



You've had a COVID 19 case in your workplace, now what do you do?

Multiple businesses across Iowa (and across the country) all facing similar challenges related to the COVID 19 public health emergency. One predominate recurring question is what to do if one of your employees contracts COVID 19. As the virus continues to spread across the states, this situation is almost inevitable. Like all disasters, the best thing that you can do is to plan now for this potential situation. We have assembled the following information for your consideration as you plan for a potential infection in your workplace. This information should not be considered as recommendations, but as considerations for planning purposes. This is also not an exhaustive list. There may be industry recommendations with specific directives or guidance that should be followed as well.

It is important to remember to educate your employees ahead of time. Let them know that it is very important for them to stay home if they are sick, wash their hands frequently, clean surfaces frequently, maintain good social distancing practices and use PPE as appropriate for their position within your organization.

For additional information on COVID 19 prevention and reopening considerations, please visit www.safeguardiowa.org.

Initial Steps

Two very common scenarios are:

1. An employee comes to work and complains that they are not feeling well. When they describe the symptoms to you, you quickly recognize that this could be COVID 19.
2. An employee calls you to let you know that they are not feeling well and are experiencing symptoms of COVID 19, or that they have received positive test results for COVID 19.

In either case, it's important to act quickly to ensure the well-being of your employees, your customers and yourself. Sometimes we tend to look past the employee that has reported the illness as we begin thinking of all of the steps that are necessary at our place of business. Step one should be to make sure that this employee is taken care of as you begin your response.

The following items are for your consideration only.

- Ensure that you maintain distancing between the employee and others. If necessary, contact medical personnel.
- Provide the employee a place to go, away from others.

- Ask the affected employee to identify all individuals (co-workers, contractors, customers, clients, vendors) who have worked in close proximity with the employee for the period beginning two days prior to the onset of symptoms to the present. (You may need to work with legal advisors to understand your company's obligations to customers that your employee has been in contact with)
- If medical assistance is not necessary, advise the employee to go home and contact their primary care provider.
- Consider shutting down to allow for appropriate enhanced cleaning. Enhanced cleaning should be completed whether or not shutting down is an option. Any commercial cleaners, bleach water solutions, etc., can be used. It's important to remember not only the employee's workspace but other common areas, restrooms, common equipment, entrances and exits, and other areas that the employee may have been in contact with.
- Other employees who may have been in close contact with the employee should be notified that there has been a COVID case **without disclosing the identification of the infected employee**. They should be sent home to self-quarantine. CDC recommends quarantine for 14 days from the date of exposure.
- Maintain contact with the employee throughout their illness. Provide them with information about expectations and ensure they are clear on return to work procedures. CDC advises that, at minimum, employees should not return to work until at least 10 days has passed from onset of symptoms. It may extend well beyond that time. An employee should not return to work until they have been symptom free and no fever for at least three full days.
- If needed, consider implementing non-invasive screenings of employees (such as body temperature checks or symptom questionnaires) entering the workplace; consult guidance from the EEOC and other federal, state, or local agencies regarding permissible medical inquiries in light of COVID-19.

These initial steps will be important as you begin the process of reopening safely. Remember that these are only the beginning. There are many other considerations. Many companies are unsure how to handle the time off that exposed or infected employees will need.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act outlines many of the requirements that an employer must take into consideration. You can find information concerning paid leave considerations and which businesses are required to offer paid leave for employees that are quarantined as a result of COVID 19 here: (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-employer-paid-leave>)

References:

Businesses and Workplaces; Plan, Prepare, Respond. (2020). Retrieved May 11, 2020 from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html>.

Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Employee Paid Leave Rights. Retrieved May 12, 2020 from <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-employee-paid-leave>.