

COVID-19 Guidance for Critical Infrastructure Workers

Background

Coronavirus disease 2019, or COVID-19, is a new respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. Some people are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, including:

- People over 60 years of age. The risk increases significantly thereafter and escalates with age, with persons over age 80 in the highest risk category.
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility.
- People, regardless of age, with underlying health conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, severe obesity, chronic kidney disease, chronic lung diseases or asthma, as well as those with severely weakened immune systems.

The most common signs and symptoms include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. However, studies show that some individuals with COVID-19 lack symptoms (“asymptomatic”) and that even those who eventually develop symptoms (“presymptomatic”) can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means that the virus can spread between people who are interacting within 6 feet—for example, by coughing, sneezing or talking—even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms.

This guidance aims to help critical infrastructure workers to safely continue working and ensure continuity of essential operations after potential exposure to someone with COVID-19, provided those workers are symptom-free.

Who is a critical infrastructure worker?

Critical infrastructure workers are people working in 16 different sectors as identified by the [DHS Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency \(CISA\)](#), including:

- Federal, state, & local law enforcement
- 911 call center employees
- Fusion Center employees
- Hazardous material responders from government and the private sector
- Janitorial staff and other custodial staff
- Workers – including contracted vendors – in food and agriculture, critical manufacturing, informational technology, transportation, energy and government facilities

If You Are an Employer of Critical Infrastructure Workers Exposed to COVID-19

To ensure continuity of operations of essential functions, the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) advises that critical infrastructure workers may be permitted to continue work following potential exposure to

COVID-19, as long as they don't develop any COVID-19 symptoms and additional precautions are implemented to protect them and the community. **This option should be used only in situations where exempting workers from quarantine is necessary to preserve operations, and that cessation of operations would lead to serious harm or danger to public health or public safety.**

A potential exposure means being a household contact or having close contact (being within 6 feet for more than a total of 15 minutes cumulatively within a 24-hour period) with an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. The timeframe for having contact with an individual with COVID-19 includes the period of time of 48 hours before the individual develops symptoms (or if the individual with COVID-19 was asymptomatic, 48 hours before the test date).

Critical infrastructure workers who have had an exposure but don't show symptoms should take the following actions prior to and during their work shift:

- **Pre-Screen:** Employers should measure the employee's temperature and assess symptoms prior to them starting work. Ideally, temperature checks should happen before the individual enters the facility.
- **Regular Monitoring:** As long as the employee doesn't have a fever or symptoms, they should self-monitor under the supervision of their employer's occupational health program.
- **Wear a Mask:** The employee should wear a face mask at all times while in the workplace for 14 days after last exposure. Employers can issue face masks or can approve employees' supplied cloth face coverings in the event of shortages.
- **Social Distance:** The employee should maintain 6 feet and practice social distancing as work duties permit in the workplace.
- **Disinfect and Clean work spaces:** Clean and disinfect all areas such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment routinely.

If the employee becomes sick during the day, they should be [sent home immediately](#). Surfaces in their workspace should be [cleaned and disinfected](#). Persons who had close contact with the ill employee starting 2 days prior to symptoms (or starting 2 days prior to test date for those who were asymptomatic) are considered exposed and should be notified.

Even if exposed critical infrastructure workers continue to work, it is still recommended that they get tested 5-9 days after a known close contact exposure, and that they be removed from the workplace if testing results positive.

Employers should implement the recommendations in the [CDPH COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#) to help prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. Additional information about identifying critical infrastructure during COVID-19 can be found on the [DHS CISA website](#) or the CDC's specific [First Responder Guidance page](#).

If You Are a Critical Infrastructure Worker Who Has Been Exposed to COVID-19

How do I know if I was exposed?

You generally need to be in close contact with a sick person to get infected. Close contact includes:

- Living in the same household as a person with COVID-19,
- Caring for a person with COVID-19, or

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Please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus to find the latest version.

- Being within 6 feet of a person with COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more.

What should I do if I am a close contact to someone with COVID-19 but am not sick?

You should monitor your health for symptoms of COVID-19, including fever, cough and difficulty breathing, during the 14 days after you were last in close contact with a person sick with COVID-19. You can continue to go to work as long as you have no COVID-19 symptoms and only after approval from and under the direction of your employer. If you have any conditions that may increase your risk for a serious illness (age 60 years or over or have underlying medical conditions), contact your health care provider and tell them you were exposed to someone with COVID-19. Apart from providing essential services, you should avoid public places for 14 days. In addition you should take these everyday preventative actions:

- Monitor your symptoms and take your temperature before work.
- Practice enhanced hand hygiene and social distancing as work duties permit. Don't congregate in the break room or other crowded places.
- Wear a face mask or a face covering at all times.
- Minimize close contact to other household members as best you can. Stay in another room; use a separate bathroom; avoid sharing dishes, glasses, towels or other household items; and clean high touch surfaces and shared spaces every day.
- Stay home if you become sick.
- Get tested 5-9 days after your close contact exposure.

What should I do if I am a close contact to someone with COVID-19 and get sick?

If you get sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing (even if your symptoms are very mild), you should stay at home and away from other people. Contact your healthcare provider to discuss evaluation and testing. This is especially important if you are at higher risk for a serious illness (age 60 years or over or have underlying medical conditions), call your health care provider.

Stay home away from others and do not return to work until:

- at least 10 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared, and
- at least 1 day (24 hours) has passed of being fever-free (i.e., no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications) and your other symptoms have improved.

For example, if you have a fever and coughing for 7 days, you need to stay home 3 more for a total of 10 days. Or, if you have a fever and coughing for 10 days, you need to stay home 1 more day with no fever and improved cough for a total of 11 days.

How can I protect myself from exposure?

- Stay home as much as possible.
- Practice social distancing in the workplace, at least 6 feet if possible.
- Wear a face covering in public settings, especially where it's difficult to maintain social distancing.
- Practice proper hand hygiene. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in public place. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands. Do not shake hands.
- If you are sick, stay home except to get medical care.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. If surfaces are dirty, clean them using detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection. To disinfect, most common EPA-registered household disinfectants will work. See [CDC's recommendations for household cleaning and disinfection](#).

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- Get plenty of rest, drink plenty of fluids, eat healthy foods and manage your stress to keep your immunity strong.

How can I reduce stress reactions?

Responding to COVID-19 can take an emotional toll on you. There are things you can do to reduce stress reactions:

- Acknowledge that stress can impact anyone during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Learn the symptoms including physical (fatigue, illness) and mental (fear, withdrawal, guilt).
- Allow time for you and your family to recover from responding to the pandemic.
- Create a menu of personal self-care activities that you enjoy, such as spending time with friends and family, exercising, or reading a book.
- Take a break from media coverage of COVID-19.
- Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to care for yourself and your family as you did before the outbreak. Call [NAMI Chicago Helpline](https://www.nami.org/About-NAMI/Chicago) (833-626-4244) or our CDPH MH Centers (312-747-1020) for free telephonic services from a mental health counselor.

Helpful Contacts and Websites

Resource Center for Businesses, Consumers and Employees – The Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) is working with Federal, State and County agencies to provide support to Chicago businesses, consumers and employees impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. See what resources are available at www.chicago.gov/bacpcovid19.

Workplace Safety Concerns – If you have concerns about employees working in close proximity, unsanitary environment or other employer’s practices, and want to file a complaint, call the Attorney General’s Workplace Rights Bureau at 844-740-5076 or use this [complaint form](#).

Violations of COVID-19 Safety Guidelines - To report violations of COVID-19 safety guidelines, including workplace violations, large gatherings, price gouging, or complaints related to paid sick leave, contact 3-1-1 by downloading the CHI311 free mobile app, going online at 311.chicago.gov or by calling 3-1-1.

COVID-19 Information – For information on Chicago’s COVID-19 response, visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus, email coronavirus@chicago.gov, or call 312-746-4835. You can also [sign up](#) to receive updated guidance from CDPH as it becomes available. For additional information and resources, visit the [CDC COVID-19 website](https://www.cdc.gov/covid19/).

Health Care Assistance for Uninsured – People who don’t have a provider or medical insurance, can call the nearest community health center and they will help them coordinate care. Find a community health center at findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov.

Mental Health Support - Refer employees in need of mental health support to the [NAMI Chicago](https://www.nami.org/About-NAMI/Chicago) helpline at 833-NAMI-CHI (833-626-4244) for a listening ear, mental health information or referrals.

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