

Guidance for Environmental Health Response to COVID-19 Cases in Regulated Businesses

Environmental health role in outbreak response

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has an established protocol for rapid investigation of foodborne, waterborne, and zoonotic disease outbreaks with coordination among local and state epidemiologists, environmental health specialists, laboratorians, agriculture officials, and other stakeholders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a need for state and local environmental health (EH) specialists to expand the scope of the types of outbreaks to which they typically respond. In some instances, EH will be asked to assist with workplace contact tracing for employees who tested positive for COVID-19 or are suspected of having COVID-19 and who work at businesses regulated by state and local agencies, including retail food and beverage establishments, lodging facilities, swimming pools, youth camps, and campgrounds.

Identification of employees with COVID-19

MDH identifies a single employee

If MDH case investigators identify a single employee with COVID-19, contact tracers will notify the employer if the case worked during their infectious period.

- Infectious period is 2 days prior to onset of symptoms or in the 10 days after onset of symptoms.
- If asymptomatic, dates of concern are 2 days prior to test collection date or 10 days after test collection date.

EH or local public health identifies a single employee

If EH receives the initial report of an individual case from their regulated business, or if they are notified by local public health (LPH) case investigators, EH is encouraged to discuss the items in this document with the person in charge of the business. **Do not notify MDH about individual cases.** If a cluster (3 or more cases) is detected, contact MDH; additional follow-up will be requested.

MDH identifies a cluster of employees or patrons

If MDH case investigators identify a cluster (3 or more) of employees with COVID-19 that work at a business under the jurisdiction of EH, or if patron transmission is detected, MDH will notify the appropriate EH jurisdiction for additional follow-up with the business.

EH response to a report of an employee with COVID-19

Communication with the person in charge

EH will contact the person in charge at the business. Ideally, this can be done over the phone. In-person visits should be minimized as much as possible.

Exclude employees who test positive from work

EH will work with management of the business to ensure that the ill employee has been properly excluded from work. The employee should follow the guidance in this document: [What to do if you have COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/case.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/case.pdf)

Employees who test positive for COVID-19 should stay home until all of the following are true:

- Their cough, shortness of breath, and other symptoms are better, and
- It has been 10 days since they first became ill, and
- They have not had a fever for 1 day, without using fever-reducing medications.

Identify close workplace contacts

EH will work with management of the business to identify anyone who worked with the ill employee, starting 2 days prior to the onset of their symptoms until they stopped working. Close contacts will need to self-quarantine. Close contacts should follow the guidance in this document: [What to do if you have had close contact with a person with COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/contact.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/contact.pdf).

- People who worked within 6 feet of the COVID-19 case for 15 minutes need to self-quarantine for 14 days since their last exposure to that person.
 - If close contacts develop symptoms of COVID-19 during the quarantine period, the person can seek medical care or testing as they choose. Regardless, that person needs to stay home until all of the following are true:
 - Their cough, shortness of breath and other symptoms are better, and
 - It has been 10 days since they first became ill, and
 - They have not had a fever for 1 day, without using fever-reducing medications.

- Close contacts who are in self-quarantine must stay in quarantine for the entire 14 day period, regardless of testing status. A negative COVID-19 test result does not reduce the length of time they are in quarantine.
- People who did not work near the person with COVID-19, or who worked close to them for less than 15 minutes do not need to self-quarantine, but they should monitor themselves for symptoms.

Notifying close workplace contacts

The business is responsible for notifying close workplace contacts of employees who are COVID-19 cases.

Practices for EH-regulated businesses to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among employees

Businesses are responsible to comply with all Stay Safe Guidance applicable to their industry: [Stay Safe Guidance \(https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp) as well as all other applicable laws, regulations, and standards. The following is intended to highlight practices generally applicable to all EH-regulated businesses that will help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

COVID-19 Preparedness Plan

Every business is required to have a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan. Verify that the business has developed and implemented their plan.

Additional resources are available on the Stay Safe MN website: [Stay Safe Guidance \(https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp)

Employee screening

Consult the guidance applicable to your industry for employee screening requirements: [Stay Safe Guidance \(https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp). Screening all employees for COVID-19 symptoms is recommended, even if the applicable guidance does not require it and even if there are not currently ill employees.

Instruct food service employees who are sick to stay home.

Use the Visitor and Employee Health Screening Checklist to screen for COVID-19: [Visitor and Employee Health Screening Checklist \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facilityhlthscreen.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facilityhlthscreen.pdf) .

Temperature screening is an option if it can be done with proper social distancing, protection, and hygiene protocols. However, temperature screening is not required.

Use a very low threshold for excluding employees based on their symptoms. Symptoms that are compatible with COVID-19 should not be “explained away” by other reasons (allergies, hangovers, etc.) when deciding whether to exclude employees.

Follow the MDH guidelines for COVID-19 and when to return to work: [COVID-19 and When to Return to Work \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/returntowork.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/returntowork.pdf).

Continue following MDH's requirements for reporting employee illness: [Illness Reporting for Food Establishments \(www.health.state.mn.us/people/foodsafety/dwi/empillfs.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/foodsafety/dwi/empillfs.pdf).

Have a protocol to address employees who begin showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at work.

Train and remind employees of required hand hygiene practices, including handwashing procedure and frequency, restricting bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, proper glove use, and COVID-19 precautions.

Employee scheduling

Plan employee schedules so that cohort groups work together, when practical. For example, Aaden, Javier, and Ann always work together; Hodan, Dawb, and Peter always work together. However, members of one team should never work with another team. Scheduling in teams can help to reduce exposures within the staff.

Social distancing

Evaluate processes and workstations to maintain as much social distancing as possible. Provide 6 feet of separation between employees who work together. This can be difficult to accomplish in some situations, such as restaurant kitchens.

Encourage employees to practice social distancing and discontinue after-work functions to prevent transmission of COVID-19 among co-workers. Transmission among co-workers in social settings has been observed on multiple occasions.

Surface cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting

Food contact surface sanitizing

Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces by following the Minnesota Food Code requirements: [Cleaning and Sanitizing \(www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/food/docs/fs/cleansanfs.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/food/docs/fs/cleansanfs.pdf)

Follow the manufacturer's label to ensure that appropriate products are used to sanitize food contact surfaces. Not all disinfectants are appropriate for food contact surface sanitizing.

If approved disinfection products are used on food contact surfaces at disinfection strength, they must be rinsed with potable water, then sanitized according to the Minnesota Food Code.

Implement standard operating procedures for cleaning and sanitizing food contact surfaces, food preparation surfaces, and beverage equipment after use.

Disinfecting

Clean and disinfect high-contact surfaces (examples: tables, doorknobs, light switches, faucets, point-of-sale systems, keyboards, telephones, etc.) according to the CDC's [Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html).

If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap, then rinsed with clear water prior to disinfection.

Special attention should be paid to surfaces and areas that the ill employee(s) may have contacted.

Use U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved [List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2) (www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2) to thoroughly clean and disinfect.

If an EPA-approved disinfectant is not available, follow the instructions for using bleach in CDC's [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html).

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products for concentrations, application method, contact time, and the use of personal protective equipment. Do not mix cleaning and disinfection products together.

Consider providing cleaning and disinfection kits (sprays or buckets, hand sanitizers or other cleaning supplies) that are readily accessible throughout the establishment for areas that will be cleaned periodically.

Cleaning electronics

For electronics such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATMs, remove visible contamination if present. Clean and disinfect according to manufacturer's recommendations. Consider using wipeable covers for these items, if possible.

If no manufacturer guidance is available, consider the use of alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol to disinfect touch screens. Dry the surfaces thoroughly to avoid damage to the equipment.

Additional Resources

[Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers Responding to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)
\(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html)

[Interim Recommendations for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19
\(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/guidebusiessential.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/guidebusiessential.pdf)

[What Grocery and Food Retail Workers Need to Know about COVID-19
\(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/grocery-food-retail-workers.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/grocery-food-retail-workers.html)

[Social Distancing, Disinfecting & Other Precautions \(FDA\) \(www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19#precautions\)](https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19#precautions)

[Interim Guidance for Hotel Managers and Owners
\(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/lodgingcleaning.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/lodgingcleaning.pdf)

[Food Safety during the COVID-19 Pandemic
\(www.health.state.mn.us/people/foodsafety/emergency/covid.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/foodsafety/emergency/covid.html)



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Contact health.communications@state.mn.us to request an alternate format.

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