

# COVID-19 Employee Screening and Testing Recommendations for Industry

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) recommends that plants and businesses adopt an ongoing, sustainable system of testing based on intensive employee screening with a low threshold for testing symptomatic employees.

## Effective employee screening is a two-step process

### Step 1

The initial screening involves verbally asking each employee, before every shift, a series of five basic questions:

Have you had any of the following symptoms since your last day at work or the last time you were here? Please answer “Yes” or “No” to each question:

1. Fever or feeling feverish?
2. Cough?
3. Shortness of breath?
4. Sore throat?
5. Muscle aches?

Temperature screening can also be included in the initial screening; however, temperature screening alone is not effective. More than 30% of COVID-19 cases do not report fever or feeling feverish. If using infrared temperature screeners upon entry to the facility, they should be set to 99.5° because these devices are often imprecise. Setting to 99.5° reduces the likelihood of missing an individual with a low-grade fever.

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## Step 2

If a worker answers “Yes” to any of the screening questions, or has an infrared screening temperature above 99.5° during the initial screening, the worker should be isolated, masked, and further evaluated by an occupational health nurse. See [COVID-19 Enhanced Screening Form for Use in Manufacturing and Food Production Plants](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/busiscreen.docx) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/busiscreen.docx>).

- During “enhanced” screening, the employee’s temperature may be taken again with an aural (ear) or oral thermometer (when it can be done with proper social distancing and hygiene), and the employee will be asked detailed questions about illness and exposure history. Employees with temperatures of 100.4° or above at this step are considered symptomatic for COVID-19 even if no other symptoms are present.
- The occupational health nurse will determine if the employee can return to work, should be seen by a health care provider, or should be tested per the plant’s protocol, and then return home to self-isolate and wait for test results.
- The nurse can determine if isolation is feasible in the home environment and may request assistance from the local public health department for housing and any needed services.
- If an occupational health nurse is unavailable and an individual’s screening temperature of 99.5° or higher cannot be verified through another method, they should be referred for testing, out of an abundance of caution.

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## Testing

- MDH recommends testing symptomatic employees, even those with very mild symptoms, based on systematic and comprehensive screening as described above. The objective is a sustainable system of screening and testing that identifies ill employees. When this is done along with adoption of other best practices, such as physical and operational changes to accommodate distancing, appropriate use of PPE, and adequate cleaning and disinfection of common areas, transmission is minimized in the plant.
- Use of a release form to specifically allow the plant to receive test results in real-time for those employees who choose to sign it, is important. See [Authorization for Disclosure of Protected Health Information to Employer](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/busitemp.docx) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/busitemp.docx>). This way, a plant can quickly identify any “hotspots” for transmission within the plant, and perform its own workplace follow-up to exclude co-worker contacts of COVID-positive employees.

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- COVID-19 is a “reportable” disease, meaning that positive test results must be reported to MDH by the lab and the clinic. MDH will follow-up with cases and contacts, particularly household and very close contacts of the employee. For more information visit: [Business and Employers: COVID-19 \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/businesses.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/businesses.html).

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### When should a plant consider testing everyone (symptomatic and asymptomatic employees)?

- There may be situations when testing of all employees should be considered. The key factor involved in making this judgement is the number of positive cases proportionate to the size of the workforce within a short period of time (for e.g., 10 days). Plant management should use the MDH Hotspot Reporting email inbox to request a consult: [health.hotspot.covid19@state.mn.us](mailto:health.hotspot.covid19@state.mn.us). MDH epidemiologists will consider the advisability of testing all employees at the facility who have not already tested positive for COVID-19. Testing will be at the expense of the employer.
- Keep in mind, testing all employees at the same time provides information about the COVID-19 status of employees only on the day of testing. In other words, an employee may be negative on the test day, and positive the next day. Point in time, mass testing does not remove the ongoing need to conduct thorough daily symptom screening and exclusion of ill employees as described above.



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