What you can do in your workplace to keep safe and healthy during a pandemic

March 15, 2020

As the leader of a large or small business or organization, you are naturally concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on your employees, customers or clients and your bottom line. Based on the information available as of March 15, 2020 at 4pm, these are the recommendations of your local public heath unit.

COVID-19 Basics

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that circulate both in humans and animals.
Human coronaviruses are common and may be associated with mild illness, like the common cold and more severe illnesses such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Coronaviruses spread through **droplets** from an infected person who coughs or sneezes. Through these virus-laden droplets, it can spread to people who you spend a lot of time with (close contacts) such as household members – like how the flu and other respiratory illnesses spread. It can also live on surfaces and infect a person who touches that surface and then touches their eyes, mouth or nose. Symptoms include fever, cough, shortness of breath and fatigue. Complications can include serious conditions like pneumonia or kidney failure, and death.

80% of individuals have a mild illness.

For up-to-date COVID-19 information call our infectious diseases team at 1-800-922-0096 (prompt #9) or visit or community Q & A.

Southwestern Public Health
1-800-922-0096
www.swpublichealth.ca

Sw SOUTHWESTERN
Public Health
Oxford · Elgin · St.Thomas

What you should do:

The low-cost measures below will help prevent the spread of infections in your workplace, such as colds, flu and stomach bugs, and protect your customers, contractors and employees. Employers should start doing these things now, even if COVID-19 has not arrived in your community. These steps can reduce working days lost due to illness and stop or slow the spread of COVID-19.

Encourage Respiratory Etiquette and Hand Hygiene

- Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, hand washing and hand sanitizing at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.

- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.

- Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand rub that contains at least 70% alcohol concentration, or to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds. Washing hands with soap and water is preferred if hands are visibly dirty.

- Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rub in the workplace. Ensure adequate supplies are maintained.

Actively encourage sick employees to stay home

- Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not go to work until they are symptom free for 24 – 48 hours. Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.

- Employers should be flexible with requiring healthcare provider's notes for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness. Healthcare provider notes to validate employee illness or to return to work can put unnecessary strain on healthcare provider offices and medical facilities during this busy time.

- Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. During this time, employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Make sure your workplaces are clean and hygienic. Surfaces (e.g. desks and tables) and objects (e.g. telephones, keyboards, light switches, faucets, doorknobs, etc.) need to be wiped with disinfectant regularly because contamination of surfaces touched by employees and customers is one of the main ways that COVID-19 spreads. Consider increasing your cleaning services so that your high touch surfaces can be cleaned throughout the day rather than at the end.\

Before Travel

- Employers should be aware of their staff's travel plans. The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that all international travel be avoided. They also recommend that individuals who have travelled internationally self-isolate at home for 14 days upon return to Canada. *If your employees provide an essential service and/or are essential to the continuity of your business or organization's operations, you may choose to have them work if they have no symptoms.* If, however, they develop even mild symptoms, they should go home and self-isolate. While working, individuals who have recently travelled internationally should practice excellent hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

- Avoid sending employees internationally who may be at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. older employees and those with medical conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease) to areas where COVID-19 is spreading.

- Consider issuing employees who are about to travel with small bottles (under 100 ml) of alcohol-based hand rub. This can facilitate regular hand-washing.

While Traveling

- Encourage employees to wash their hands regularly and stay at least two meters away from people who are coughing or sneezing

- Ensure employees know what to do and who to contact if they feel ill while traveling.

- Ensure that your employees comply with instructions from local authorities where they are traveling. If, for example, they are told by local authorities not to go somewhere they should comply with this. Your employees should comply with any local restrictions on travel, movement or large gatherings.

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus)
Information for Non-Health Care Workplaces

Upon Return from Travel:

- The Chief Medical Officer for Canada recommends quarantine for any international travellers returning to Canada. https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/travel-health-notices/221

Getting your business or organization ready for COVID-19 in your community

- Develop a plan of what to do if someone becomes ill with suspected COVID-19 at one of your workplaces. The plan should cover putting the ill person in a room or area where they are isolated from others in the workplace and contacting the local health authorities.

- Consider how to identify persons who may be at risk, and support them, without inviting stigma and discrimination into your workplace. This could include persons who have recently travelled to an area reporting cases, or other personnel who have conditions that put them at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. diabetes, heart and lung disease, older age).

- Promote remote working tools (videoconferencing, audio conferencing, VPN access) across your organization. If there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community, the health authorities may advise people to avoid public transport and crowded places.

- Develop a contingency and business/organization continuity plan for an outbreak in the communities where your business or organization operates. The plan should address how to keep your business or organization running even if a significant number of employees, contractors and suppliers cannot come to your place of work - either due to local restrictions on travel or because they are ill.

- Communicate to your employees and contractors about the plan and make sure they are aware of what they need to do – or not do – under the plan. Emphasize key points such as the importance of staying away from work even if they have only mild symptoms or have had to take simple medications (ibuprofen) which may mask the symptoms

- Be sure your plan addresses the mental health and social consequences of a case of COVID-19 in the workplace or in the community and offer information and support.

- For small and medium-sized businesses without in-house health and safety support, develop partnerships and plans with your local health and social service providers in advance of any emergency.