COVID-19 Recommendations for Critical Infrastructure Businesses and Industries

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This updated document clarifies which businesses and industries this document is addressing. It also updates the definition of contact with COVID-19 to make it consistent with recent CDC guidance.

This guidance is for Minnesota critical infrastructure businesses and industries in food and agriculture; veterinary medicine; mining; construction; critical manufacturing; distribution; public utilities; law enforcement; transportation; and community financial banks. This Minnesota guidance does not apply to other critical infrastructure sectors described under federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency guidelines. This document does not apply to health care and public health; government; schools; child care; corrections; general business; retail; restaurants and hospitality; and other sectors for which there is specific Minnesota state guidance.

COVID-19 response for critical infrastructure

The most important actions that employers can take to minimize spread of COVID-19 in the workplace include: systematic employee screening; support testing of symptomatic employees; adopting physical and operational changes to accommodate distancing; mandating face coverings and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE); and ensuring there is adequate cleaning and disinfection of common areas.

All Minnesota businesses are required to develop a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan that includes how the facility will implement these best practices. For more information and a template plan that can be tailored to each facility, visit Stay Safe Guidance for All Business Entities (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/all-businesses.jsp).

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) recommends that employers screen every employee before every shift for symptoms of COVID-19, and support testing of symptomatic employees based on the screening, even when their symptoms are mild. Symptoms to ask about during basic screening include sore throat, cough, fever or feeling feverish, muscle aches, shortness of breath, and loss of taste or smell. The objective is to establish a sustainable system of screening and testing that identifies and excludes ill employees on a continuous basis. Workers who have symptoms when they arrive at work, or
who get sick during the day, should be sent home and referred to health care for further evaluation and testing.

**Guidance for employers when an employee with symptoms is tested for COVID-19:**

1. The employee should stay home and isolate away from other people until test results are available.

2. **The employee who tests negative:**
   - May return to work if their symptoms are better.
   - Should stay home if they still have symptoms and consult a health care provider.

3. **The employee who tests positive:**
   - Employees who test positive for COVID-19 and have symptoms should stay isolated at home and away from others in the house until all three of the following are true:
     - Symptoms have improved; **AND**
     - At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared; **AND**
     - At least 24 hours have passed without fever, without using fever-reducing medications.
   - Employees who test positive for COVID-19, but do not have symptoms, must stay isolated at home and away from other people in the house for 10 days from their testing date.
   - MDH does not recommend that employers require a negative COVID-19 test result before an employee can return to work. For more information, visit [CDC: Duration of Isolation and Precautions for Adults with COVID-19](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/duration-isolation.html).
   - Consider alternative housing for employees who test positive for COVID-19 when workers live in close quarters, such as in a shared apartment or in the same living space with extended family, and risk of exposure to others in the house is ongoing. In Minnesota, local public health officials are key in identifying housing and needed services for people whose living situations make it impossible to stay separated from the other people who live with them.

**Employer responsibilities when an employee tests positive for COVID-19**

1. Identify commonalities among workers who have tested positive for COVID-19. This includes dates illnesses started; job positions; location of workstations in the facility; work shifts; transportation to work; and social or family connections. This will support efforts to understand how COVID-19 may be spreading inside and/or outside the workplace. Employers are often in the best position to identify these connections.

2. **Workplace contact tracing**
   a. The purpose of workplace contact tracing is to limit disease spread by identifying co-workers who have had contact with an infectious employee, then excluding these contacts from the workplace and requiring them to quarantine at home.
b. **Contact** is defined as spending a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 during their infectious period.

   i. For businesses covered by this guidance, co-workers can be exempted from this definition of contact, if during their period of contact, everyone was using a face covering and a face shield, **OR**, if everyone was using a face covering and there was a physical barrier between them, such as a full Plexiglas screen.

c. People with COVID-19 can give the disease to others 2 days before they show symptoms until 10 days after their first symptoms (this is termed the infectious period). Therefore, contact tracing should include co-workers who were exposed to a worker with confirmed COVID-19 beginning 2 days before the individual’s symptoms started (for workers without symptoms, 2 days before their test date) until the time the case was at home and isolated away from others.

d. Pay special attention to contacts who work very closely together with the COVID-positive employee, reside in the same home, eat lunch together, or carpool.

e. Employers play a critical role in identifying workplace contacts and asking them to quarantine at home so that others in the workplace are not exposed. Supervisors and HR personnel have the tools to identify workplace contacts quickly and efficiently. Local public health and MDH are best positioned, through routine case interviews and contact tracing activities, to identify close contacts who live with or have social ties to a worker who has COVID-19.

f. Contact tracing, whether performed by a health department or by the employer, should be conducted in a way that protects the confidentiality and privacy of an employee with COVID-19.

### Quarantine and testing strategies

Fourteen days is the standard length of time to quarantine at home after contact with someone (in the workplace or elsewhere) who has tested positive for COVID-19. However, CDC guidance does permit workers in critical infrastructure sectors to continue working after exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19 if their absence would create staffing shortages; they adhere COVID-prevention protocols; and they remain symptom-free. MDH recommends instead that critical infrastructure industries adopt one of the following quarantine strategies to better control disease spread in the workplace while providing for workforce needs:

a. **Strategy 1:** Employees should quarantine at home for a **minimum** of 10 days and get tested on day 7. If the COVID-19 test is negative and the employee does not develop symptoms, they may return to work on day 11.

b. **Strategy 2:** Employees should quarantine at home for a **minimum** of 7 days, and get tested on day 5. If the COVID-19 test is negative and the employee does not develop symptoms, they may return to work on day 8. This strategy should only be adopted in facilities with severe staffing shortages.

c. **Strategy 3:** Employees should quarantine at home for 10 days. If symptoms develop, the employee should get tested and remain home until results are available. If the employee does not develop symptoms, they may return to work on day 11, without any restrictions; no medical
exam or testing is required. This is a fallback strategy for critical infrastructure when testing is limited.

These quarantine/testing strategies may also be adopted for “mission critical” staff, such as those who work for public utilities, who are asked to quarantine prior to assignments where they will be sequestered.

**When multiple employees test positive for COVID-19**

When an increase in COVID-19 cases occurs among employees in a facility within a short time frame (10-14 days), state and local public health officials will contact the facility to offer guidance. These officials will review COVID-19 cases at the facility, and worker and supervisory adherence to the facility’s COVID-19 Preparedness Plan. This includes reviewing employee screening and testing protocols, physical and operational changes that have been made to accommodate distancing, mandatory masking, appropriate use of masks and PPE, and cleaning and disinfection procedures in common areas.

If the spread appears to be occurring in the workplace, testing of multiple individuals (i.e., mass testing) may be indicated. However, mass testing has limitations. Testing all or a group of potentially exposed employees at the same time provides information about COVID-19 status on the day of testing. It does not inform workplace staff or public health officials about the COVID-19 infection status of employees on subsequent days (e.g., an employee may be negative on the test day and positive the next day). Mass testing, at one point in time, does not remove the ongoing need to conduct regular, daily symptom screening and testing, with exclusion and follow-up of ill employees.

The following may be evidence for workplace spread of COVID-19 within a facility:

1. An analysis of the number of COVID-19 positive employees over time indicates an increase in the number of cases within a short time frame (e.g., 10-14 days).
2. A local public health and MDH analysis of the COVID-19 cases within the facility identifies clusters of cases associated with specific workgroups, shifts, or locations in the business, as opposed to sporadic or scattered cases, or cases among household members, carpoolers, and social groups.
3. Interviews with management find that the facility is not fully following recommended practices for disease prevention and infection control.

The following mass testing strategies may be considered jointly with facility management, MDH, local public health, and employee and community groups:

1. Whole plant testing.
   a. Voluntary testing of all facility employees who have not already tested positive is recommended when there is evidence for widespread transmission within a facility.
   b. If employers elect to conduct facility-wide testing, multiple asymptomatic workers with COVID-19 may be identified. Employers should have a plan for meeting staffing needs while these people are excluded from the workplace.
2. Cohort or group testing.
   a. Voluntary testing of a cohort or group of facility employees who have not already tested positive is recommended when it can be shown that transmission within a facility is limited to a particular shift, workgroup, or area of the facility.

3. Whole plant testing in conjunction with household or community testing events.
   a. Concurrent testing of facility employees and their households and/or the surrounding community is recommended when there is evidence for transmission within the facility as well as in employee households and the surrounding community.

4. Community testing.
   a. Community testing is recommended when there is an increase in the number of cases within a short period of time (e.g., 10-14 days) in a town, city, or county involving employees of multiple workplaces, their household members, and community members.
   b. Community testing should be a joint effort between the State of Minnesota, the local municipality, the local public health department, county emergency managers, community groups, and local businesses.