Protecting Workers during a Pandemic

*Reference source from OSHA Publications –***Pandemic: Protecting Workers during a Pandemic Fact Sheet**

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak and can be caused by a variety of agents, including influenza and coronaviruses. During a pandemic, transmission can be anticipated in the workplace not only from patients to workers in healthcare settings, but also among co-workers and between members of the general public and workers in other types of workplaces. Workers who believe that their employer provides a safe and healthy workplace are more likely to report for work during a pandemic.

Clear communication promotes confidence in the employer's ability to protect workers and reduces absenteeism. Employers should ensure that their workers understand:

- Differences between seasonal epidemics and worldwide pandemic disease outbreaks;
- Which job activities may put them at risk for exposure to sources of infection;
- What options may be available for working remotely, or utilizing an employer's flexible leave policy when they are sick;
- Social distancing strategies, including avoiding close physical contact (e.g., shaking hands) and large gatherings of people;
- Good hygiene and appropriate disinfection procedures;
- What personal protective equipment (PPE) is available, and how to wear, use, clean and store it properly;
- What medical services (e.g., vaccination, postexposure medication) may be available to them; and
- How supervisors will provide updated pandemic-related communications, and where to direct their questions.

Sick leave

Employers may consider providing sick leave so that workers may stay home if they are sick. Flexible leave policies help stop the spread of disease, including to healthy workers.

Training

Following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations, employers should provide worker training on infection controls, including the importance of avoiding close contact (within 6 feet) with others. Employers should provide adequate supplies and ready access to soap and running water, tissues, alcohol-based hand sanitizers and cleaning agents. Frequent visual and verbal reminders to workers can improve compliance with hand hygiene practices and thus reduce rates of infection.

Control measures

Employers may modify the work environment and/or change work practices to provide additional protection to workers and clients.

Risk Communication

Workers should be aware of the exposure risk level associated with their job duties. In addition, a pandemic may disproportionately affect people in certain age groups or with specific health histories. Workers with job-related exposure to infections who voluntarily disclose personal health risks should be considered for job accommodations and/or additional protective measures, e.g., use of PPE. Higher risk work settings include those healthcare workplaces where: infected patients may congregate; clinical specimens are handled or transported; or materials contaminated with blood or infectious wastes are handled. These settings warrant: use of physical barriers to control the spread of infectious disease; worker and client management to promote social distancing; and adequate and appropriate PPE, hygiene and cleaning supplies.

Additional information, including an OSHA Fact Sheet on exposure risks in healthcare workplaces, can be found on OSHA's Publications page: www.osha.gov/ publications. Employers and workers can also learn about preparedness for pandemics and other events at OSHA's Emergency Preparedness and Response page: www.osha.gov/SLTC/ emergencypreparedness.

Read more >>
https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHAFS-3747.pdf