Return to Work Guidance for Water Treatment Plant Operators Who Have Confirmed COVID-19 Infection, or Who Do Not Show Symptoms after Contact with a Known Case of COVID-19*

Water treatment plant operators (WTPOs), their families and water systems seek guidance on when to report to work or return to work if they may have had indirect or direct contact with COVID-19 or have contracted the illness. This guidance is intended to help answer these questions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Water Treatment Plant Operators with Confirmed COVID-19

1. WTPOs should not return to work until both a and b have been met:
   a. At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medications and respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) have improved; and,
   b. At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared

2. WTPOs can return to work if they follow a and b below:
   a. Follow respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene, and cough etiquette (as defined by CDC) cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm.
   b. Wear a facemask while working closely with others (within 6 feet) until all symptoms are gone or until 14 days after the illness began, whichever is longer. This is possible only if you have a supply of facemasks. If WTPOs are working alone, they do not need to wear a facemask.

3. Some WTPOs may have a prolonged cough as a result of COVID-19, which may continue after isolation has ended. They may wear a facemask when working closely with others until their cough goes away or their health returns to baseline status.

Alternatively, WTPOs with confirmed COVID-19 infection can stop isolation and return to work without complying with the time limits stated in #1 above if they meet all of the following:

1. Fever is gone without use of fever-reducing medication
2. Illness signs and symptoms have improved
3. Operator receives two negative lab test results for COVID-19 collected at least 24 hours apart. Tests must be molecular assay for COVID-19 from Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab specimens.
Water Treatment Plant Operators Who Do Not Show Symptoms after Contact with a Known Case of COVID-19

CDC exposure designations of Low, Medium and High Risk for those exposed to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, are presented below:

Indirect contact with COVID-19/Low risk: For WTPOs that may have visited a school, medical facility or other locations in which a suspected or positive COVID-19 case has been found. Similar exposures arise when an employee family’s member may have been exposed to COVID-19 but are asymptomatic.

Close contact/medium to high risk: CDC defines close contact for healthcare exposures as follows: a) being within approximately 6 feet (2 meters), of a person with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time (such as caring for or visiting the patient; or sitting within 6 feet of the patient in a healthcare waiting area or room); or b) having unprotected direct contact with infectious secretions or excretions of the patient (e.g., being coughed on, touching used tissues with a bare hand).

WTPOs Who Do Not Show Symptoms after Close Contact with a Known Case of COVID-19 (Medium and High Risk)

1. WTPOs should actively monitor for symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection but can return to work if they follow a and b:
   a. Follow respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene, and cough etiquette (as defined by CDC) cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm.
   b. Wear a facemask while working closely with others (within 6 feet) until 14-days after the date of exposure. This is possible only if there is a sufficient supply of facemasks. If WTPOs are working alone they do not need to wear a facemask.

2. Follow a and b if symptoms develop during the monitoring period:
   a. If WTPOs develop fever (measured temperature > 100.4° or subjective fever) or develop respiratory symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they must stop working, immediately isolate themselves from others, and promptly notify their supervisor. They should consult their healthcare provider for further evaluation.
   b. Testing for COVID-19 should be performed, if available. If testing is not available, follow guidance above for infected WTPOs.
      i. If the test is positive, follow guidance above for infected WTPOs.
      ii. If the test is negative, they can return to work if all of the following are met:
         1. Symptoms are gone.
         2. It has been at least 24 hours since the fever has gone (if they had a fever) without use of fever-reducing medications.
3. Wearing a facemask is recommended while working closely with others (within 6 feet) until 14-days after the date of exposure. This is possible only if there is a sufficient supply of facemasks. WTPOs working alone do not need to wear facemasks. Note: If new symptoms arise during the 14- day monitoring period, retest for COVID-19.

**WTPOs Who Do Not Show Symptoms after Indirect Contact (Low Risk) with a Known Case of COVID-19**

1. WTPOs should continue to work while self-monitoring for symptoms. They should follow respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene, and cough etiquette (as defined by CDC) [cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm](http://cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm).
2. They do not need to wear a facemask as long as they are symptom free.
3. Follow #2 in the above section for close contact if symptoms develop during the monitoring period.

*This guidance is based on Return to Work Guidance for Healthcare Workers (HCWs) and First Responders (FRs) Who Have Confirmed COVID-19 Infection or Are Asymptomatic with High or Medium Risk Exposures to a Known Case of COVID-19.*

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