

WHAT TO DO WHEN COVID-19 COMES TO WORK

Checklist for Employers



Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department



Having one or more employees diagnosed with COVID-19 can be overwhelming. Use this simple checklist to keep track of the main steps you need to take when this occurs.

- Notify our Business Response Team (BRT)** within 24 hours if you know of employees with diagnosed or probable COVID-19, or if an employee is identified as a close contact* of someone with diagnosed or probable COVID-19.
 - Email: health-BRT@co.whatcom.wa.us
 - Call during business hours: (360) 778-6100
 - Call after hours: (360) 715-2588
- Tell employees impacted by COVID-19 to stay home, or to go home from work immediately.** This includes:
 - Employees who are diagnosed with COVID-19 or experiencing any [symptoms](#) of COVID-19
 - Employees who are close contacts of an individual diagnosed with COVID-19
- Close off any areas or shared equipment used by an employee with confirmed COVID-19** if they worked while contagious in the past 7 days.
 - Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation.
 - Wait 24 hours, or as long as possible, before thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting tools, equipment, and all areas used by the person.
- Strongly encourage employees with COVID-19 symptoms, and employees who had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19, to get tested for COVID-19.** Free or low-cost testing is available regardless of immigration status. Call the Whatcom County Health Department's nurse consult line at (360) 778-6128. Nurses will arrange for testing. See [testing locations and information](#).
- Create a “[line list](#)” of employees and customers or clients who were close contacts** of an employee with diagnosed or probable COVID-19. The list should include name, phone number, date of birth, and date of last contact with person diagnosed with COVID-19.
 - Email the [line list](#) to health-BRT@co.whatcom.wa.us. When sharing this and other sensitive personal information with us, please put “Confidential” in the email subject line.
 - We will interview the people on this list to determine who may need to quarantine.
- Inform close contacts and maintain employees' confidentiality.** You will need to inform close contacts of the sick employee that they may have been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19. Do not disclose the identity of the ill employee, because this is a violation of their privacy rights.

If you have an employee who is diagnosed with COVID-19, our Business Response Team can help address the details specific to your business or organization and offer guidance.

It is unlikely you will need to close your business if an employee is sick. The actions you need to take to keep your employees safe and healthy will depend upon factors like the size of your workplace, the number of people who are infected with COVID-19 or who are close contacts*, whether an employee was onsite when contagious, and how you've implemented health and safety practices (e.g. wearing masks, physical distancing, cleaning and sanitizing).

- ❑ **Provide sick leave and benefit information** to support employees while isolating** or quarantining.***
- ❑ **Tell employees about the exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace** and be available to answer their questions while maintaining confidentiality. For guidance about what to say, see [Tips for Talking to Staff](#) and [Sample Messaging for Businesses to Communicate to Employees about COVID-19 Diagnosis in the Workplace](#).
- ❑ **Be familiar with [return to work conditions](#).**
 - **Note that a negative COVID-19 test is not sufficient to allow a worker return to work.**
 - **We will approve return to work for employees in isolation.** We will provide employees written notice of the duration of isolation. Workers can return to work once they have been formally released from isolation by the Whatcom County Health Department.
 - **Approve close contacts to come back to work when they have completed quarantine.** We will notify close contacts how long they need to stay in quarantine. Unlike people in isolation, the employer must approve quarantined employees to come back to work when their quarantine period has ended. Before allowing the employee to return to work, make sure to ask if: 1) they have had any COVID-19 symptoms during the quarantine period, and 2) if they have been in contact with anyone who has confirmed COVID-19. If so, check with us as the quarantine period may need to be extended.

If the business is deemed critical infrastructure by Washington State, it may be possible for close contacts to return to work during quarantine under very strict requirements and with approval from the Whatcom County Health Department.

- ❑ **Decide if you will communicate to the general public about cases of COVID-19 in the workplace.** You are not required to communicate with the public about COVID-19 cases, but an honest report of the ways you are working to protect employees and customers can help to control rumors and boost the public's confidence in your business or organization. [See Sample Messaging for Businesses to Communicate with Public about COVID-19 Diagnosis in the Workplace](#).

We have many resources and people here to support you during this challenging time. Visit the [Whatcom County Health Department's webpage for businesses and organizations](#) for local resources including an Employer Tool Kit to support you and your business. For additional local guidance and peer support, visit the [Whatcom Together](#) website.

DEFINITIONS

***Close Contact:** Someone who was within six feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes over a 24-hour period.

- Close contact happens during the sick person's infectious period, which can start up to two days before symptoms started. For people diagnosed with COVID-19 who do not have any symptoms, it can start two days prior to when the person was tested for COVID-19 until the time they were isolated.
- Someone can be a close contact whether or not face coverings were worn.

****Isolation:** Separates someone who is infected with the virus from others. See [CDC guidance on when people who are sick should isolate themselves](#).

*****Quarantine:** Separates someone who may have been exposed to the virus in case they become sick. See [CDC guidance on when to quarantine](#).