For Non-Healthcare Businesses & Community Organizations:

What to Do if Someone at the Workplace Has COVID-19

Updated January 19, 2022

This guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) for local use. It is posted at http://www.sfcdcp.org/businesses.

Changes since the March 2021 version: Updates to reflect newer information about how to handle cases of COVID-19 in the workplace.

AUDIENCE: Businesses, companies, offices, faith-based and similar organizations. This guidance does not apply to healthcare personnel and first responders, who should follow guidance from their occupational safety office.

APPLIES WHEN: One or more persons either tested positive for COVID-19 or their healthcare provider diagnosed them with COVID-19 AND they were present in the workplace during the 48 hours before being diagnosed or having symptom onset.

Background

Under San Francisco’s Safer Return Together Health Order businesses may not allow any employee to come to work if they have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 or if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. If someone with confirmed COVID-19 was not at the workplace while they had symptoms, in the 48 hours preceding the onset of symptoms, or in the 48 hours prior to a positive test, these instructions do not apply and there are no special recommendations for identifying workplace Close Contacts for quarantine or exclusion.

Isolation and Quarantine: See sfcdcp.org/i&q for resources on isolation and quarantine. SFDPH also has detailed guidance for isolation and quarantine, including how long people must stay home and when they are allowed to return to work, school or other community interactions.

Symptoms of COVID-19: Please see the most up to date symptoms of COVID-19 listed at the CDC’s website.

When an employee or other person who has been present in the workplace reports that they have been diagnosed with COVID-19

1. Find out (a) the last day that the person diagnosed with COVID-19 was present at the workplace, and (b) the day their symptoms began (if they never had symptoms, use the date of diagnosis instead of the day their symptoms began).

2. Identify Close Contacts. Close Contact is being within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more in 24 hours, even if both people were wearing masks. An infected person can spread
COVID-19 starting 2 days before they have symptoms or test positive for COVID-19. They stay contagious for at least five days after their symptoms started (if they never have symptoms, five days after their positive test).

Ask the person diagnosed with COVID-19 which employees had Close Contact with them in the 48 hour period prior to developing symptoms (if they never had symptoms, use the date of diagnosis instead of the day their symptoms began).

3. Inform employees who are Close Contacts. Close Contacts must quarantine for at least 10 days following the last contact with the infected person, UNLESS they are up to date on COVID vaccination. If during the quarantine, the employee develops COVID-19, they would transition to “isolation.”
   - Refer the diagnosed employee(s) and their Close Contacts to the SFDPH detailed guidance for isolation and quarantine.
   - Close Contacts who are up to date on COVID vaccination do not need to quarantine if they do not have symptoms, however they should get tested 5 days after the date of Close Contact.

4. Maintain confidentiality. Do not disclose the ill person’s identity to anyone at the workplace. Do not disclose the identity of the ill person in your effort to identify or inform Close Contacts.

5. If three or more employees test positive in a 2-week period, call the Department of Public Health at 415-554-2830.

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Frequently Asked Questions

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 discourages employers from requiring a note for employees to stay home from work or return to work after diagnosis of COVID-19.

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.

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?

It depends. Please see Exceptions and special situations for quarantine and Summary Chart: How long do I have to stay away from people? to determine what the recommendations are for the particular situation.

An employee was exposed to a roommate who tested positive. Do staff who are a Close Contact of the exposed employee required to quarantine? Do they need to be tested?

No. The employee with the roommate that tested positive is considered a Close Contact and would need to quarantine if they are not up to date on their COVID vaccinations, 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.”
Will I (the employer) be informed if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?

Not by the Department of Public Health, the employee should advise their employer that they have tested positive for COVID-19.

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.

A customer who recently visited my business notified us that they tested positive. The store has a record of who was working when the customer visited. Do the staff who were working during that time need to quarantine or be tested?

Maybe - it depends on whether Close Contact occurred. If staff are able to limit the duration to less than 15 minutes over 24 hours of all interactions with customers that require them to be within 6 feet, then they would not be considered Close Contact and would not need to quarantine or test.

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.

All of my employees are up to date on their COVID vaccinations. Do they still need to quarantine if they were a Close Contact of someone who tested positive?

Currently, people who are up-to-date on their COVID vaccinations and do not have symptoms are not recommended to quarantine after Close Contact with someone who tested positive. However these persons should get tested 5 days after their Close Contact and must isolate if they do end up testing positive.

Is there a summary chart describing how long people must isolate or quarantine depending on whether they have symptoms or are up to date on their COVID vaccinations?

Yes. Please visit the direct link to the Summary Chart for COVID I and Q, which is part of the web page at sfdph.org/iandq.

If I still have questions, whom can I ask?

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