

What to Do When Someone at the Workplace Tests Positive for COVID-19

This step-by-step protocol explains legal obligations and provides additional guidance to employers when one or more people at the workplace tests positive for COVID-19. This protocol applies to employees as well as volunteers, contractors, or other people who work at the facility. In addition to this protocol, employers must comply with all applicable state and federal laws and any collective bargaining obligations. For non-English versions of all documents referenced in this guide, please go to Santa Clara County Public Health [Business and Workplaces webpage](#).

When to Use this Protocol

If the person diagnosed with COVID-19 ever had symptoms, use this protocol if they were symptomatic while at work or developed symptoms within 48 hours of being at work.

If the person diagnosed with COVID-19 never had symptoms, use this protocol if they tested positive within 48 hours of being at work.

Note: This protocol is triggered as soon as you learn that a person at your workplace has received a positive test result on a COVID-19 diagnostic test. You may not avoid the requirement to implement this protocol by re-testing the person, even if the results of one or more re-tests are negative. The County Health Officer does *not* recommend repeated testing to confirm a positive test result due to the low likelihood of a false positive on the initial test.

Step 1: Provide instructions to the COVID-19-positive worker

Work Exclusion & Isolation Period

Non-high-risk, non-congregate settings: The worker must be sent home immediately and instructed to **isolate for 10 days** from the date they tested positive **AND**, if symptomatic, **24 hours** after resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medication and improvement in any other symptoms; (whichever is **longer**). The individual may return to the worksite only after both of these criteria are met.

Provide the COVID-19 positive worker with the [Home Isolation and Quarantine Guidelines](#) [handout](#).

Employees are no longer considered contagious if they meet the criteria detailed in the [Return to Work letter](#) (see the Business and Workplaces webpage for more information). The County of Santa Clara discourages employers from requiring a medical note or a negative test to return to work as long as the criteria detailed are met.

Step 2: Identify all close contacts to the COVID-19-positive worker

If an employer learns that an employee has tested positive, the employer must try to determine which, if any, employees had close contact with the positive employee. A **close contact** is defined as someone who was within six feet from the person who tested positive for at least 15 minutes at any time beginning 2 days before the infected person had symptoms or tested positive. Close contacts include people who had 15 minutes of continuous contact with the infected person, as well as people who had repeated short-duration interactions with the infected person. In addition, being considered a close contact does not depend on whether the contact or the infected person was wearing a face covering during their interaction.

Maintain Confidentiality

Employers should keep employees' medical information confidential in accordance with federal and state laws. Do not disclose the identity of the COVID-19 positive worker in your effort to identify close contacts. Please consult with your attorney if you have any questions about applicable employment or privacy laws.

Identify Close Contacts During the Exposure Period

The employer must investigate and document the employee's schedule and work location to determine: 1) the day their symptoms began (if applicable); 2) the date of their first positive test; and 3) the last day that the person diagnosed with COVID-19 was present at the workplace.

This information must then be used by the employer to identify all individuals who may have had close contact with the confirmed-positive employee during the exposure period.

The **exposure period** is defined as:

- **Start:** 2 days before the person had symptoms (or 2 days before date of first positive test for employees who are asymptomatic)
- **End:** last day the positive person was at work

Being "exposed" does not depend on whether the person exposed or the infected person was wearing a face covering during their interaction.

Complete the Worksite Case and Contact Reporting Form

The employer must go to the [Worksite Case and Contact Reporting Portal](#) to fill out the Worksite Case and Contact Reporting Form. The employer should gather the following information for all people who have been identified as close contacts (to be provided to the Santa Clara County Public Health Department), including any vendors/suppliers, visitors, or others who had close contact with the employee at the worksite.

- Name
- Phone number
- Address

- Language spoken (if not fluent in English)

Employers may also consider instituting a policy informing employees that if they are confirmed to have COVID-19, they will be requested to provide a list of other employees with whom they had close contact during the exposure period.

Step 3: Communicate with All Employees

Work Exclusion, Quarantine & Testing for Close Contacts

NEW Vaccinated persons* with an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 are not required to quarantine if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Are fully vaccinated (this means 2 or more weeks have passed after having received the second dose in a 2-dose vaccine series, or 2 or more weeks have passed after having received one dose of a single-dose vaccine)
- Are within 3 months after they received the last dose in the vaccine series
- Do not have [symptoms of COVID-19](#) since the current exposure (if a person has COVID-19 symptoms, isolate and get tested immediately).
- Are not an inpatient or resident in a healthcare setting or facility.

Anyone who does not meet ALL 3 of the above criteria should continue to follow the general quarantine guidance below.

Anyone who had close contact with the person diagnosed with COVID-19 during the exposure period (defined above) must be prohibited from entering the worksite and must be instructed to stay at home for **10 days**, starting the last day the close contact was exposed to the person diagnosed with COVID-19 while that person was [considered contagious](#).

All close contacts are recommended to be tested on Day 6 or later from last exposure if asymptomatic (and immediately if symptomatic). COVID-19 testing locations can be found on our website. Asymptomatic close contacts may discontinue quarantine after Day 10 from last exposure but should continue monitoring for symptoms for a full 14 days. Even if the test is negative, close contacts should remain in quarantine for the full 10 days. Test results, positive or negative, should be shared with the employer.

The general quarantine guidance above applies to healthcare workers under normal circumstances, and healthcare workers who have routine workplace exposures that are not high risk should continue to follow their employer's guidance for returning to work. However, if critical staffing shortages exist, healthcare workers may follow the recommendations outlined in the [COVID-19 Quarantine Guidance for Healthcare Workers During Critical Staffing Shortages](#).

Fully vaccinated healthcare workers with [higher-risk exposures](#) are not required to quarantine

outside of work. See [Quarantine Guidance for Fully Vaccinated People](#) in the Provider Responsibilities and Guidance page for more information.

Provide the [COVID-19 Close Contact Advisory](#) to all close contacts identified.

General Advisory & Symptom Monitoring for All Other Employees

All others present at the workplace, but NOT identified as close contacts, should be advised to **self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days** after the last day that the person diagnosed with COVID-19 was at work. This includes individuals who have been vaccinated. They may continue to work, but if they develop symptoms, they must stay home (or if at work, must be sent home immediately) and should contact their healthcare provider to get testing. Everyone at the worksite must follow the business's Social Distancing Protocol.

If the workplace is a "High-Risk Setting," one where workers are at a high risk for exposure to COVID-19 due to frequent face-to-face interaction with members of the public and inability to maintain physical distancing at work, workers should get tested at least every 30 days. These "High-Risk Setting" workers include, but are not limited to, first responders, pharmacy

employees, food service workers, delivery workers, public transportation operators, and grocery store clerks.

If desired, provide the [COVID-19 General Exposure Advisory](#) to all employees who were NOT identified as close contacts.

Step 4: Report Case(s) to the Santa Clara County Public Health Department

If a positive case is identified at your worksite, you must complete the worksite case and contact reporting form on the [Worksite Case and Contact Reporting Portal](#). Under the Health Officer Order, reports must, **as a matter of law**, be made within four hours after the employer learns of the positive case(s). The information provided will remain confidential and does not affect immigration status. You may update the information you provide if you discover additional information after your initial report.

Note: Your legal obligation to report to the Public Health Department is triggered as soon as you learn that a person at your workplace has received a positive test result on a COVID-19 diagnostic test. You may not avoid the requirement to report the positive person by re-testing them, even if the results of one or more re-tests are negative. The County Health Officer does *not* recommend repeated testing to confirm a positive test result due to the low likelihood of a false positive on the initial test.

Step 5: Report Any Hospitalizations or Deaths to the Local Cal/OSHA District Office

Any serious injury, illness, or death occurring in any place of employment or in connection with any employment must be reported by the employer to the local Cal/OSHA district office immediately. For COVID-19, this includes hospitalizations and deaths among employees, even if work-relatedness is uncertain.

- Full details on what information needs to be reported (<https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/report-accident-or-injury.html>), contact information for district offices (<https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/districtoffices.htm>), and the Title 8 section 342 requirement (<https://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/342.html>) are available online.
- Cal/OSHA prefers calls by phone but will also accept email reports (caloshaaccidentreport@tel-us.com).

Step 6: Disinfection After a Confirmed COVID-19 Case at the Workplace

Until cleaning and disinfection are completed, close off areas visited by the ill person(s) if the person visited those areas within the last 48 hours. If safe, open outside doors and windows and use ventilating fans to increase air circulation in the area. Wait 24 hours or as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection. Using an EPA-certified cleaning agent, clean and disinfect all areas used by the ill person(s), including offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment (like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines), focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.

Continue routinely cleaning and disinfecting all high-touch areas throughout the day, following [CDC guidelines](#). Clean visibly dirty surfaces and objects using soap and water prior to disinfection. Use an [EPA](#)-approved disinfectant product, and follow the instructions on the label for proper use, additional PPE needs, and any other special considerations when using the product.

Step 7: Preventing Workplace COVID-19 Transmission

Strictly Enforce Face Covering Use

Face coverings are now mandated in the State of California ([CDPH, 2020](#)). All persons must be instructed to wear their face covering at all times in accordance with State requirements.

Face coverings are not required for workers while eating or drinking, for workers with a medical condition that prevents wearing a face covering, for communication by or with a person who is hearing impaired, or when the face covering would create a risk to the person related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

As Appropriate, Restructure the Workplace to Better Support Social Distancing Measures

Reconfigure, restrict, or close common areas to maintain social distancing. Minimum required social distancing measures are identified in the Social Distancing Protocol. Additional measures and restrictions are included in [Mandatory Directives](#) issued by the Health Officer.

Some basic, preliminary social distancing measures include the following:

- Maximize remote work, based on business functions. Under the Order, businesses must require all workers to work from home if they are able to perform their employer assigned work duties from home.
- For those who must remain at the workplace, maintain at least a 6-foot distance from everyone outside your household.
- For all indoor spaces open to the public, comply with any capacity limitations currently in place. Review the [Mandatory Directive on Capacity Limitations](#) to determine whether a capacity limitation applies to your facility.

- Space desks and workspaces at least six feet apart. Arrange desks and workspaces so they face the same direction rather than facing each other.
- Sanitize any shared desk/work areas between each shift.
- Minimize and avoid use of common areas (such as conference rooms, cafeterias, and break rooms).
- Instead, encourage individuals to eat meals outside or alone at their desks.
- If such common areas are used, place additional limitations on the number of workers in enclosed areas to ensure at least six feet of separation between everyone in the area.
- Stagger personnel breaks, in compliance with wage and hour regulations, to maintain adequate social distancing.
- Minimize or prohibit any in-person meetings, and opt for virtual meetings in accordance with current public health order restrictions.

Actively Encourage Adherence to Hygiene Measures

Actively encourage all individuals to increase hygiene measures (hand washing, avoiding contact with eyes/nose/mouth, covering coughs and sneezes), and provide frequent breaks for hand washing. Provide tissues, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes that can be easily accessed throughout the facility. Employers must ensure that hand sanitizer dispensers and handwashing facilities are always operational and stocked.

Print out and post educational materials throughout the workplace. Printable materials are available at: <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/covid19/Pages/learn-what-to-do-flyers.aspx>

Implement Routine Cleaning Measures

Clean

- See the CDC guidance "[Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)" for specific guidance in cleaning and disinfecting indoor and outdoor areas.
- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- All workers must wash hands regularly and be provided with frequent handwashing breaks.

Disinfect

- Ensure that routine disinfection is conducted using one of the following:
 - [EPA-registered household disinfectant](#), per manufacturer's recommendations;
 - Alcohol solution with at least 60% alcohol; or
 - Diluted household bleach solutions (if appropriate for the surface)
- Routinely clean and disinfect high-touch items (door handles, handrails, light switches, telephones, keyboards, etc.) throughout the day.

Additional Recommendations

- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks, other work tools and equipment) can be wiped down by employees before each use.
- Discourage workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use.

Ensure Strict Adherence to Social Distancing Protocol and Industry-Specific Directives

All businesses are required to complete and implement a Social Distancing Protocol and submit it to the County using the [online form](#). Additional measures specific to other industries or activities are included in [Mandatory Directives](#) issued by the Health Officer.

Periodically revisit your facilities' Protocol to determine whether any measures should be updated to enhance workplace safety. Ensure that all personnel are properly trained on the Protocol and that the Protocol measures are being strictly implemented and followed.