

## Tips for Employers When an Employee Has COVID-19 Exposure and/or Symptoms

The following tips came out of a [Whatcom COVID-19 Employer Support Task Force](#) Forum on July 17, 2020 called "My Employee Has Symptoms. Now What?" This was the second in a series of forums created to support businesses and organizations in Whatcom County. For a recording of this forum and to learn about upcoming forums, visit [whatcomtogether.org/events](http://whatcomtogether.org/events).

In all likelihood, your workplace will experience at least one of these three scenarios at some time during this COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Employee has symptoms of COVID-19.
2. Employee has had a close contact with someone who has COVID-19.
3. You have a positive case at your business.

The following tips will help you be prepared.

### Reach out for help

- See information about [What to Do If a Worker Has COVID-19 or Is a Close Contact](#).
- Contact the Whatcom County Health Department's Business Response Team: [health-BRT@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:health-BRT@co.whatcom.wa.us); Phone: (360)778-6100, or after hours (360)715-2588.
- Encourage sick employee to contact their healthcare provider if they are having symptoms that are unusual for them.

### Be prepared – Have a plan ready and use it consistently

- Make sure you understand all guidance and have a good written plan in place before you must use it.
- Identify COVID-19 as quickly as possible and act promptly to prevent spread.
- Have a designated safety coordinator responsible for ensuring the COVID-19 plan is consistently implemented.
- Do not become complacent. Continue to be very diligent and anticipate that there will be new COVID-19 cases.

### Implement COVID-19 prevention strategies consistently

- Strictly follow [state guidance](#) for your business sector.
- Educate staff about safety practices.
- Display signage. See the [Safer.Stronger.Together materials](#) for example.
- Explain to staff that the actions they take outside of work impact the workplace and other employees. Emphasize making good choices when employees are on their own time.
- Ask staff [screening questions](#) and conduct temperature monitoring every day.
- Insist on appropriate [face coverings](#) for the job and physical distancing.
- Change work schedules to limit the number of people onsite at one time.
- Keep crews consistent so people are working with the same small group of people each shift to limit contacts.

*Staff are only as good as the information you give them.*  
- Tom Kunesh

### Maintain a rigorous cleaning schedule

- Identify reputable cleaning companies who you can call to do immediate cleaning and disinfecting if there has been a sick employee in the workplace.
- Have a buzzer that goes off hourly to alert employee that it is time to clean frequently touched surfaces.
- Have extra supplies (e.g., masks, bleach) easily available.

### Keep staff informed about COVID-19 cases in the company

- Provide regular (e.g., weekly) updates for employees about any COVID-19 exposures in the business. Report location and action taken. Being transparent and giving accurate information will help reduce staff anxiety and rumors.
- Maintain confidentiality of employees who are sick or who are a close contact. If someone asks about a sick employee, you can just say, "they are going to be out for a while" without revealing why.

### Share information about positive cases and possible exposure with the community

- Use print and social media, and other ways of communicating with clients, to provide accurate (non-confidential) information about COVID-19 exposures with the community. Your transparency and honesty will be appreciated.