Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

April 29, 2020

This guidance is based on what is currently known [about the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)](#). The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available. Additional information and guidance related to COVID-19 is available at www.kdheks.gov/coronavirus.

KDHE is working with multiple state agencies in the public health response to COVID-19. Much is unknown about how the virus that causes COVID-19 spreads. Current knowledge is largely based on what is known about similar coronaviruses.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in humans and many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats, and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people, such as with MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV. The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person in multiple countries, and some limited person-to-person transmission has been reported in the United States. However, respiratory illnesses like seasonal influenza, are currently widespread in many US communities.

The following guidance may help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, in non-healthcare settings.

To prevent stigma and discrimination in the workplace, use only the guidance described below to determine risk of COVID-19. Do not make determinations of risk based on race or country of origin and be sure to maintain confidentiality of people with confirmed COVID-19. There is much more to learn about the transmissibility, severity, and other features of COVID-19 and investigations are ongoing. Updates are available on KDHE's web page at [/www.kdheks.gov/coronavirus/index.htm](http://www.kdheks.gov/coronavirus/index.htm) and CDC's web page at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/covid19.

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 [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 72 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants), AND at least 7 days should have passed since symptoms first appeared. 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 and that 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 healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare 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:**
  - KDHE recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. 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:**
  - Provide educational materials 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 by washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol may be used if soap and water are not available. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
  - Provide soap and water and 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.
  - Remind employees to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing or use the inside of the elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash hands with soap and water, or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
  - 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.

- o No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
- o Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.
- o Encourage employees to avoid using other employees' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use.

- **Assess your essential functions**
  - o Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize existing customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed)
  - o Identify alternate supply chains for critical goods and services. Some goods and services may be in higher demand or unavailable.
  - o 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.
  - o Talk with business partners about your response plans. Share best practices with other businesses in your communities (especially those in your supply chain), chambers of commerce, and associations to improve community response efforts.

- **Consider establishing policies and practices for social distancing**
  - o Implementing flexible work sites (e.g., telework)
  - o Implementing flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts)
  - o Increasing physical space between employees at the worksite
  - o Increasing physical space between employees and customers (e.g., drive through, partitions)
  - o Implementing flexible meeting and travel options (e.g., postpone non-essential meetings or events)
  - o Downsizing operations
  - o Delivering services remotely (e.g., phone, video, or web)
  - o Delivering products through curbside pick-up or delivery

- **Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps:**
  - o Carefully consider whether travel is necessary.
  - o Consider canceling, adjusting, or postponing large work-related meetings or gatherings that can only occur in-person.
  - o When videoconferencing or teleconferencing is not possible, hold meetings in open, well-ventilated spaces.
  - o 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.
  - o 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 healthcare 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 healthcare 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 healthcare 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.

- **Additional Measures in Response to Currently Occurring Sporadic Importations of the COVID-19:**
  - Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to KDHE guidance for how to conduct a risk assessment of their potential exposure.
  - If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should refer to KDHE guidance for how to conduct a risk assessment of their potential exposure.

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