



County of Santa Cruz

Health Services Agency
1080 Emeline Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Potential Employee Exposure to Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How is Coronavirus spread?

Person-to-person spread most often happens during close contact with someone infected with COVID-19. An infected person produces respiratory droplets when they speak, cough, or sneeze. These droplets can land in the mouth, nose, or eyes of someone nearby (within 6 feet). Transmission can also take place if a person touches a surface contaminated with the virus and then touches their own mouth, nose, or eyes. However, this is a far less frequent method of transmission.

What is asymptomatic spread?

Even people without symptoms can carry the novel coronavirus and spread it to others. This is called asymptomatic spread.

What is community spread?

Community spread takes place when an illness is widespread within a population. Community spread means the original source of infection is not known.

What are the implications of community spread for our workforce?

Community spread of Coronavirus is happening throughout Santa Cruz County. For this reason, direct or indirect contact with a known or unknown COVID-19 person while at work poses no increased risk to the staff member. To ensure that critical functions continue, staff members with direct or indirect contact with a COVID-19 patient should continue to work as long as they don't have symptoms.

What if a staff member has had indirect contact exposure to COVID-19?

Staff members with **indirect** contact with a COVID-19 patient should continue to work as long as they don't have symptoms. While all standard social distancing protocols should be followed, no additional steps need to be taken to protect co-workers or the community. Brief, indirect exposure is considered very low risk, especially if face coverings and distancing have been used.

What if a staff member has had direct contact exposure to COVID-19?

Direct contact means close physical contact (within 6 feet for a prolonged period of time) of someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. This may occur if a staff member is living with or caring for someone with COVID-19. Direct contact also occurs by having unprotected, direct contact with the infected respiratory fluids of a patient. For instance, if you touch a freshly used tissue with your bare hand.

Staff members with **direct** contact with a COVID-19 patient should continue to work as long as they don't have symptoms. Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and follow [CDC recommended precautions](#). Additional steps may need to be taken to protect co-workers and the community (see below).

How do I know if an employee has had a direct contact?

Staff from the Public Health Department's Communicable Disease Unit (CDU) interview all individuals who are known to be positive with COVID-19. They investigate where the person has been and who they were around while infectious. CDU staff then reach out to those contacts to alert them of their potential exposure. This is called "contact tracing". If someone has been in direct contact with a known COVID-19 patient, they will be contacted by CDU if there is a significant likelihood of exposure to the virus. CDU will also issue an exposure notice to be posted for employees.

Should all staff be screened regardless of potential exposure?

Yes. Supervisors should screen all staff for COVID-19 symptoms prior to starting work. Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of Breath
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Sudden inability to taste or smell

This list is not inclusive. Staff who have other symptoms that are severe or concerning should immediately leave the workplace.

What should a supervisor do if an employee shows symptoms?

If any staff member becomes ill with fever, cough or shortness of breath, they should immediately leave the workplace. Clean and disinfect all surfaces in their workstation. Advise the staff member to self-isolate at home and contact their healthcare provider as needed.

What if a staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

The Public Health Communicable Disease Unit (CDU) will work with anyone who tests positive, as well as their close contacts. Employees should be instructed to follow the direction of the

CDU. Per federal and state privacy law, employee health information should not be shared. The CDU will provide direction to personnel, managers, and supervisors on any necessary employee health and safety communications.

Can supervisors request that an employee be tested for COVID-19?

No. Testing is done at the guidance of the employee's healthcare provider, not the employer. Testing is usually not necessary and plays no role in treatment and recovery.

What else can supervisors do to protect staff?

Social distancing requirements should be followed at all work locations regardless of potential staff exposure. All workers should:

- Stay at least 6 feet away from others as duties permit. Supervisors may choose to stagger breaks to avoid crowding in shared kitchens or breakrooms.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water. Use hand sanitizer if unable to wash.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Do not come to work if you are sick. Leave work immediately if you become sick.

Should staff wear a face covering at work?

Yes. All staff are required to wear a face covering except when alone in a private office. Healthcare workers should follow the masking guidance of their Medical Director while at work.

Are there additional safety measures for workers who may have been exposed?

If you are concerned about staff with potential exposure, strict adherence to the social distancing protocol is required. In addition:

- Do not share headsets or other objects that are used near the face.
- Clean and disinfect all shared work areas. This may include offices, bathrooms, and breakrooms.
- Increase the frequency of cleaning commonly touched surfaces. These may include phones, desktops, door handles, and keyboards.
- Work with facility maintenance staff to increase air exchange in the building

When can an employee who has been infected with COVID-19 return to work?

Employees may return to work when all three of the following conditions are met:

- They have no fever for 72 hours without fever-reducing medication;
- AND cough, shortness of breath and other symptoms have improved;
- AND at least ten (10) days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

Who can I call if I have questions?

The County's COVID-19 call center is now open 7 days a week from 8am – 6pm. The number is 831-454-4242. Outside of these hours you can still call United Way's 211 call center and is also available by texting COVID-19 to 211-211.

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