

Recommendations and Guidance to Protect Critical Infrastructure Workers during COVID-19 Pandemic

The Washington State Department of Health has developed this guidance to assist employers and workers in essential businesses in response to the 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. We realize that not all essential business can be conducted while maintaining social distancing of 6-feet, such as lifting heavy equipment and conducting utility repairs.

While the situation is evolving, at this time we believe that people over 60, immune-compromised people and those with chronic medical conditions are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. One thing we know for sure is that it spreads easily from person to person through tiny droplets in the air after someone coughs or sneezes. Most of this spread happens when someone has symptoms, like a cough. It is possible for the virus to spread when someone doesn't have symptoms, but this is not the main way it spreads. It is also possible for the virus to spread through droplets on hard surfaces, though this is also not the main way it spreads. That is why using basic preventative measures and personal hygiene is so important.

Protect workers

Your highest priority must be to protect workers in your establishment. Ensure workers are educated on the potential risk and basic preventive measure, such as:

- Wear cloth face coverings in public settings. Wearing a cloth face covering is not substitute for social distancing. Wearers should wash their hands before and after touching and adjusting the mask.
- Require everyone to wash their hands upon entering any structure, before meals, after time outside, and prior to leaving work. Wash hands often during their shift with soap and water for 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands especially your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Cough and sneeze into elbow or into a tissue. Throw away the tissue immediately after use and wash hands. (For employees tips, see [Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette in Healthcare Settings](#).)
- If an employee demonstrates any of the symptoms of illness (see Screening Employees below)
- Maintain a minimum of six feet of distance between yourself and others when feasible.
 - Where workstations cannot be separated provide barriers to create an effective 6 foot separation.

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- Other controls such as ventilation changes or fans to supply fresh air to the worker's breathing zone may also create an effective separation when space is limited.
- Frequently clean and disinfect high contact surfaces like doorknobs, tables, furniture, shared bathrooms, countertops, and shared crew vehicles and heavy equipment.
- Avoid sharing equipment such as pens, clipboards, tools, and other frequently used items. If items must be shared clean and disinfect them frequently.

Screen Workers

We recommend screening workers or having employees self-screen before each shift. Use the following screening questions:

“YES or NO, since your last day of work, or since your last visit to this facility, have you had any of the following:”

- A new fever (100.4°F or higher), or a sense of having a fever?*
- A new cough that you cannot attribute to another health condition?*
- New shortness of breath that you cannot attribute to another health condition?*
- A new sore throat that you cannot attribute to another health condition?*
- New muscle aches (myalgias) that you cannot attribute to another health condition, or that may have been caused by a specific activity (such as physical exercise)?*

*If a worker answers **YES** to any of the screening questions, immediately activate your emergency protocol for COVID-19. The designated screener should consider:

- A review of the screening results
- Recommendations for exclusion of the employee from work
- Recommendations for medical follow-up

Restriction of Visitors

If your business can restrict visitors, we strongly recommend doing so. We understand some essential businesses provide service to the public and will not be able to restrict visitors. If you cannot restrict visitors ensure social distancing and frequent cleaning of high contact surfaces.

Determine if the Work is Critical

Many essential businesses conduct both essential and non-essential routine work. Utilities, public works, and transportation industries should determine if the work is essential to the health and safety of their employees and the public.

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Some work can and should be postponed such as planned expansions, non-critical routine maintenance, and non-critical capital improvement projects. Other work cannot be postponed, such as restoring water, wastewater or electrical service, repair or maintenance of critical infrastructure and equipment, and emergency repairs.

Work that can be completed alone or allows the crew to maintain 6-feet apart that ensure continued operation of an essential utility or infrastructure should continue. Work that requires more than one person in close proximity may still need to be conducted for safety reasons. The employer should limit interactions between workers, in such cases.

Consider limiting interactions between your workers, such as:

- Keep workers on the same shifts to limit the number of different people in which they interact
- Ensure maintenance or work crews that must have close interactions are as small as possible
- Keep crews together to reduce the exposure of each worker
- Conduct preconstruction or safety meetings over the phone or by video conferencing instead of in-person
- Have workers use separate vehicles as much as possible to limit the time they are in close contact with each other
- Limit close interactions and activities to less than 10 minutes, if possible

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

PPE may also be needed to prevent certain exposures, but it should not take the place of other more effective prevention strategies such as the engineering and administrative controls above. Working within 6-feet of another healthy individual in itself may not require PPE. PPE selected should be based off work tasks, employer's hazard assessment, and the type of exposure the worker has on the job.

Examples of PPE include: gloves, goggles, face shields, face masks, and respiratory protection, when appropriate. Employers are required to provide their workers with PPE needed to keep them safe while performing their jobs. Employers should check the L&I, OSHA and CDC websites regularly for updates about recommended PPE for COVID-19. All PPE for each worker must be:

- Based on the hazard to the worker.
- Properly fitted and refitted as needed.

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- Put on and worn properly every time.
- Regularly cleaned, maintained and replaced, as necessary.
- Removed properly every time.

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

The risk of COVID-19 is not connected to race, ethnicity or nationality. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

Have more questions about COVID-19? Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127**. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.