.”

THE INFECTION CONTROL PLAN

- As part of the process for safely returning to work, your employer will develop and put into practice an “infectious disease preparedness and response plan,” sometimes called the “exposure control plan” or “infection control plan.”
- This plan will define the measures put in place by your employer to mitigate the virus’s modes of transmission and prevent it from spreading into the workplace.
- A typical workplace infection control plan for COVID-19 will include a physical distancing policy, a face covering policy, a sanitization and hygiene policy as well as administrative and engineering control measures and PPE requirements.
- As an employee, it’s important that you understand the purpose of each of these prevention methods and your role in making them successful.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- When community spread is ongoing or other risk factors are present, employers will require employees to maintain a physical separation of at least six feet, or two meters, whenever possible.
- This amount of physical distancing or “social distancing” can reduce the risk of aerosol and droplet transmission between employees.

- When this type of distancing is required, the number of people allowed into certain areas of the facility may be restricted and some work areas removed from service in order to obtain adequate spacing.
- Be sure you maintain social distancing while standing in lines, visiting breakrooms and cafeterias and when approaching co-workers performing their job duties.
- Think about this distance as the new normal for personal space and it's okay to say, "Hey, back it up a little bit. You're in my space." This not only protects you, it also protects your co-workers.

FACE COVERING POLICY

- In addition to physical distancing, you may also be required to wear a face covering.
- A face covering, or face mask can be used to reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the distance that infected droplets or aerosols travel when expelled.
- The CDC recommends a multi-layer, cloth face-covering without valves or vents be worn over a disposable "surgical type" or "flat-mask" face covering.
- During times of community spread, or when other risk factors are present, local governmental agencies may mandate the use of a face covering for anyone who goes out in public.
- When this is the case, your employer will be required to follow local regulations and anyone entering your facility will be required to wear a face covering.
- Wearing a face covering provides some protection for the wearer, but its primary benefit is to reduce the likelihood of spreading the virus to others.
- Think about wearing a face covering the same way you think about covering your cough with a tissue or sneezing into your elbow. It is not only good social etiquette, but it protects others from getting sick. And when everyone wears one, everyone is better protected.
- This is why many employers will choose to implement some type of face covering policy even in areas where there is no regulatory requirement to do so.
- In our new world after COVID-19, not wearing a face covering when one is required is a social faux pas and inconsiderate to others around you.
- Keep in mind that the face covering policy where you work will be determined by the risk factors specific to your unique workplace and your specific job task. These policies will likely change as conditions change.
- Workers who perform tasks deemed to be "low risk" and are able to perform their work while maintaining a safe distance from co-workers and the general public may not be required to wear a face covering while performing their job or while remaining in their personal workspace.
- Even when this is the case, these workers may still be required to wear a face covering when leaving their personal workspace and moving about the facility. This is because it may be hard to maintain physical distancing in aiseways, stairways and similar high traffic areas.
- You may also be asked to put on a face covering anytime you must work closer than six feet, or two meters, from others, when visiting the nurse or reporting the onset of symptoms, during the prework screening process or any other time you need to be in close proximity to a co-worker.

PUTTING ON AND TAKING OFF A FACE COVERING PROPERLY

- All employees need to know how to properly put on and take off a flat mask face covering.
- Before putting on any face covering, first make sure your hands are clean.
- Then, inspect it for any tears or holes and locate the metal strip in the mask. Orient the mask so the colored side faces outward, or away from you.
- Place the top part of the mask on the bridge of your nose and form the metal strip to the shape of your nose. Then, place the bands behind your ears.
- While holding the mask against your nose, pull the bottom of the mask down to ensure that it covers your nose, mouth and chin.
- Once adjusted, try to avoid touching the mask while you're wearing it. If you must touch or adjust your mask, be sure to clean your hands immediately afterward.
- To take off the mask, unloop the bands from behind your ears and carefully remove the mask without touching the front.
- Dispose of used masks in a closable trash bin and immediately wash your hands.

A 100 PERCENT FACE COVERING POLICY

- Frequently putting on and taking off a face covering during the workday is not optimal. This is one reason why many employers will choose to implement a 100 percent face covering policy for all workers, all the time.
- A 100 percent face covering policy provides maximum protection for everyone, eliminates any confusion about when and where a face covering should be worn and reduces the risk of cross contamination by workers frequently handling a used mask.
- Make sure you understand and follow the face covering requirements in your workplace.

THE SANITIZATION AND HYGIENE PROGRAM

- Your employer's infection control plan will include a sanitization and hygiene program aimed at preventing contact transmission of the virus by encouraging frequent employee hand washing and the periodic cleaning of commonly touched surfaces.
- To prevent picking up and spreading the COVID-19 virus, you need to wash your hands, a lot.
- To properly wash your hands, use warm water and soap. Work the soap into a lather and make sure it covers all the surfaces of your hands, fingers and wrists.
- Work up and down each finger, your thumb and also the back of your hand.
- Also, rub your fingertips in a circular motion firmly against all areas of the palm of your hand.
- Then, form a grip and squeeze your fingers together several times to force the soapy water under your fingernails.
- Your hand washing should last at least 25 seconds if it's going to be effective in killing the virus. The virus is protected by an outer layer of fatty material and it takes about 25 seconds for the soap to break down this fatty layer and kill the virus.
- When soap and water are not available, a hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol can also be used.
- Keep in mind that most cases of contact transmission are self-inflicted and occur when we touch our face with unclean hands. This is a habit we all need to break.
- One study revealed that a typical person touches their face 23 times per hour and often doesn't realize they are doing so.
- Wearing a face covering or a mask makes it even more tempting to touch our face as we re-adjust and position the mask for improved comfort or to scratch an itch.
- The best advice is the one we all continue to hear over and over again. Wash your hands often and don't touch your face.

CLEANING COMMONLY TOUCHED SURFACES

- Another aspect of the sanitization and hygiene program is cleaning commonly touched surfaces.
- Your employer's infection control plan will include a list of commonly touched surfaces to be cleaned, such as door handles, light switches, phones and similar items.
- The custodial staff or a contractor will likely take on this role; however, you may also be required to clean and sanitize your primary work area and related tools or equipment.
- There are a variety of sanitizing and disinfecting agents approved for this purpose. The Centers for Disease Control also recommends a solution of one quarter cup bleach per gallon of water as a sanitizing agent.
- A good rule of thumb is to sanitize the commonly touched items in your work area at the beginning of your shift.
- It's also a good idea not to use other workers' phones, desks, work tools and equipment, if at all possible.

SPEAKING TO YOUR SUPERVISOR ABOUT CONCERNS

- Your employer's policies related to physical distancing, face coverings and hygiene will be based on regulations or ordinances, infection statistics in your community and the risk factors at your particular facility.
- This is why the control measures we are showing in this video may not align 100 percent with what your employer asks you to do.
- If you don't feel adequately protected by the infection control measures put into place by your employer, talk to your supervisor about your concerns, especially if you are at higher-risk for developing a severe illness from COVID-19, such as being older or having a serious underlying medical condition.

OSHA'S FOUR CATEGORIES OF WORKER RISK

- OSHA has created four categories of worker risk related to COVID-19 exposure: high-risk and very high-risk workers, medium risk workers and lower risk workers.

Lower Risk Workers

- Lower risk workers are those who do not have prolonged occupational contact with the general public or other co-workers. These workers seldom get within six feet, or two meters, of anyone. Their risk of becoming infected at work is low, regardless of the existence of community spread or not.

- OSHA's current guidance is that lower risk workers should follow basic infection control measures such as physical distancing, covering coughs and sneezes, practicing frequent hand washing, staying home when sick and following their company's face covering policy.

Medium Risk Workers

- Medium risk workers are those who, periodically, do have prolonged occupational contact with co-workers or the general public at distances closer than six feet, or two meters, where these contacts are not suspected to be infected with COVID-19.
- OSHA's guidance for medium risk workers is that, in addition to following basic infection control measures, their employer should implement administrative and engineering controls to reduce face-to-face contact.
- Some examples include the installation of physical barriers or "sneeze guards" at workstations to help prevent droplet transmission, limit the number of people allowed in certain areas at any one time and encourage remote work, provide drive-through services or use online meetings to reduce face-to-face contacts.

- OSHA also recommends that your employer perform a hazard analysis to determine if these medium risk workers should wear additional protective equipment.

High & Very-High Risk Workers

- High and very-high risk workers are those who have occupational exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19.
- Generally, this category is made up of workers involved in the facility's screening process, industrial nurses and other healthcare workers who perform specific medical or laboratory procedures.
- These types of workers will be required to wear additional protective equipment.
- This additional PPE may include some combination of a disposable smock or gown, disposable medical gloves, eye protection and/or a face shield. This type of PPE provides contact protection from blood and body fluids as well as the expelled respiratory droplets that can carry COVID-19.
- In addition, a NIOSH-approved N95 respirator may be required to prevent inhaling aerosols and to protect the mucus membranes of the nose and mouth from droplet transmission.
- If you are required to wear a respirator, you will have to shave any facial hair that may interfere with the respirator achieving a proper seal to your face.
- Keep in mind that an N95 respirator has increased breathing resistance and your employer may require you to undergo a lung function test and a respirator fit test to ensure that you are able to wear the facepiece or respirator safely.
- If you have difficulty breathing while wearing any type of face covering, face mask or respirator, inform your supervisor right away.

DONNING YOUR PPE

- If your employer requires you to wear this type of protective equipment, then you must also receive specific training in its proper care, use and disposal.
- Before donning your PPE, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly.
- If you are going to wear a gown or smock, put it on first. This type of protective outer layer is designed to prevent your clothes from becoming contaminated.
- It should be removed and replaced between each patient or at the completion of each task if no patients are being contacted.
- Next, don your respirator. If you are using an N95 facemask type respirator, position the straps in front of the respirator and hold the respirator against your face. Form the metal strip to fit around your nose snugly.
- While holding the mask in place, stretch one band over the top part of your head. Then, stretch the other band over your head and secure it to the base of your neck.
- The mask should have a secure seal with no air leakage as you inhale or exhale.
- Then, put on your eye and/or face protection and adjust it to fit properly.
- Next, don your disposable medical gloves, if required.
- If you are also wearing a smock or gown, make sure the cuff of the gloves covers the wrist material of the isolation gown.
- If you are physically touching people, immediately remove the gloves when finished and wash your hands. You must use a new pair of gloves with each new person you plan to touch.
- If you are performing tasks that do not require touching others, you can use the same gloves for the duration of the task.
- Be aware that gloves do not prevent cross contamination and anything you touch with contaminated gloves will also become contaminated and will need to be cleaned and sanitized or disposed of.

REMOVAL OF YOUR PPE

- When it's time to remove your ensemble of PPE, you need to do so carefully to prevent spreading contamination.
- First, remove your gloves. Gloves must be removed carefully to prevent contaminating your hands.
- Pinch the palm area with the fingers of the opposite hand and turn the glove inside out.
- Carefully insert a finger under the cuff of the remaining glove without touching the outside of the glove. Then, pull the glove off while allowing it to turn inside out.
- Immediately dispose of the gloves in an appropriate disposal bin with a self-closing lid.
- Next, remove your smock or gown while avoiding touching the outside material as much as possible. The outside material of the front and sleeves is contaminated.
- Allow the gown to turn inside out as it is removed so you may handle it safely. Dispose of it in an approved receptacle with a self-closing lid.
- Next, remove your eye and/or face protection. The front of these items is contaminated, so remove them by grasping the back strap only.
- If these items are reusable, place them into a designated receptacle so they may be cleaned and sanitized for reuse.
- Finally, carefully remove your respirator without touching the front of it. The front of your respirator is contaminated.
- Grasp the bands from behind your head, carefully remove the respirator and dispose of it in an approved receptacle with a self-closing lid.
- Immediately after removing your PPE, wash your hands thoroughly to remove any contamination you picked up during removal.

SUMMARY

- Yes, the post pandemic world is different and it's likely to stay this way for quite some time. It's going to take a group effort for us to stay safe at work while COVID-19 remains a threat in our community, but the good news is, yes, we can stay safe at work.
- Here's a quick review of how we do it. As an employee, your responsibilities include participating in your employer's screening process and staying home if you are sick. Maintaining the appropriate physical distancing from your co-workers and the general public. Wearing a face covering to protect others when appropriate or required. Frequently washing your hands while avoiding touching your face. Cleaning and sanitizing the commonly touched objects in your work area. Selecting and using the correct PPE based on your risk of exposure.
- Here is one final thing you need to remember. Your employer's policies and procedures related to COVID-19 or other contagious illnesses will change as the level of risk in your community changes or as new regulatory requirements are enacted.
- The list of items that may change includes the CDC's guidance related to vaccinated people. Vaccinated people should stay up to date on the latest CDC guidance and continue to follow their employer's prevention policies while in the workplace.
- Perhaps one day soon, the type of protections mentioned in this video will no longer be necessary and your company's infection control efforts can be scaled back to reflect a reduced risk.
- Until then, we must all continue to do our part to stop the spread of COVID-19 where we work and in our communities.

COVID-19: *Staying Safe at Work for Employees*

ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW QUIZ

1. b

2. c

3. b

4. c

5. a

6. b

7. b

8. a

9. c

10. a

COVID-19: *Staying Safe at Work for Employees* – REVIEW QUIZ

The following questions are provided to determine how well you understand the information presented in this program.

Name _____ Date _____

1. _____ carriers of COVID-19 are contagious without showing any symptoms.
 - a. Symptomatic
 - b. Asymptomatic
 - c. Characteristic
2. The Centers for Disease Control considers a fever to be a temperature over _____ Fahrenheit.
 - a. 98.6 degrees
 - b. 99.6 degrees
 - c. 100.4 degrees
3. If you begin to feel sick after reporting to work, you should wait until the end of your shift to report your symptoms.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. _____ is believed to be the primary means by which COVID-19 is spread.
 - a. Aerosol transmission
 - b. Contact transmission
 - c. Droplet transmission
5. A face covering or face mask can be used to reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the distance that infected droplets or aerosols travel when expelled.
 - a. True
 - b. False
6. The CDC considers a person as fully vaccinated 1 week after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.
 - a. True
 - b. False
7. When washing your hands, you should wash them for at least _____ if it's going to be effective in killing the virus.
 - a. 15 seconds
 - b. 25 seconds
 - c. 60 seconds
8. When soap and water are not available to wash your hands, a hand sanitizer containing at least _____ alcohol can also be used.
 - a. 60 percent
 - b. 70 percent
 - c. 80 percent
9. One study revealed that a typical person touches his or her face _____.
 - a. 3 times per hour
 - b. 13 times per hour
 - c. 23 times per hour
10. If you don't feel adequately protected by the infection control measures put into place by your employer, you should talk to your supervisor about your concerns.
 - a. True
 - b. False