

COMPLIANCE BULLETIN

Cal/OSHA Issues Return-to-Work General Guidelines for COVID-19

As state economies reopen, the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal/OSHA) has issued [interim general guidelines](#) to help employers in California protect their workers from COVID-19. This interim guidance does not impose new legal obligations.

The new guidance identifies specific infection control measures that are mandatory for California employers to implement and include in their Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP).

Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP)

California employers are [required](#) to have a written program that, among other things, identifies workplace hazards and trains employees on how to address them. It also requires that employers update their plans when new hazards emerge.

Employers are required to determine if COVID-19 infection is a hazard in their workplace. If it is a workplace hazard, then employers must implement infection control measures. According to Cal/OSHA, most California workplaces must adopt changes to their IIPP because COVID-19 is widespread in the community.

Action Steps

Employers in California should review this guidance and implement Cal/OSHA recommendations as they prepare and plan for their workforce to return to their worksites.

Cal/OSHA's interim guidance is subject to change as the situation evolves. For this reason, employers are also encouraged to continue monitoring [Cal/OSHA's website](#) for updates and important information.

Provided to you by **Risk Management Advisors**

Resources

Federal OSHA

- [Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19 \(Spanish\)](#)
- [Prevent Worker Exposure to Coronavirus \(Spanish\)](#)

California Department of Public Health

- [Novel Coronavirus Guidance for Child Care and Preschool Settings](#)
- [2019 Novel Coronavirus Guidance for Colleges and Universities](#)
- [2019 Novel Coronavirus Guidance for Schools and School Districts](#)

Cal/OSHA

- [Aerosol Transmissible Diseases Model Exposure Control Plan](#)
- [California Workplace Guide to Aerosol Transmissible Diseases](#)

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The Aerosol Transmissible Diseases (ATD) Standard

Cal/OSHA requires employers covered by the [ATD standard](#) to protect employees from airborne infectious diseases and pathogens transmitted by aerosols. The ATD Standard applies to numerous facilities, including medical establishments, laboratories, correctional facilities, homeless shelters, mortuaries, funeral homes and any location specifically assigned by Cal/OSHA.

However, Cal/OSHA's position is that these COVID-19 precautions may also be applicable to workplaces not traditionally covered by California's ATD standard. This is particularly true for establishments with significant interaction with the public.

Infection Prevention Measures

Cal/OSHA recommends that employers include the following infection prevention measures in a written IIPP:

- Actively encourage sick employees to stay home;
- Immediately send employees home or to medical care, as needed, if they have a frequent cough, fever, difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat or recent loss of taste or smell;
- Ensure employees who are out ill with fever or acute respiratory symptoms do not return to work until both of the following occur:
 - At least three full days pass with no fever (without the use of fever-reducing medications) and no acute respiratory illness symptoms; and
 - At least 10 days pass since the symptoms first appeared;
- Provide employees with paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19 if required to by the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#);
- Ensure employees that return to work following an illness promptly report any recurrence of symptoms;
- Encourage employees to telework from home when possible;
- Practice physical distancing by canceling in-person meetings, using video or telephonic meetings, and maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet between persons at the workplace when possible;
- Provide employees with cloth face coverings or encourage employees to use their own face coverings for use whenever employees may be in workplaces with other persons. Cloth face coverings are not personal protective equipment (PPE), but combined with physical distancing of at least 6 feet, they may help prevent infected persons without symptoms from unknowingly spreading COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that the general public not use surgical masks or N-95 respirators, so that these critical supplies are available to health care workers and first responders;
- Avoid shared workspaces (desks, offices and cubicles) and work items (phones, computers, other work tools and equipment) when possible. If they must be shared, clean and disinfect shared workspaces and work items before and after use;
- Establish procedures to routinely clean and disinfect commonly touched objects and surfaces such as elevator buttons, handrails, copy machines, faucets, and doorknobs. Surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water prior to disinfection. These procedures should include:
 - Using disinfectants that are [EPA-approved](#) for use against the virus that causes COVID-19;
 - Providing EPA-registered disposable wipes for employees to wipe down commonly used surfaces before use;
 - Following the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., safety requirements, PPE, concentration and contact time); and
 - Ensuring there are adequate supplies to support cleaning and disinfection practices; and



- Advise employees to avoid nonessential travel if possible and check the [CDC's Traveler's Health Notices](#) prior to travel.

Confirmed COVID-19 Cases at Work

If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection:

- Inform employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA);
- Temporarily close the general area where the infected employee worked until cleaning is completed; and
- Conduct deep cleaning of the entire general area where the infected employee worked and may have been, including breakrooms, restrooms and travel areas, with a cleaning agent approved for use by the EPA against the coronavirus. It should ideally be performed by a professional cleaning service. Any person cleaning the area should be equipped with the proper PPE for COVID-19 disinfection (disposable gown, gloves, eye protection, mask or respirator if required) in addition to PPE required for cleaning products. See below for further information on PPE.

Retailers, Service Industry and Establishments With Frequent Contact With the Public

For employers in industries such as retail sales or service industries, to protect those employees with frequent contact with the public, arrange work and implement measures that account for the possibility that the public is a possible contamination source, including:

- Conduct even more frequent cleaning and disinfection of surfaces touched by the public such as credit card machines, touch screens, shopping carts and doors;
- Protect cashiers and other workers who have frequent interaction with the public with engineering controls such as Plexiglas screens or other physical barriers, or spatial barriers of at least 6 feet, if feasible;
- If exposures to the general public cannot be eliminated with engineering controls, require or encourage customers to wear face coverings, which are mandatory in some jurisdictions;
- Schedule work to allow frequent hand-washing by employees handling items (e.g., cash, credit cards and merchandise) touched by members of the public. Notably, [Executive Order N-51-20](#) requires that employees working in food facilities (as defined by the [California Retail Food Code](#)) must be permitted to wash their hands every 30 minutes and additionally, as needed;
- Enforce physical distancing by limiting the number of customers in retail space;
- Ask customers to take precautions such as only touching items they intend to purchase, and provide hand sanitizer stations; and
- Provide workers handling items touched by the public with PPE (e.g., disposable gloves).

Employee Training

Provide training in a language that is readily understandable by all employees on the following topics:

- General description of COVID-19, symptoms, when to seek medical attention, how to prevent its spread and the employer's procedures for preventing its spread at the workplace;
- How an infected person can spread COVID-19 to others even if they are not sick;
 - How to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by using cloth face coverings, including [CDC guidelines](#) that everyone should use cloth face coverings when around other persons;
 - How cloth face coverings can help protect persons around the user when combined with physical distancing and frequent hand-washing;



- Information that cloth face coverings are not protective equipment and do not protect the person wearing a cloth face covering from COVID-19; and
- Instructions on washing and sanitizing hands before and after using face coverings, which should be washed after each shift;
- Cough and sneeze etiquette;
- Washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, after interacting with other persons and after contacting shared surfaces or objects. As noted above, [Executive Order N-51-20](#) requires that employees working in food facilities (as defined by the [California Retail Food Code](#)) must be permitted to wash their hands every 30 minutes and additionally, as needed;
- Avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands;
- Avoiding sharing personal items with co-workers (e.g., dishes, cups, utensils and towels);
- Providing tissues, no-touch disposal trash cans and hand sanitizer for use by employees; and
- Safely using cleaners and disinfectants, which includes:
 - The hazards of the cleaners and disinfectants used at the worksite;
 - Wearing PPE (such as gloves); and
 - Ensuring cleaners and disinfectants are used in a manner that does not endanger employees.

Washing Facilities

Regardless of COVID-19 risk, all employers must provide washing facilities that have an adequate supply of suitable cleansing agents, water, and single-use towels or blowers (see title 8 sections [1527](#), [3366](#), [3457](#) and [8397.4](#)).

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Cal/OSHA requires employers to conduct a hazard assessment to determine if any PPE is needed to protect employees from hazards that are present or are likely to be present in the workplace, including health hazards. Employers must select and provide employees with properly fitting and sanitary PPE that will effectively protect them against these hazards. Employers must also ensure the appropriate PPE is provided to and used by employees who use cleaners and disinfectants.

Current CDC guidelines do not recommend that the general public wear respirators or masks to protect against COVID-19. Consistent with CDC guidelines, and in light of current respirator and surgical mask shortages and their prioritization for health care workers, Cal/OSHA is not recommending respirators or masks for most workers at this time.

Source: California Department of Industrial Relations