

The world health community continues to monitor the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the disease it causes. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that manifests itself in many ways, ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Our understanding of how the virus spreads is evolving as we learn more about it. Still currently, the virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person, whether by close contact or respiratory droplets that are produced when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or talks. Studies also show that the virus can be spread by people who are not currently symptomatic, so safety precautions should be taken seriously by everyone, regardless of whether or not they feel ill.

As the state begins to emerge from shelter-in-place guidelines, more people are returning to work every week in New Jersey. Whether your job takes you to a construction site or an office building, there are general guidelines that everyone should follow to ensure that they and their coworkers remain safe during this pandemic. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends all employees, regardless of their jobs, to adhere to the following actions:

- Notify your supervisor and stay home if you have symptoms.
- Follow CDC-recommended steps if you are sick. You should not return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met in consultation with healthcare providers, your employer, and state and local health departments.
- Follow CDC-recommended precautions and notify your supervisor if you are well but have a sick family member at home with COVID-19.
- Limit close contact with others when possible. If in small spaces like elevators, limit the number of workers in a place at each time.
- CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas where there is a significant community-based transmission of COVID-19.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as shared tools, machines, vehicles and other equipment, handrails, ladders, doorknobs, and portable toilets.



Social Distancing

For most, social distancing is a new concept. In an attempt to prevent the transmission of the virus through the air, the CDC recommends maintaining a distance of 6 feet from another person. For most workplaces, this presents an interesting challenge; how do you practice social distancing in communal areas like cafeterias, water coolers, or restrooms? In some cases, employees can simply spread out over large areas. In situations where this is not available due to space limitations, it may be useful to attempt to stagger shifts and/or break times to allow

Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19

social distancing. Other times, your best option is simply to make sure that things like restroom doorknobs are continually cleaned. Still, depending on your job site you could also consider other precautions:

- prohibiting large gatherings (currently no more than ten people) on the job site, such as the all-hands meeting
 - Discourage hand-shaking and other contact greetings.
 - Do not hold or participate in site-wide meetings, stand-downs, celebrations or lunches whenever possible.
 - Eliminate community provided food or coffee pots
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Supervisor Responsibilities

If you haven't already, there is no better time than now to create a disease response plan that establishes these guidelines for employees. These action plans can let employees know what steps are being taken to protect them and what steps they need to do to protect themselves. Useful information, like providing company-wide contact information for each employee could be disseminated to the entire organization. Other steps to ensure your job-site is safe are:



- Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace.
 - Do not share tools or equipment
 - Limit the exchange/sharing of paper documents by encouraging the use of electronic communication whenever possible.
 - Identify specific locations and practices for daily trash such as paper, hand towels, food containers, etc.
 - Modify work schedules to stagger work, provide alternating workdays or extra shifts to reduce the total number of workers on a job site at any given time.
 - Provide routine environmental cleaning (doorknobs, keyboards, counters, and other surfaces).
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Where can I get more information?

Stay informed. Talk to your employer, supervisor, or union representative who is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. See these sources for more information on employee exposure to COVID-19:

- [CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- [CDC COVID-19](#)