

# Preventing, Reporting and Mitigating Workplace Outbreaks During COVID-19

## What does it mean to have an outbreak?

An outbreak simply means a workplace has had at least two cases of COVID-19 in a two-week period, and it's likely that the cases got sick because of interacting at work. **It's a Colorado requirement that all suspected outbreaks must be reported to Public Health as soon as possible.** Public Health will work with you to determine which employees need to be isolated or quarantined, and make sure your cleaning and disinfection practices are sufficient to deactivate the COVID-19 virus. Additional details on individual case and outbreak definitions can be found [here](#).

## Preventing Outbreaks

Workplaces/facilities can help prevent outbreaks by reducing transmission among staff, maintaining healthy business operations, and maintaining a healthy work environment. Please review the following guidelines to help prevent and mitigate possible outbreaks at your place of business:

To [reduce transmission among employees](#):

- Encourage employees to self-monitor for [COVID-19 symptoms](#) daily.
- Require sick employees to stay home, and send employees home immediately if they become sick during their shift. Remember to keep an employee's health information confidential.
- Encourage sick employees to [get tested for COVID-19](#). Sick employees should stay home from work while awaiting their test results and continue to stay home even if their test results are negative. COVID-19 test results are not definitive, and an individual could still be developing symptoms and/or contagious.
- Actively screen employees for [COVID-19 symptoms daily](#) before they enter the workplace/facility.
- Educate employees about how they can reduce the spread of COVID-19 at work and at home.
- Encourage the use of [face masks](#) among employees and customers in public settings where social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.
- Provide accommodations for vulnerable employees at [higher risk for serious illness](#), such as older adults and those with certain chronic medical conditions.
- [Healthy employees with recent exposure](#) to a person with symptomatic COVID-19 should be quarantined at home for 14 days. Modifications may be made for critical infrastructure employees.

To [maintain healthy business operations](#):

- Appoint a workplace coordinator who will be responsible for COVID-19 issues and their impact at the workplace.
- Implement flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices.
- Determine how you will operate if nonattendance spikes from increases in sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who must stay home to watch their children if dismissed from

childcare programs and K–12 schools.

- Establish policies and practices for social distancing. Social distancing means avoiding gatherings over 10 people and maintaining a six-foot separation from others whenever possible.

To [maintain a healthy work environment](#):

- Consider increasing ventilation and/or increasing the percentage of outdoor air that circulates into the system to improve ventilation.
- Support respiratory etiquette (tissues) and hand hygiene (access to handwashing and hand sanitizer) for employees, customers, and worksite visitors.
- Perform **routine environmental cleaning and disinfection, particularly on frequently touched surfaces**.
- Perform [enhanced cleaning and disinfection](#) after people or employees suspected/confirmed to have COVID-19 have been in the workplace or facility.
- Avoid attending meetings and gatherings in-person if possible.

## Reporting Outbreaks

Workplaces/facilities that suspect an outbreak (knowledge of two or more employees with confirmed COVID-19 or COVID-like illness within a 14-day period) should immediately take the following actions:

- Contact El Paso County Public Health at 719-578-3220 to schedule a time to discuss further outbreak guidance and next steps.
- Fill out the CDPHE [COVID-19 outbreak report form](#) to report the outbreak in accordance with Colorado statute.
- Begin identifying staff with COVID-19-like symptoms using this CDPHE [COVID-19 line list template](#).

## Mitigating Outbreaks

**If two or more cases are detected within 14 days among employees, you should temporarily close, and report the outbreak immediately to Public Health.** Public Health will help you confirm if an outbreak exists, identify additional cases, and determine the extent of the outbreak. We will also help you develop a plan to safely re-open. By working closely with Public Health, you may be able to conduct a rapid risk assessment and implement immediate control measures in lieu of closure.

During an outbreak, Public Health will help you build a plan that may include:

- Enhanced cleaning, disinfection, and environmental controls.
- [Contact tracing](#) to identify healthy employees who may have been exposed to an ill coworker.
- Excluding vulnerable employees at [higher risk for serious illness while the outbreak is ongoing](#).
- Consider requiring all employees to use [face masks](#) (cloth or otherwise) while at work.
- Do not use testing to “clear” employees to return to work. Testing is a point-in-time assessment and will not indicate if the exposed person is developing the virus. Public Health can provide additional information.
- Additional workplace/facility closure may be required by Public Health if widespread transmission continues to occur despite the above measures or if there are not enough staff available to run safely.
- Additional outbreak mitigation recommendations may be recommended depending on specific situations.