

# El Paso County Public Health

## COVID-19 Workplace Guidance



With the more transmissible Omicron variant, there will likely be staffing and other COVID-related disruptions. El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) encourages businesses, workplaces and community partners to proactively think through and plan for these scenarios. Depending on the unique needs of the workplace, businesses are encouraged to implement prevention strategies such as utilizing remote work to the greatest extent possible, considering flexible sick leave policies, improving ventilation, increasing social distancing between employees, encouraging masks, and connecting employees to testing and vaccination resources.

### Preventing Outbreaks

Workplaces/facilities can help prevent outbreaks by reducing transmission among staff, implementing best practices for infection prevention in the workplace, and maintaining a healthy work environment. Please review the following guidelines to help prevent and mitigate possible outbreaks at your place of business.

To [reduce transmission among employees](#):

- Encourage employees to self-monitor for [COVID-19 symptoms](#) daily.
- Have sick employees stay home and send employees home immediately if they become sick during their shift. This is applicable for COVID-19 and any other illness. EPCPH strongly recommends they follow [isolation guidance](#) if the illness is caused by COVID-19. Remember to keep an employee's health information confidential.
- Encourage sick employees to [get tested for COVID-19](#). A negative test alone is not enough for ill workers to return; sick employees are strongly encouraged to stay home from work while awaiting their test results and continue to stay home even if their test results are negative. COVID-19 test results are not definitive, and an individual could still be developing symptoms and/or contagious or be ill with a different infectious disease.
  - More information on quarantine can be found on [page 3](#)
  - More information on isolation can be found on [page 2](#)
  - More information on testing can be found on [page 3](#)
- For asymptomatic employees seeking testing after an exposure to a confirmed COVID-19 case, it is recommended they wait five days after their exposure to provide enough time for the viral load to become detectable if they have been infected.
- Recommend actively screening employees for [COVID-19 symptoms daily](#) before they enter the workplace/facility.
- Educate employees about how they can reduce the spread of COVID-19 at work and at home.
- Encourage the use of [face masks](#) among employees and customers in public settings where social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.
- Provide accommodations for vulnerable employees at [higher risk for serious illness](#), such as older adults and those with certain chronic medical conditions.

- [Healthy employees with recent exposure](#) to a person with COVID-19 who are not vaccinated, who are not fully vaccinated or who have not received a recommended booster and are eligible, are recommended to complete a five-day [quarantine period](#) starting from their last exposure date. It is recommended that anyone who has been in [close contact](#) with a COVID-19 positive case get tested five days after exposure.

To [maintain a healthy work environment](#):

- Consider increasing ventilation and/or increasing the percentage of outdoor air that circulates into the system to improve ventilation.
- Support respiratory etiquette (tissues) and hand hygiene (access to handwashing and hand sanitizer) for employees, customers, and worksite visitors.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning and disinfection, particularly on frequently touched surfaces.
- Perform [enhanced cleaning and disinfection](#) after people or employees suspected/confirmed to have COVID-19 have been in the workplace or facility.
- Minimize in-person gatherings and meetings to the furthest extent possible, especially during periods of high community incidence and positivity. Consider greater flexibility for remote work.
- Establish policies and practices for social distancing. Social distancing means maintaining a six-foot separation from others whenever possible.

To [maintain resilient business operations](#):

- Appoint a workplace coordinator who will be responsible for COVID-19 issues and their impact at the workplace.
- Implement flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices.
- Determine how you will operate if nonattendance spikes from increases in sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who must stay home to watch their children if dismissed from child care programs and K–12 schools.

## [Isolation](#)

Ensuring sick people stay home (and people with COVID-19 follow isolation requirements, regardless of vaccination status) is critical to preventing the spread of COVID-19.

If able to wear a mask, the length of isolation lasts for at least five days (specifically five 24-hour periods) after the onset of symptoms or a positive test result if asymptomatic, and for 24 hours after being fever-free without the aid of fever-reducing medication and an improvement of symptoms.

On day five, if the individual has been fever-free for 24 hours without the aid of fever-reducing medication, other symptoms are improving, and they wear a well-fitting mask on days six through 10, they can be around others on day six.

If they continue to have fever or other symptoms have not improved after five days of isolation, they should wait to end their isolation until they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and their other symptoms have improved. They should continue to wear a well-fitting mask.

In rare instances (for example, if a person was very sick or has certain medical problems), isolation may last 20 days. Public health experts do not recommend repeat testing to decide when to end the period of isolation except in rare circumstances in consultation with a medical provider. Find information about [how to isolate](#).

### **Repeat testing after someone tests PCR positive**

Retesting of someone who previously tested PCR positive within the last 90 days is not recommended for the general public. If your employee has been instructed to quarantine or isolate by EPCPH, they can return to work after meeting the time criteria in their quarantine or isolation letter. They do not need to test negative.

Isolation periods should begin either on the date symptoms began or on the date of a positive test if asymptomatic, as defined in this document.

There are some settings where repeat testing might be indicated, such as long-term care facilities, health care settings, or correctional settings.

Note that insurance might not cover the cost of repeat testing.

### **Return to work strategies for employees who had COVID-19**

A person may return to work (outside of their home) after being in isolation if they meet one of these three criteria:

- Five days after symptoms started
- Five days after a positive test if they don't have symptoms
- Five days after a hospital discharge even if they are treated with antiviral medication (unless you met criteria for discontinuation of isolation while hospitalized)

AND the person also meets all of these three criteria:

- Has had no fever for the last 24 hours without the use of medication
- Other symptoms are improving
- Wears a well-fitting mask when around others for five days after the isolation period.

El Paso County Public Health does not recommend a negative test for a person who meets the criteria to return to work.

## **Quarantine**

EPCPH strongly recommends quarantine for close contacts who do not meet the quarantine exemptions, as a public health best practice to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Quarantine means staying home for a period of time after you are exposed to someone with COVID-19. This is because you can be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 but may not show symptoms for up to 14 days. Even though you may not show symptoms, you can still spread the virus.

Individuals should quarantine for five days and get tested on day five. If the test is positive, they should enter isolation and follow the isolation guidance listed above. If the test is negative, they can leave quarantine but should continue to wear a mask when around others for 10 days after their last exposure date.

## Quarantine Exemptions

Quarantine is not recommended if an individual meets one of the criteria listed below. They are encouraged to wear a mask when around others for 10 days and monitor their symptoms and seek testing on day five after their exposure.

- An individual who has a confirmed COVID-19 infection within 90 days of exposure.
- An individual who has received a booster dose.
- An individual who has completed their vaccine series (two weeks since one dose of Johnson & Johnson or two weeks since the second dose of Pfizer or Moderna) and is not yet eligible for a booster dose.

### Those eligible for a booster dose are those:

- At least 18 years old and two months since their Johnson & Johnson dose.
- At least 12 years old and five months since their second Pfizer dose.
- At least 18 years old and five months since their second Moderna dose.

Individuals who do not meet one of the exemption criteria should quarantine for five days after their last day of exposure, seek testing on day five of quarantine, and wear a well-fitting mask in public for the remainder of their quarantine period. Children aged 2 years and younger and any individuals who cannot medically tolerate a mask should quarantine at home for the full 10-day period.

Anyone who is experiencing symptoms should be tested immediately and enter isolation pending the test results.

## Close contacts

Close contacts of persons with confirmed or probable COVID-19 should self-quarantine from the time of their last contact with the person.

Anyone who is a close contact should contact their primary care provider if they begin experiencing any symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, body aches, fatigue, loss of taste or smell, congestion, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea).

### Who counts as a close contact?

- Anyone who was within six feet of someone who has COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes (total time over each 24-hour period) in the 48 hours prior to symptom onset thru the end of their isolation period.
- Anyone who provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19.
- Anyone who had direct physical contact with the sick person (touched, hugged, or kissed them).
- Anyone who shared eating or drinking utensils with the sick person.
- Anyone whom the sick person sneezed on, coughed on, or otherwise got respiratory droplets.

## Contact tracing

Contact tracing is conducted by ECPH staff to identify individuals who might have been exposed to someone known or suspected of having COVID-19. Close contacts are at risk of getting infected themselves.

Contact tracing is a critical tool to help to slow the spread of COVID-19 by having close contacts self-quarantine away from others.

Individuals who are contacted by EPCPH about a positive test or potential exposure to COVID-19 should be reassured that their information is kept confidential.

More information on what contact tracing can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/contact-tracing.html>.

## **Reporting and mitigating outbreaks**

It is a [Colorado requirement to report all suspect outbreaks of disease within 24 hours](#). Workplaces/facilities that suspect an outbreak (knowledge of five or more employees from a non-household group with confirmed COVID-19 or COVID-like illness, of at least one with a positive PCR test or antigen test, within a 14- day period) should immediately take the following actions:

- Contact EPCPH at 719-578-3220 to schedule a time to discuss further outbreak guidance and next steps. Please note, this is not meant to be a punitive action; EPCPH often has access to resources and guidance that are not available elsewhere.
- Fill out the [CDPHE COVID-19 outbreak report form](#) to report the outbreak in accordance with Colorado law.
- Begin identifying staff with COVID-19-like symptoms using this CDPHE COVID-19 [line list template](#).

Do not wait until you have five or more employees out sick to act. Contact EPCPH as soon as you see a sudden increase in cases or severe outcomes to discuss prevention and mitigation procedures to attempt to avoid having further illness in the facility.

If five or more cases are detected within 14 days among employees, consider temporarily closing to ensure proper disinfection and sanitation, and report the outbreak immediately to EPCPH. EPCPH will help you confirm if an outbreak exists, identify additional cases, and determine the extent of the outbreak. Public Health will also help you develop a plan to safely reopen. By working closely with EPCPH, you may be able to conduct a rapid risk assessment and implement immediate control measures instead of closing.

During an outbreak, EPCPH will help you build a plan that may include the following components:

- [Enhanced cleaning, disinfection, and environmental controls](#)
- Contact tracing to identify healthy employees who may have been exposed to an ill co-worker
- Excluding vulnerable employees at higher risk for serious illness while the outbreak is ongoing
- Requiring all employees to use face masks (cloth or otherwise) while at work
- Helping clarify the best way to clear employees to return to work

Additional workplace/facility closures may be required by Public Health if widespread transmission continues to occur, despite the above measures or if there are not enough staff available to run safely