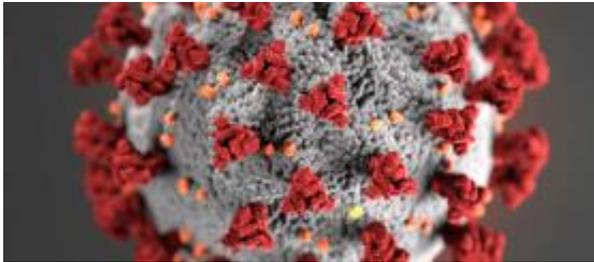# SAFETY COMMUNICATION
Coronavirus

Prevention in the Workplace

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the spread of the coronavirus "is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation.. ." We still don't know a lot about the disease. The official name is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). First identified in Wuhan, China, it has spread worldwide, with a small number of confirmed cases in the United States. Information about how COVID-19 spreads is still limited and is based on what is known about similar coronaviruses.

Coronaviruses are respiratory viruses and are generally spread through respiratory droplets from coughs and sneezes of an infected person, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It's currently unclear if a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

There is presently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19, and according to the Centers for Disease Control, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus.

How to Protect Yourself

The CDC is recommending these actions to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses:

- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Practice good handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or an alcohol based hand rub with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your upper sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands; germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs with household sprays and wipes.
- Stay home if sick, and limit contact with others as much as possible. Do not return to work until you no longer have a fever and are free from other symptoms for at least 24 hours without medication.

The CDC has published fact sheets giving an overview of the disease ([What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)](#)) and steps to take if you become sick ([What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)](#)).

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Prevention in the Workplace

Employers can take an active role in preventing or limiting the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The CDC has developed recommended strategies for employers including:

- Actively encourage sick employees to stay home or go home if they show signs of illness
- Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette, and hand hygiene by all employees:
  - Provide tissues, alcohol-based hand rubs (hand sanitizer) and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
  - Visit coughing and sneezing etiquette and clean hands and the CDC's Educational Materials page for more information.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning:
  - Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
  - Provide disposable wipes so commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

The CDC is recommending the same precautions for COVID-19 as for the flu. Their publication Get Your Workplace Ready for Pandemic Flu has good information on preventing infectious diseases, as well as preparing your agency for possible pandemic.

Planning for an Outbreak or Possible Pandemic

The number of COVID-19 cases in the US is small, but the CDC expects more cases are likely to be identified in the coming days, and according to the director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, there is a potential for a much larger outbreak.

The CDC's Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 can help employers plan for a possible COVID-19 outbreak. The CDC's Interim Guidance for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Systems and 911 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) for COVID-19 in the United States provides information for first responders, fire services, emergency medical services, and emergency management officials.

In addition to these recommendations, agencies should review or develop their pandemic plans. No one knows how serious COVID-19 will become, and there is the possibility it will reach pandemic levels. The CDC's Planning and Preparedness Resources site has resources to help you ensure you can protect your workforce while ensuring continuity of operations.

The CDC and the WHO are monitoring developments regarding COVID-19 closely. We encourage you to visit their sites often for the latest information. You can also find current information at the Texas Department of Insurance site.