



BOSTON COLLEGE
Center for Work & Family
CARROLL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

COVID-19 Updates and Resources

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General Considerations:

[8 Questions Employers Should Ask About Coronavirus](#) (HBR)

- An elevated temperature combined with respiratory symptoms is the best indicator of possible COVID-19.
- Hand washing is one of the best defenses against infection. Employers should ensure that employees have access to washing facilities well-stocked with soap and paper towels.
- Public health organizations recommend that employers ban employees or visitors from coming to the office for 14 days after a medium or high risk exposure to the virus, which generally means they have come in close contact with someone infected or have traveled to a high risk region.
- Employers should review their paid time off and sick leave policies and ensure their employees that they will not be penalized and can afford to take sick leave, which can encourage self-reporting and reduce potential exposure.
- Ensure employers have reliable real-time communication with all employees, including those not on site, to provide updates on conditions and policies. This includes maintaining updated contact information and regularly testing organization-wide communication.
- Limit business travel to areas where COVID-19 is most prevalent, to prevent both illness and loss of productivity from quarantine or exclusion from the workplace after travel. The CDC [Travel Health Notices](#) and [State Department Travel Advisories](#) can be used to determine what travel should be cancelled or postponed.

[Interim Guidance for Business and Employers](#) (CDC)

- To prevent stigma and discrimination in the workplace, do not make determinations of risk for COVID-19 based on race or country of origin, and maintain confidentiality of any employees with confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- **Recommended strategies for employees to use now:**
 - Actively encourage sick employees to stay home if they have symptoms of acute respiratory illness or a fever (100.4 degrees F or higher)
 - Ensure sick leave policies are flexible, and do not require a note from a healthcare provider to validate an employee's illness, as offices will be busy and may not be able to provide timely documentation. Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to take care of sick children or family members.
 - Separate and send home employees who come to work appearing to have acute respiratory illness or who develop symptoms at work.
 - Emphasize and educate employees on the importance of staying home when sick, coughing and sneezing etiquette, and hand hygiene.

- Provide soap and water and alcohol based hand rubs and ensure supplies are maintained.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning of all surfaces in the workplace. Provide disposable wipes for employees to wipe down common surfaces themselves before use.
- Advise employees to take necessary steps before traveling, including checking themselves for symptoms, checking recommendations for countries they are traveling to, and calling a healthcare provider if they become sick while traveling.
- Advise employees to tell their supervisor and conduct a risk assessment if they have a family member at home sick with COVID-19.
- **Considerations for creating an Infectious Disease Outbreak Response Plan**
 - Employers must also consider how to lower the impact of COVID-19 in their workplace in the event of an outbreak in the U.S.
 - Employers should identify and communicate their objectives in the event of an outbreak. This could include:
 - Reducing transmission among staff
 - Protecting people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications
 - Maintaining business operations
 - Minimizing adverse effects on other entities in their supply chain
 - Key considerations when making decisions on appropriate response
 - Disease severity in the community where the business is located
 - Impact of disease on employees that are vulnerable and may be at higher risk for health complications from COVID-19
 - Prepare for possible increased numbers of employee absences due to illness in the family or dismissed schools
 - If employers have multiple locations, provide local managers with authority to make decisions based on conditions in their locations
 - Coordinate with state and local health officials to guide timely and appropriate responses
 - Recommendations for Response Plan
 - Identify possible workplace exposure and health risks
 - Review HR policies to ensure they are consistent with public health recommendations and state and federal laws
 - Explore whether the company can implement practices to increase physical distance between employees, such as telecommuting and flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts) if authorities recommend social distancing

- Identify key functions and job roles within supply chains essential to business operations, and consider how they'll be affected by absenteeism.
- Set up procedures for activating the response plan and altering business operations
- Plan to minimize exposure between employees and between employees and the public if authorities call for social distancing
- Establish a process to communicate plans and updates to employees and business partners
- Prepare to institute flexible workplace and leave policies for employees
- If there is evidence of an outbreak, consider cancelling non-essential business travel to additional countries, as well as large meetings or events

[How Working Parents Can Prepare for Coronavirus Closures](#) (HBR)

- Working parents should speak to their boss one-on-one about mutual expectations for possible scenarios related to COVID-19 -- for example, what will happen if their child's school closes but the workplace is still open.
- Working parents should also make sure they're on the same page as their parenting partner on how they will share responsibilities and accommodate possible changes in work schedules and school closures. Seek out solutions and back-up plans to handle possible scenarios.
- Learn to leverage technology wisely. Consider how family members will be able to work with the available computers and tablets to complete school work or work from home, and become familiar with online technology systems now. Understand limitations as well, as internet bandwidth may not support all family members working online or using the internet at the same time.
- Consider how friends can help support each other, whether that be taking turns grocery shopping or sharing ideas for creative activities to keep children entertained at home.
- Remember the bigger picture. Use this as an opportunity to teach children about what matters most and our responsibilities to each other.

[SHRM Resources: Communicable Diseases](#)

SHRM has developed a variety of tools and resources related to COVID-19. Some are accessible to their members only, while some articles like [CDC Official Asks Employers to Do All They Can to Slow Coronavirus](#) are open access.

Preparing for Remote Work:

[What's Your Company's Emergency Remote-Work Plan?](#) (HBR)

- Steps to preparing your organization to respond flexibly to possible disruptions
 - Acknowledge that most or all of your workforce may need to work remotely. Gather a team now that includes business leaders, IT, HR, communications, and facilities to plan how operations will continue in different scenarios.
 - Map out jobs and tasks that could be affected. Note which duties can and cannot be done without a physical presence in the office, as well as ones you aren't sure about. Be willing to experiment with things you aren't sure can be done remotely.
 - Audit available IT hardware and software, and close any gaps in adoption and access. Assess employees' comfort level with different applications. Provide training and practice where there are gaps. Determine if there are any data security issues and try to address them beforehand.
 - Set up a communications protocol in advance. Outline how everyone can be reached and on what platform, how employees should communicate with customers and clients, and how and when teams will coordinate and meet.
 - Identify ways to measure performance that could inform broader change. Collect data that will allow employers to analyze what worked, what didn't, and why after the fact. They may decide to keep certain elements of flexible work even after the threat of coronavirus is over.

[COVID-19: Steps to prepare a remote work policy](#) (HRDive)

- To prepare for a period of mandated remote work, employers need to develop and test work-from-home policies before they're necessary.
 - Identify the roles that are most key to operations. Then employers can take inventory of what those workers need to do their jobs away from the office.
 - Initiate a test period, with tech support standing by to address any issues that arise.
- The right tech only accounts for half of remote work success. The other important thing to communicate is the "norms" and expectations of remote work to employees.
 - The unified use of one platform will be essential.
 - As employers develop these remote work policies, it will be crucial to write them down and distribute them to workers through email, the employee handbook, company intranet and wherever else the organization stores information.

[8 strategies to set up remote work during the coronavirus outbreak](#) (Fortune)

1. Start from the top
 - a. The CEO and leadership must be present in online tools and channels, communicating proactively, and engaging in conversations.

2. Reinforce the company's mission, purpose, and values
 - a. When employees have a vision that they can rally behind as a group, alignment becomes easier across time zones.
3. Be open and authentic
4. Promote a digital company culture
 - a. Create space for culture and interpersonal relationships to happen spontaneously, as they would in a physical space.
5. Use the right tools, and use them all the time
 - a. Use every digital tool you have available to facilitate communication.
6. Create remote-first experiences
 - a. This includes spontaneous "high fives", celebrations, etc., as well as consciously allowing remote or virtual attendees to speak/ share their ideas.
7. Be creative when handling conflicts and problems
8. Show compassion

[How To Manage and Operate A Remote Workforce](#)

- Communicating a shift to remote work
 - Whether this was a shift you were planning, or you now have to react to Coronavirus rapidly, the first step should always be clear communication from leadership.
- Video communication is essential
 - Although this may seem like a "nice to have" feature, it's a critical factor in success. Human beings, ultimately, feel more connected when we can see each other. Whether we realize it or not, vast portions of how we communicate come through our body language, eye contact, and other forms of nonverbal communication. We recommend video calls leveraging Zoom, Google Meet, or Skype for Business, not just for group meetings, but every one-on-one chat between team members.
- Quickly implement these remote working basic tools
 - Encourage team members to focus on leveraging cloud-based documents that multiple team members can access, edit, and collaborate on simultaneously (for example, the Google Drive).
 - Implement a company-wide business chat platform.
- Over-communicating is key to this new way of working
- Running great virtual meetings
 - Require all attendees, if possible, to join via video.
 - Consider shortening meetings to encourage greater focus on the problem at hand.
 - Focus on "working sessions" versus meetings when possible.
- Remote work culture can be just as strong as office culture

Supporting Employees during Remote Work:

[COVID-19 Has My Teams Working Remotely: A Guide for Leaders](#) (Gallup)

- **Individualization is key.** Managers need to ask each team member to describe the conditions under which they perform best, their concerns about their workflow, and their emotional response to the situation.
- **Set expectations early and clearly.** Make expectations crystal clear: X is the work you should do, Y is the quality standard, Z is the deadline. Executives should provide higher-level expectations aligned with the company's purpose: We'll keep our customers engaged by doing X, we'll maintain our standards by doing Y, we'll fulfill our mission by doing Z. The more detail, the better.
- **Communication.** Employees who are accustomed to working in-house may feel cut off from the resources, information or relationships they need to do their jobs well, so plan for more conference calls. Managers will have to be diligent about communicating productively -- coaching high performance requires frequent conversations, and there won't be chance conversations in the hall.
- **Support your managers.** They may worry about disruptions to the workflow they're accountable for. Some may feel they have to be physically present to be good coaches, unsure that they can engage workers from a distance. Invest in management development and coaching ahead of the budget plan, and be affirming about the situation and understanding about altered deadlines.

[Companies Can Help Employees Working Remotely During The COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Challenges from remote work fall into two broad categories: task-oriented and social.

- **Task-oriented:**
 - *How to communicate and share information when employees are no longer convened in the same office*
 - *How best to enable employees to collaborate in real time*
 - In both cases, setting up systems well in advance is the key to success. Instant messaging platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, or Zoom, that allow employees to chat with each other almost instantly are one way to work around these challenges; document-sharing platforms such as Dropbox, Microsoft Teams, and Google services are another.
- **Social**
 - *Separating people from their coworkers can create a sense of isolation for some people*
 - To mitigate the sense of isolation, it is important for companies to build in time for the type of conversations that people organically have at work -- but that aren't about work. One example is "virtual pizza parties".

[Tips for Staying Productive and Mentally Healthy While You're Working From Home](#) (Time)

1. **Location is key.**

- a. Find a dedicated and comfortable spot to work that you can associate with your job and leave when you're off the clock -- that means get off the couch, and definitely out of bed.
2. **Find a buddy.**
 - a. Social interactions can alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness. Consider finding a colleague you can reach out to when you're feeling the need to chat with someone.
3. **Have a plan.**
 - a. When working alone, you should keep a more structured daily schedule than usual. Time spent alone is better if it's structured. Examples include scheduling multiple breaks throughout the day to play with a pet, take a long walk, or grab the mail.
4. **Think about how you're communicating.**
 - a. It's important to go beyond email and use other digital tools that can better replicate the in-person office experience and provide for clear communication.
5. **Remember everyone works differently.**
 - a. Not everyone employee actually wants to work from home, making this shift extra stressful for some. It's key to communicate as much as possible and help employees struggling with the change.

[Working from home is a lifesaver--and a game changer](#) (CNN)

- Many solutions to mitigate the spread of coronavirus involve the use of technological solutions like Zoom conferences, remote work on Slack or Google Hangouts, and files on Google Drive.
- However, it may be hard to reduce this dependence on technology after the fact. When the coronavirus subsides, work may not resume as it was before. Companies may decide to keep flexibility in place once telecommuting infrastructure has been established.

Other Considerations for Remote Work:

[COVID-19, Work-from-Home Policies, and Maintaining Wage and Hour Compliance](#)

[Working from home because of coronavirus? Don't give your company a different kind of virus](#)

Corporate Examples:

[List of companies asking employees to work from home](#) (Business Insider)

Microsoft: [As we work to protect public health, we also need to protect the income of hourly workers who support our campus](#)

- Microsoft has asked employees in the Puget Sound region and northern California who can work from home to do so, which means they have a reduced need for hourly workers on-site. The company acknowledges the impact lost work will have on hourly workers, they have decided to continue paying all vendor hourly service workers their regular pay during this period, whether their services are needed or not.
- Microsoft recognizes that this action may not be possible for smaller companies, but believes that larger employers who are able to should consider taking these steps as well.

[Tech giants promise to pay hourly workers as employees commute](#)

- Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Amazon recently announced that they plan to pay hourly workers regular wages even as on-site support staffing needs are reduced while employees work from home.

[Walmart- New COVID-19 Policy to Support the Health of Our Associates](#)

- Should an associate be quarantined or have a confirmed case of the virus, they'll receive up to two weeks of pay. If they're not able to return to work after that time, additional pay replacement may be provided for up to 26 weeks for both full-time and part-time hourly associates.

Additional Resources:

[CDC Travel Health Notices](#)

[State Department Travel Advisories](#)

[COVID-19: Implications for business](#) (McKinsey)

[The impact of Coronavirus on the global market](#) (Mercer)

[Responding to the potential business impacts of COVID-19](#) (PwC)

[COVID-19 U.S. Employment Law Update and Guidance for Employers](#) (Sibley)

[5 Ways to Manage Coronavirus Concerns When Employees Can't Work From Home](#) (US Chamber)