

If an employee in your company has become infected with COVID-19 then it is very important to assist that employee, as well as other employees, and re-evaluate what can be done to stop the further spread of COVID-19, whether at the workplace or at the homes of everyone connected with the employee.

To do this effectively each of the following issues needs to be addressed:

1. Provide support to that employee and assist with isolation
2. Support to other staff and prepare for counselling
3. Inform the Health Department that you have an employee with COVID-19 infection
4. Attempt to establish how that employee got infected,
5. Identify who the employee might in turn have infected
6. Assist with contacting all these people and helping with quarantining
7. Continue to screen staff to detect signs of possible COVID-19 infection
8. Take steps to prevent any further infections
9. Possible temporary closure of the shop.

Each of these 9 issues is discussed below.

1 Support to COVID-19 infected employee



Since he/she tested for COVID-19 your employee is likely to be in quarantine and would have been notified by a doctor or nurse that they are infected and need to be isolated for 14 days. However, sometimes there are miscommunications around this and your employee might still be at work.

If the employee is at work then:

- a) Separate him/her from other employees by placing in a well-ventilated room
- b) Ask him/her to wash hands thoroughly
- c) Provide him/her with a surgical mask if you have one, or else a cloth mask
- d) Provide supportive counselling via your health and safety representative or via a trusted colleague
- e) Assist the employee to follow the advice from the health department regarding isolation required to protect their family, friends, colleagues
- f) Provide suitable sick leave arrangements for the 14 days that the employee will be in isolation and hence away from work
- g) If the likelihood is high that the infection was occupationally acquired (in other words it arose out of or in the course of work duties), then a workers' compensation claim needs to be completed.

If the employee is at home or at a quarantine facility, then:

- a) Assist the employee to follow the advice from the health department regarding isolation
- b) Provide suitable sick leave arrangements for the 14 days that the employee will be away from work.

2 Support to other staff

- Reassure staff that you are handling the situation following advice from the Health Department.
- Contact your organisation's employee health and wellness division and alert them to rapidly assist with providing counselling and psychological support for the staff.



3 Inform the Health Department

- The department of health is aware of all individuals that test positive for COVID-19 through laboratory reporting mechanisms. However, due to delays in reporting, the employee may be aware of the diagnosis before the health department.
- Contact the sub-structure or district health office in your area.
- After contacting the Health Department, a team will be dispatched to assist you



4 Establish how that employee got infected



The employee could have been infected by fellow workers/managers, customers, or by someone within their home or social circle.

Therefore, it is important to:

- Assist the employee to identify if he/she came into contact with anyone who had symptoms of a throat and chest infection. These symptoms are:
 - Fever
 - Sore throat
 - Muscle aches
 - Loss of taste or smell
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath
 - Tiredness
 - Diarrhoea
- Similarly, it is important for management to directly identify amongst the staff and frequent visitors to the company, which people have any of the symptoms listed above. Amongst these could be the person or persons who originally infected the employee and might still be unknowingly spreading the infection amongst other staff, visitors and customers.
- Make a list of all these employees and other people who have symptoms as they would need to be assessed, to decide if they should be tested for COVID-19. Include the name, surname, contact number and address of these individuals where possible.
- Depending on how many employees are involved it might be necessary to temporarily close the shop while these investigations are underway.

5 Identify who the employee might in turn have infected



Any individuals the employee came into contact with since he/she became ill could also develop the disease and need to be separated from other employees and customers, by going into quarantine.

- Ask the employee who he/she was in close contact with or worked closely with. These could be:
 - Other employees
 - Regular customers
 - People in their neighbourhood
 - Family members
 - Visitors to the shop
 - Suppliers
 - People at social gatherings
- Similarly ask all the staff at the company whether they recall being in close contact with or worked closely with the employee since the date that he/she became ill.
- Make a list of all these employees and other contacts as they may have to be quarantined to prevent further spread. Include the name, surname, contact number and address of these individuals where possible.
- Depending on how many employees are involved it might be necessary to temporarily close the shop while these investigations are underway.

6 Assist with tracing and quarantining people who might have been infected

- The health department will interview all these contacts to determine whether the level of contact is sufficient for them to have become infected, and hence whether they need to be quarantined or not.
- Please provide the list of contacts to the health department.
- Please allow the health department access to staff via a quiet room or via the telephone.
- For those staff who need to be quarantined please provide suitable special leave arrangements for the 14 days that they will be in quarantine
- Quarantine means that people who are at high risk of being infected with COVID-19 are separated from other people for 14 days so that they cannot infect others.
- Depending on how many employees are involved it might be necessary to temporarily close the shop while they are in quarantine



7 Continue to screen staff to detect signs of possible COVID-19 infection



It is possible that some of the people who were in contact with the employee were not identified and hence might still be working and at risk of becoming infected.

Also, some people can be infected with COVID-19 and yet be completely well, only becoming ill later. It is possible that such people could still be working and that they might even be the original spreaders of COVID-19.

- Therefore, all staff should be monitored by the company daily to identify other employees that may develop symptoms.
- If they develop symptoms they should not come to work, but should instead report this to their supervisor and to the health department, who will advise them which testing centre to attend, so that the test for COVID-19 can be done.
- However, some staff might come to work even if they have symptoms and therefore supervisors need to ask all staff about any symptoms they may have, every day before they start work.

8 Steps to take to prevent any future infections amongst employees

- All areas where the employee worked or visited in the shop should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and water and wiped down with a diluted bleach solution (dilute 20ml of bleach per litre of water). If the area cannot be cleaned with soap and water then wipe down the area carefully with a bleach solution, or a 70% alcohol solution.
- This includes the kitchen, staff room, canteen, toilet facilities, trolleys, baskets, doors, computers, till counters and racks.
- If large surface areas and large numbers of objects need to be cleaned and disinfected then the store might temporarily need to close while this is being done.
- Strictly follow the guidelines listed below on preventing COVID-19 infection.



9 Possible temporary closure of the shop



The Health Department may need to advise to close the shop temporarily due to the public health risk posed by remaining open.

This will be done in consultation with the shop managers and will depend upon a number of factors including the following:

The shop may need to be temporarily closed depending on the following factors:

- If the number of employees who have symptoms is considerably large, because of the time needed to investigate and determine if they should be tested for COVID-19 infection or not.
- If the number of employees who are contacts of the employee/s with COVID-19 infection is large, because of the time needed to investigate and determine if they need to be in quarantine or not.
- If the area in the store and the volume of goods that need to be cleaned is large, because of the time required to complete this important task.
- If the number of employees diagnosed with COVID-19 infection and therefore needing isolation is large, since there may be insufficient staff to operate the store.
- If the staff complement that are identified as contacts of the infected employee and therefore need to be placed in quarantine is large, since there may then be insufficient staff to operate the store.

Temporary closure of the shop can be prevented by:

- By rapidly cleaning and disinfecting the surfaces and goods that were contaminated.
- By not rotating staff from other stores, or shifting staff between work areas in a large shop.
- By seconding staff from elsewhere or temporarily employing suitably skilled staff to replace those placed in isolation and quarantine.
- By preventing infection of staff with COVID-19 by following the prudent steps outlined below.
- By training staff on how to prevent COVID-19 infection.