



**For Non-Healthcare Businesses & Community Organizations:  
What to Do if Someone at the Workplace Has COVID-19**

Updated March 19, 2021

This guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) for local use. It will be posted at <http://www.sfgdp.org/businesses> under *Businesses and Employers*.

**Updates since the 2/11/2021 version:**

- Updates vaccine information and CA Notify
- Links to Cal/Osha’s Outbreaks and the Exposed Workplace

**Since the August 17, 2020 version of this guidance, the following have changed:**

- Updates definition of “close contacts” in line with CDC guidelines
- Updates list of COVID-19 symptoms to include nausea and vomiting
- Updates information on quarantine procedures per California requirements (now minimum 10 days)
- Adds vaccine information
- Expands Frequently Asked Questions

**AUDIENCE:** Businesses, companies, offices, faith-based and similar organizations. (Healthcare personnel and first responders should instead check with their occupational safety office for guidance, and see specific info posted at <http://www.sfgdp.org/covid19hcp> under *Health Care Exposures*).

**APPLIES WHEN:** One or more persons from the organization have COVID-19. This means they either tested positive for COVID-19 or their healthcare provider diagnosed them with COVID-19.

The current [Shelter in Place Order](#) reminds businesses that they are not to let the employee come to work if they have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. If someone with confirmed COVID-19 was not at the workplace in the 48 hours preceding the onset of symptoms or while they had symptoms, these instructions do not apply and there are no special recommendations for quarantine or disinfection.

*Symptoms of COVID-19 illness include:*

- Fever of at least 100.4° Fahrenheit
- Chills or repeated shaking/shivering
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Feeling unusually weak or fatigued
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Runny or congested nose
- New loss of sense of taste or smell

**If you or your staff or colleagues have received the COVID-19 vaccine, please read more about safer social interactions at: [www.sfgdp.org/lifeaftervaccine](http://www.sfgdp.org/lifeaftervaccine)**

### Key points employers need to know when an employee tests positive for COVID-19

- Maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Do not make the sick person's identity known to anyone at your workplace.
- Assure your employees that an employer is not allowed to fire, discipline, or reduce their hours for staying home if they test positive and are asked to quarantine or self-isolate for COVID-19.
- San Francisco Department of Public Health recommends that employers do not ask for a note or a retest after an employee completes isolation or quarantine.

## Instructions

- **Gather information.** Ask the person diagnosed with COVID-19 which employees had close contact with them in the **48 hours prior** to developing symptoms. Determine (a) the last day that the infected person was present at the workplace and (b) the day their symptoms began.
- **Identify close contacts.** A close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of a person with COVID-19 for a period of time that adds up to at least 15 minutes in 24 hours, masked or unmasked, when that person was contagious. People with COVID-19 are considered contagious starting 48 hours before their symptoms began until 1) they haven't had a fever for at least 24 hours, 2) their symptoms have improved, AND 3) at least 10 days have passed since their symptoms began. If the person with COVID-19 never had symptoms, then they are considered contagious starting 48 hours before their test that confirmed they have COVID-19 until 10 days after the date of that test. **If 3 or more employees test positive in a 2-week period, call the Department of Public Health at 415-554-2830.** For more information, see <http://sfcdcp.org/closecontact>
- **Maintain confidentiality.** Do not disclose the ill person's identity to anyone at the workplace. To the extent possible, use only readily available information to identify who had close contact with the ill person. Do not disclose the identity of the ill person in your effort to identify close contacts.
- **Quarantine close contacts.** Anyone who had close contact with the person diagnosed with COVID-19 must be excluded from the workplace. **Close contacts must stay at home for at least 10 days** following the last contact with the infected person. This is considered a "quarantine." If during the quarantine, the employee develops COVID-19, they would transition to "isolation."
  - Provide the [Home Isolation & Quarantine Guidelines](#) to persons identified as Close Contacts.
  - SFDPH strongly recommends that close contacts without symptoms [get tested](#) at least 6 days after the last contact.
- **Ask other employees to self-monitor.** All others present at the workplace but not identified as close contacts should be advised to self-monitor for symptoms for 10 days after the last day that the person diagnosed with COVID-19 was at work. If they develop [symptoms](#), they must stay home and get tested, and should contact a health care provider.
  - Provide the General Exposure Advisory to all those not identified as Close Contacts, available at [www.sfcdcp.org/covid19](http://www.sfcdcp.org/covid19) under Businesses and Employers.
  - Continue to screen all employees before beginning work each day, using the Personnel Screening Attachment.

- **Clean and disinfect properly.** See CDC [guidance on cleaning and disinfection measures](#), including measures for cleaning and disinfection if someone is sick. Also see our instructions for Cleaning and Disinfectant Safety & Approved Disinfectants posted at [www.sfdcp.org/covid19](http://www.sfdcp.org/covid19) under [Cleaning Recommendations](#).
- **Promote hygiene.** Actively message all individuals to increase hygiene measures (hand washing, avoiding contact with eyes/nose/mouth, covering coughs and sneezes). Provide tissues, hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes that can be easily accessed throughout the facility. Printable materials are [available](#).
- **Rethink workplace arrangements.** Structure the work environment to follow social distancing guidelines. For example, encourage telecommuting as much as possible based on business functions. Those who remain in the workplace should keep at least a 6-foot distance from other individuals. See [additional information on operating your business during the pandemic](#).
- **Know your rights and responsibilities.** The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing has a [factsheet](#) on this topic, as well as information about state laws that prohibit discrimination against employees on the basis of their COVID-19 positive status.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. Should I ask for a doctor's note or proof of a COVID-19 test from my employee?

The San Francisco Department of Public Health has encouraged employers not to require a note for employees to stay home from work or return to work. This information can be found on our website at: [www.sfdcp.org/covid19](http://www.sfdcp.org/covid19) under "Home Isolation and Returning to Work".

### 2. Should I contact the Department of Public Health if a staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

You only have to contact the Department of Public Health if 3 or more employees test positive in a 2-week period. They can be reached at 415-554-2830.

### 3. If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, but has no symptoms, does the rest of the staff need to be sent home to quarantine?

Any other employee who was in [close contact](#) with the infected employee should quarantine for 10 days and get tested. A negative test result does not exempt close contacts from completing the full quarantine. Since other employees may not recall the exact amount of time that they interacted within 6 feet, consider other factors that would increase risk when assessing whether close contact may have occurred:

- Proximity to others (the closer they are, the higher the risk)
- Whether the infected individual has symptoms (the period around onset of symptoms is associated with the highest levels of viral shedding)
- What the infected individual was doing. Some behaviors make transmission more likely, such as coughing, singing, shouting, or talking.

- Environmental factors such as crowding, adequacy of ventilation, and whether the exposure was indoors or outdoors.

**4. If I employ multiple people who walk by less than 6 feet from each other multiple times during the course of a shift (for example, along a hallway between a restaurant kitchen and dining room), are they all considered close contacts?**

As explained above, the definition of close contacts includes a *cumulative* duration of 15 minutes. Employers and their employees should cooperate to use their best judgment when calculating time and distance in the process of identifying close contacts. Refer to the factors in previous question for additional guidance.

**5. An employee was exposed to a roommate who tested positive. Do all of the staff who are a close contact worked with the exposed employee in the past 1-2 days need to quarantine as well? Do they need to be tested?**

No. The employee with the roommate that tested positive is considered a close contact and needs to quarantine and get tested. That same employee's co-workers do not need to quarantine or get tested. There are no requirements for testing or quarantine for "close contacts of close contacts."

**6. Are employee break rooms allowed to be open?**

The January 27, 2021 [Stay Safer at Home Order of the Health Officer No. C19-07s](#) and the Office Directive provide extensive guidance for employee break rooms including:

- Office Facilities must discourage Personnel from congregating in cafeterias or breakrooms to eat.
- The number of people in employee breakrooms must be the lessor of: (a) 25% of the maximum occupancy; or (b) the number of people that can safely maintain at least six feet of distance from each other at all times.
- Requirements for posting of signage in break rooms about COVID-19 related rules and regulations.

**7. Will I (the employer) be informed if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?**

You will be informed by the Department of Public Health if your employee identifies your workplace as the likely place of exposure or if your employee has had close contact with co-workers within 48 hours before developing symptoms or testing positive for COVID-19. If your employee contracted the virus away from work and did not come into close contact with co-workers, your employee should notify you of their need to self-isolate.

## **8. What is contact tracing? How does it involve me and my employees?**

- We can help prevent COVID-19 transmission by contact tracing which helps identify people who may have been exposed and helping them quarantine, so they don't inadvertently spread the disease. The San Francisco Department of Public Health, in partnership with the community, helps identify those who have had close contact with anyone who has COVID-19. People can transmit the virus 48 hours before they develop symptoms. Some people never develop symptoms and can still transmit the virus.
- Help ensure the health of your employees and our community. Retain the attendance/schedules of all personnel at your organization for up to three weeks. It is recommended that organizations maintain a list of those willing to voluntarily provide their name and contact for contact tracing purposes. Any lists should be discarded after three weeks. Patrons are not required to provide contact information.
- If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, the organization must assist the Department of Public Health in identifying other personnel or clients, patrons, etc. who may have been exposed.
- You or some of the staff may be contacted by the San Francisco Department of Public Health who will guide you through the next steps. They will want you or your staff to provide your name, phone number, and where you live.

## **9. How can I help my quarantined employees? They are facing economic hardships.**

- Please inform your employees that they may be entitled to paid sick leave or other job protections under federal and local law if they test positive and are asked to quarantine or self-isolate for COVID-19.
- Please alert your employee to the Frequently Asked Questions for Workers Who Must Isolate or Quarantine Due to COVID-19 resource located at [www.sfgdcp.org/covid19](http://www.sfgdcp.org/covid19) under "Isolation and Quarantine."
- Tell your employee to visit the CA Notify website (<https://canotify.ca.gov/>) to learn how they can add an app to their smartphone that uses Bluetooth technology to recognize when you and your phone have been in close proximity to others infected with COVID-19 to help stop the spread of the virus in our community.

## **10. When can an employee who tests positive for COVID-19 return to work?**

- There are various situations when an employee can return to work. Please look at Interim Guidance: Leaving Isolation or Returning to Work for Those Who Have Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19.
- The employee does not need to get tested to return to work.

**11. What if an employee who tested positive was showing symptoms?**

If the employee with positive COVID-19 test result had symptoms, then that employee cannot return to work until ALL THREE of the following are true:

- 10 days after symptoms began AND
- Symptoms have improved AND
- No fever for 24 hours, without using fever reducing medicine

If the “infected employee” (employee with positive COVID-19 test result) had NO symptoms, then that employee can return to work 10 days after the positive test was collected.

**12. A customer who recently visited a retail store notifies the store that they have tested positive. The store has a record of who was working when the customer visited. Does the staff working during that visit time need to quarantine or be tested?**

Maybe - it depends on whether close contact occurred. Ideally, staff are never in close contact with customers, by limiting interactions within 6 feet to the minimum time necessary to complete the task at hand. If a staff member was in close contact with the customer, they would need to quarantine for 10 days and get tested.

**13. Under these requirements, several of my employees will have to quarantine, and I’m worried that I will have to close my business. What can I do?**

This pandemic is an unprecedented challenge worldwide, and we are all doing our best to save lives. Make sure you and your employees take full advantage of the [financial and other support](#) currently available.

**14. Is there COVID-related relief for employers whose staff take leave due to COVID-19?**

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, [extended employer tax credits](#) for paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave voluntarily provided to employees until March 31, 2021. However, this Act did not extend an eligible employee’s entitlement to Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) leave beyond December 31, 2020.

**15. If an employee has received the COVID-19 vaccine, but has come into close contact with someone who has tested positive for or has shown symptoms of COVID-19, please read more about whether they need to quarantine at [www.sfcddcp.org/quarantineaftervaccination](http://www.sfcddcp.org/quarantineaftervaccination).**

The vaccine is one of the most important ways to end the pandemic. The FDA, CDC as well as California’s own Scientific Safety Review Workgroup have reviewed all data from clinical trials to ensure the safety and effectiveness of all COVID-19 vaccines. **When the vaccine is available to you, step up for your health, the health of your loved ones, the health of your community, and get vaccinated.** The first vaccines approved in the US are about 95% effective in preventing sickness from COVID-19, however we do not know how well they prevent infections that do not cause symptoms.

This means that we do not know how common it is for a person who got the vaccine to carry the virus and transmit to others, including [those who have increased risk for severe illness or death](#). Therefore, it is still very important for those who are vaccinated, and for the rest of the population who waits for their vaccines, to continue using all the tools available to help stop this pandemic: wear a mask that covers your mouth and nose when outside your home, avoid get-togethers/gatherings, avoid being indoors with people you don't live with, stay at least 6 feet away from others, and wash your hands after touching shared objects or after touching your face. Find out more about the vaccine, including where and when to get it at: [sf.gov/covidvax](http://sf.gov/covidvax)

## **16. What is CA Notify?**

CA Notify ([canotify.ca.gov](http://canotify.ca.gov)) is an app you can add on your smartphone. It uses Bluetooth technology to recognize when you and your phone have been in close proximity to others infected with COVID-19 to help stop the spread of the virus in our community.

If you are using CA Notify and you test positive, your diagnosis will not be shared with others. However, if other people in close contact with you are also enrolled in the app, they will be told they had an exposure. They will be told the date of the exposure, but not the time, location or identity. If you are using CA Notify and you were exposed to someone who tested positive and they entered their result into the app, you will be told the date of the exposure, but not the time, location or identity.

CA Notify is available through Apple and Google. See [canotify.ca.gov](http://canotify.ca.gov) for more information.

## **17. If I still have questions, whom can I ask?**

San Francisco Department of Public Health has set up an email at [workplacesites@sfdph.org](mailto:workplacesites@sfdph.org) and a phone at 628-217-6381 that are aimed to support businesses.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### For Workers

- [Interim guidance: Leaving isolation or returning to work for those who have confirmed or suspected COVID-19 \(San Francisco\)](#)
- [Frequently asked questions for workers who must isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19 - posted at \[www.sfgdcp.org/covid19\]\(http://www.sfgdcp.org/covid19\) under "Isolation and Quarantine" \(San Francisco\)](#)

### For Employers

- [Cal/OSHA: Outbreaks and the "Exposed Workplace"](#)
- [COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfectant Safety & Approved Disinfectants \(San Francisco\)](#)
- [Contact tracing \(California Department of Public Health\)](#)
- [Definition of "close contact" \(US Centers for Disease Control\)](#)
- [General information on discrimination in the workplace. \(US Equal Opportunity Employment Commission\)](#)
- [Printable signs and fliers for the workplace \(Centers for Disease Control\)](#)
- [San Francisco's Outreach toolkit for Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

### For Both

- [Loans, benefits, sick pay, and other resources for businesses and employees impacted by COVID-19 \(San Francisco\)](#)
- [Benefits, rights and protections for employers and workers \(California Labor & Workforce Development Agency\)](#)