QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT AN EMPLOYEE TESTING POSITIVE OR BEING EXPOSED TO COVID-19

I HAVE AN EMPLOYEE WHO TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

Do I need to contact Public Health Madison & Dane County about this employee?

No, you do not need to contact us. You will need to follow the [CDC guidelines](#) under *Reduce Transmission among Employees.* This section discusses what to do with employees experiencing symptoms and those that have tested positive.

Do I need to shut down my facility if the employee was at the facility while contagious?

No, you do not need to shut down, but you do need to clean which might mean closing areas of the workplace for about 24 hours. See "[How do I need to clean my facility](#)…" for more information.

What steps should I take after an employee of my facility tests positive for COVID-19?

- Follow [CDC guidelines](#) for cleaning your facility. When possible, do not reopen until cleaning has been completed.
- Do not allow employee testing positive or other employees with close contact to come to work

Do I need to notify customers or clients?

If the employee with the positive test had close contact (within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more) with any customers or clients, those individuals should be notified. Public Health Madison & Dane County will work with you to do this. **This is required under statute 252.03(1).**

Does a business with a positive employee need to notify the general public?

No.

How do I need to clean my facility after an employee tested positive for COVID-19 and was at work while contagious?

If an employee tested positive for COVID-19 and worked while contagious, it is recommended to thoroughly clean this space using [EPA-approved disinfectants](#) effective against COVID-19. According to CDC, the following cleaning and disinfecting should be performed in your facility:

- **Close off areas** used by the person who is sick.
  - Companies do not necessarily need to close operations, if they can close off affected areas.
- **Open outside doors and windows** to increase air circulation in the area.
- **Wait 24 hours** before you clean or disinfect. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible.

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- Clean and disinfect **all areas used by the person who is sick**, such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines.
- [Vacuum the space](#) if needed. Use vacuum equipped with high-efficiency particular air (HEPA) filter, if available.
  - Do not vacuum a room or space that has people in it. Wait until the room or space is empty to vacuum, such as at night, for common spaces, or during the day for private rooms.
  - Consider temporarily turning off room fans and the central HVAC system that services the room or space, so that particles that escape from vacuuming will not circulate throughout the facility.
- Once area has been appropriately disinfected, it can be opened for use.
  - Workers without close contact with the person who is sick can return to work immediately after disinfection.
- If more than 7 days since the person who is sick visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary.
  - Continue routine cleaning and disinfection. This includes everyday practices that businesses and communities normally use to maintain a healthy environment.

When can an employee with a positive COVID-19 test return to work?

Employees with a positive test may return to work when they meet the following criteria:

- They have been fever-free for 3 days
- Their respiratory symptoms are improving
- It has been at least 10 days since their symptom onset
- If the person had no symptoms, they may return 10 days after they were tested

We recommend against requiring employees to have 2 negative COVID-19 test results before returning to work. People with COVID-19 may have positive test results for weeks after they recover but are not contagious after they meet the symptom criteria above. Requiring 2 negative tests places an unnecessary burden on the employee and may prevent you from providing services due to extended employee absences.

Does an employee need a clearance letter from Public Health before they can return to work?

No, employees do not need a clearance letter before returning to work. Public Health Madison & Dane County works with people who have a positive test to determine when they can return to work based on the criteria above and provides this information in the work exclusion letter.

What if the employee diagnosed with COVID-19 is asymptomatic? When can they come back to work?

Employees that are asymptomatic but had a positive test or diagnosis for COVID-19 should:

- Self-isolate and monitor their health for 10 days.
- If they have no symptoms, they may return to work after 10 days from testing

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- If they develop symptoms during the 10 days, they should extend isolation precautions for at least 10 days from the date of symptom onset and must meet the following criteria before returning to work:
  - They have been fever-free for 3 days.
  - Their other symptoms have improved.
  - It has been at least 10 days since their symptom onset.

I HAVE AN EMPLOYEE WHO HAD CLOSE CONTACT TO SOMEONE WHO TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

When can an employee that has had close contact to COVID-19 return to work?

Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of an infected person for a prolonged period (15 minutes or more) starting from 48 hours before illness onset. Employees that have been exposed to a COVID-19 positive person may return to work when they meet the following criteria:

- Self-isolated for 14 days from last contact with a sick person and have had no symptoms
- If develop symptoms during self-isolation period, employees must stay home and avoid others until they have been:
  - 72 hours without a fever (without fever-reducing medicine),
  - their symptoms improve,
  - **AND** it has been 10 days since their first symptoms.

Employees do not need a clearance letter before returning to work. Public Health Madison & Dane County works with people who have been in contact with someone with COIVD-19 to determine when they can return to work based on the criteria above and provides this information in the work exclusion letter.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 AND THE WORKPLACE

Should I require my employees to be tested for COVID-19 before they can work?

No, Public Health Madison & Dane County recommends against requiring employees to be tested before being able to work. A test only tells us if a person has COVID-19 on the day they are tested. Furthermore, Public Health Madison & Dane County does NOT require negative COVID-19 test result(s) to return to work after testing positive. This is because people with COVID-19 may have positive test results for weeks after they recover but are not contagious after they meet the isolation criteria. Requiring documentation or proof of a test puts an unnecessary burden on staff and delays when an employee is able to start work. As always, any employee who is sick or has symptoms should not be at work.

What should an employer do to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in their facility?

Employers should:

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- Allow employees to work remotely , communicate virtually, and limit in-person meetings and gatherings
- Stagger work schedules and rearrange workspaces to allow physical distancing to be maintained
- Provide employees proper PPE (gloves, masks, etc as defined by job duties and risk of exposure), handwashing supplies, and hand sanitizer
- Have the policies required by the order written for hygiene, cleaning, and protective measures
- Train employees on:
  - their employee illness policy,
  - what the symptoms for COVID-19 are
  - what to do if they test positive,
  - what to do if they were exposed,
  - the importance of frequent hand washing or sanitizing
  - the importance of heightened cleaning and sanitizing protocols
  - the importance of physical distancing
  - when to wear PPE and
  - the proper way to wear PPE.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19 that I should have my employees self-monitor for prior to coming to work?

1. Cough
2. Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
3. Fever >=100.4F
4. Chills
5. Muscle pain
6. Sore throat
7. New loss of taste or smell

This list is not all-inclusive. Other less common symptoms have been reported, including gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.

Will my business be contacted if one of my employees tests positive?

Public Health Madison & Dane County will contact businesses if an employee with COVID-19 was at the worksite while contagious. We will ask you to notify employees who were exposed. We may also ask you for the names, addresses, or phone numbers for employees who had close contact with the employee who tested positive. You are required to comply with these requests under statute 252.03(1).

Due to HIPAA, it is important not to share any unnecessary information on the positive person with other employees from the workplace, but instead provide general information about the employees' exposure and guidance provided by the health department to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. Only discuss with those employees whose exposure has been deemed as a close contact.

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What is the definition of close contact?

Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of an infected person for a prolonged period (15 minutes or more) starting from 48 hours before illness onset. The 15 minutes does not need to be continuous (e.g., 3, 5-minute periods would count) and wearing a cloth face covering does not completely remove the exposure risk when in close contact.

When and how should I clean my facility?

At this time it is strongly encouraged that all businesses clean on a more frequent basis and it is recommended that all high-touch surfaces are cleaned every 2 hours or after every user when possible. The CDC has information on cleaning in a facility.

How can Public Health Madison & Dane County help if we think someone is coming to work sick?

It is, overall, a bad business practice for the employer to allow any person to work when sick and goes against all the CDC COVID-19 guidance. We are not performing enforcement on businesses that are allowing people to work when sick; however, if there is a confirmed communicable disease identified for one of the employees, enforcement may be ordered.

Does the business with an outbreak need to notify the general public?

In extreme cases where a large amount of people working in an establishment test positive and close contacts are not easily traceable, Public Health Madison & Dane County may need to notify the general public that an exposure at that business might have occurred. This would only be done as a last resort.

RESOURCES

- Public Health Madison & Dane County employee illness agreement template for COVID-19 for return to work guidance.
- For food operators, review FDA's What to Do If You Have COVID-19 Confirmed Positive or Exposed Workers in Your Food Production, Storage, or Distribution Operations
- CDC Factsheet on Cleaning and Disinfecting in a Facility

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