



# COVID-19 in the Workplace

*A guide for employers*

## Preventing the spread of COVID-19 at work

COVID-19 and its variants continue to circulate throughout Johnson County, Kansas. In order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 and its variants spreading in your workplace, there are several things you can do.

### Exclude ill employees/patrons

Individuals can spread COVID-19 even before they develop symptoms, and individuals who are infectious (spreading the virus) may not have any symptoms. The symptoms of COVID-19 are wide ranging from a loss of taste and smell to severe respiratory issues.

JCDHE recommends employers exclude employees/patrons who have at least one of the primary symptoms or two or more of the secondary symptoms. Employees with symptoms should consult with a health care provider to be tested for COVID-19 or obtain an alternative diagnosis. If an employee only has one secondary symptom, employers may consider excluding them from work until 24 hours after their symptom resolves.

#### Primary symptoms (at least one)

- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Loss of taste and/or smell

#### Secondary symptoms (at least two)

- Fever (measured or subjective)
- Chills
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Diarrhea/nausea/vomiting
- Congestion/runny nose
- Extreme fatigue



### Encourage employees to be vaccinated

The most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is through vaccination, especially when a high percentage of employees are vaccinated (70-90%). Additional benefits of vaccination include that individuals who are exposed to an individual with COVID-19 do not need to quarantine and continue to work as long as they are not showing symptoms.



### Institute a mask policy for unvaccinated employees

Individuals who are unvaccinated remain at risk for contracting and spreading COVID-19. Masks have been shown to be an effective and low-impact way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Throughout the region, there have been numerous instances of spread occurring in workplaces when masks were not being worn (e.g., a single employee infecting over 10% of the workforce) as well as cases where spread was not been documented because both staff and patrons were wearing masks (e.g., hair salon employee who saw 84 clients while infectious and no infections were identified).

Understanding that masks are uncomfortable, when worn properly they can prevent your staff from becoming ill, potentially with life-threatening illnesses. There's also the economic cost to you as a business owner: **if too many employees become sick and/or exposed (and are quarantined) you run the risk of not having adequate staffing to remain open.**

Masks must be worn properly, covering both the nose and mouth to be effective. Accountability measures (e.g., empowering employees to remind their coworkers when masks aren't being worn appropriately, a point person who is responsible on that shift, etc.) can help ensure that masks are being worn correctly.



### Maintain physical distancing

Masks are an important component to preventing the spread of COVID-19, but they are not a guarantee that infection won't occur. Therefore, both physical distancing measures (6 feet between staff and patrons when possible) and mask-wearing should be implemented together when many employees are unvaccinated or when vaccination status is unknown.



### Hand hygiene and glove usage

Frequent hand washing or sanitizing is critical in preventing the transmission of COVID-19. Employees and patrons should have easy access to hand washing stations or hand sanitizer.

The wearing of gloves in most types of employment as a preventive measure is not recommended. Not only do gloves offer a false sense of security, they can lead to increased transmission because people are wearing gloves instead of frequently washing their hands.

Using hand sanitizer on gloves leads to the degradation of those gloves and defeats their purpose. Using the same gloves over and over between completing tasks of serving customers is the equivalent of not washing your hands in between completing those tasks and serving those customers. Instead, it is increasing the chance of transmission each time.



### Adhere to current travel restrictions

Employees should not travel to locations that are having large outbreaks of COVID-19 cases. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment frequently updates the list of locations where people will need to quarantine for 14 days after arrival in Kansas. This applies to both Kansas residents and those visiting Kansas. Go to [coronavirus.kdheks.gov](https://coronavirus.kdheks.gov) for the latest information.

## When a case of COVID-19 occurs in the Workplace

When a case of COVID-19 occurs in the workplace, the positive employee must isolate at home, away from others for 10 days from when symptoms first appeared and be fever-free for 24 hours with no fever-reducing medication and symptoms have improved before they can return to work. Being able to quickly contact those people who were in close contact with the positive employee is one of the best ways to contain the spread of disease.



Due to recent legislation, JCDHE is not allowed to collect the contact information for employees who were exposed to COVID-19 without the employees' explicit consent. **If the positive employee does not consent to release information about their close contacts, it is the employer's responsibility to notify employees who were close contacts of the individual who tested positive.**

### Notification of a COVID-19 positive employee

JCDHE receives notification of COVID-19 positive individuals through laboratory reports. JCDHE staff will contact these individuals to notify them of their test results, identify where they may have been exposed and who they may have exposed while infectious. During the call, the individual is asked where they work and if they were at work during their infectious period – starting two days before and 10 days after symptoms start, or their test date if they're not showing any symptoms. They will also be asked if they have had close contact with other employees.

JCDHE may contact you if there is a positive individual in the workplace. Under HIPAA, the only time JCDHE can release the identity of an individual is to prevent the further spread of disease. For this reason, if an individual was not at work while infectious or was not in close contact with individuals, then the employer will not be notified in order to protect the confidentiality of patient health information.

If an individual does not cooperate with an investigation (e.g., not answering the phone, not providing their workplace, etc.), then JCDHE will not know about a potential workplace exposure. Additionally, if an employee works in Johnson County, Kansas but lives in another jurisdiction, JCDHE will not be notified. Notification practices of employers may vary by the health department of residence.

You may also be notified by an employee of the positive test result and may never be contacted by JCDHE. In this case, you do not need to inform JCDHE, but you may reach out via email if you have any questions at [jocoemployer@jocogov.org](mailto:jocoemployer@jocogov.org).

## When a COVID-19 positive individual may return to work

Employees who test positive for COVID-19 should be excluded from work until:

- At least 24 hours have passed since their fever disappeared (without the use of fever-reducing medications) and improvement in symptoms;

**and**

- At least 10 days have passed since their symptoms began.



### **JCDHE does not recommend requiring a negative COVID-19 test result before returning to work.**

A COVID-19 positive individual is no longer infectious if they have been fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of medication), their symptoms have improved, and it's been at least 10 days since their symptoms began. It is possible for an individual to test positive for a period of time after their symptoms go away. This does not mean they are still infectious. For this reason, JCDHE recommends following the return to work guidelines above.

## Close contacts of a COVID-19 positive individual

If JCDHE interviews a COVID-positive individual and they worked while infectious and may have exposed other individuals, JCDHE will notify the employer and work with them to identify potentially exposed individuals.

An exposed individual is anyone who the COVID-positive individual had 'close contact' with **starting two days before their onset of symptoms, or their test date if they're not showing any symptoms.** Coronavirus is spread through respiratory droplets (spit) of someone who is infected; it spreads efficiently in enclosed areas (e.g., enclosed offices, vehicles, etc.).

### A 'close contact' is considered:

- Being within 6 feet of someone for 10 minutes or more (these 10 minutes are cumulative, so in a place of employment the easiest way to identify these contacts is anyone the individual would have had multiple face-to-face conversations with)
- Having a meeting in an enclosed room with the individual who tested positive
- Anyone who the COVID-19 positive individual ate with in a break room
- Anyone who the COVID-19 positive individual rode with in a vehicle
- Having physical contact with a COVID-19 positive individual (i.e., holding a child in a childcare facility, a police officer arresting an individual, physical fitness/training with a partner)

## When to exclude employees

Unvaccinated individuals who are identified as having close contact with the COVID-19 positive individual and were unmasked or not wearing a mask properly, will need to be excluded from work. All close contacts, regardless of which quarantine procedure they follow, should continue to self-monitor for 14 days from exposure. If symptoms develop during the 14-day period, person should self-isolate and get a PCR test. If an individual develops symptoms anytime during the 14 days following exposure, they no longer meet the CDC's guidelines for early return. Exposed, symptomatic individuals who receive a negative PCR test after symptom onset should complete the 14-day exclusion period. Exposed symptomatic individuals who either do not receive a PCR test OR whose PCR test was negative prior to symptom onset would be considered presumed

positive and should self-isolate for 10 days after the onset of symptoms.

- **WITHOUT Testing:** Quarantine for **10 days** from last exposure. If the person remains symptom-free, they may return to activities on day 11 after exposure.
- **WITH Testing:** Quarantine for **7 days** from last exposure. A PCR test should be conducted on day 6 or later. If the PCR test is negative and person is symptom-free, they may return to activities on day 8 after exposure.

To protect the identity of the individual, never release information about who was positive.

These employees do not need to be tested for COVID-19 unless their health care provider advises them to do so.

### **Employees that do NOT need to be excluded**

If employees (the ill individual and his/her contacts) were always wearing masks properly (covering nose and mouth), then people identified as close contacts are at a lower risk of infection and do not need to be excluded.

Individuals who were in the office at the same time as the positive employee, but farther away than 6 feet and limited contact (less than 10 minutes) do **not** need to be excluded, but can be notified of the exposure and reminded that COVID-19 is in our community and all residents should be monitoring themselves for signs and symptoms, wearing masks when in public, maintaining physical distance of 6 feet or more from other individuals and washing hands frequently with soap and water. A sample letter in this document has been developed to send to these low-risk employees. To protect the identity of the individual, never release information about who was positive.

**Per CDC guidelines, individuals who have been vaccinated for COVID-19 may be exempt from quarantine IF they meet ALL of the following criteria:**

1. Asymptomatic following their exposure,
2. At least two weeks following their second dose of Pfizer or Moderna or one dose of Johnson and Johnson, and
3. Within six months of their vaccination.

These employees do not need to be tested for COVID-19 unless their health care provider advises them to do so.

### **Employees who are a close contact of someone outside the workplace**

Employees may be notified that they are a close contact of a COVID-positive individual outside the workplace (e.g., family member, social contact, etc.). These employees should be excluded from work for 14 days following their last interaction with the positive individual. If the close contact is a household member who is unable to isolate themselves away from the other household members, this may result in an individual being excluded from work for longer than 14 days (14 day quarantine from the last day the household member was infectious, which is at least 10 days after their onset of symptoms).

### **Cleaning the workplace if someone is sick**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provide guidance to employers on cleaning and disinfecting your building or facility if someone is sick.

Cleaning: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html)

Disinfectants: [epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19](https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19)

**Letter for HIGH-RISK EXPOSED EMPLOYEE**  
**(Copy text on to your organization's letterhead)**

DATE

Workplace Name

Dear (name of High-Risk Exposed Employee),

The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment has notified us of an employee who has tested positive for COVID-19. Following an evaluation of who this individual was in contact with, it has been determined that you may have been exposed, meaning you are at risk of becoming sick.

Per public health recommendations, you must complete a 14-day quarantine from **LAST DATE OF EXPOSURE – END DATE**. During this time, you will need to make arrangements to avoid being around all people as much as possible.

People can spread coronavirus before they start feeling sick, so if you must be around people, it is extremely important that you wear a mask and stay 6 feet away from other individuals, even if you're not feeling ill.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include, but not limited to, fever, cough, loss of smell and/or taste, chills, fatigue, loss of appetite, shortness of breath, muscle aches, chest pain, headache, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, sore throat, and runny nose. If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 disease while in your 14-day quarantine period, please notify your health care provider.

The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment offers free testing for those who live and work in Johnson County. For additional information and to schedule an appointment, please visit [jocogov.org/schedule-covid-19-test](https://jocogov.org/schedule-covid-19-test).

COVID-19 is circulating at high levels in our community and everyone should be washing their hands with soap and water frequently, wearing a mask in public, and maintaining 6 feet of physical distance to prevent its spread.

For current information and facts regarding COVID-19 in Kansas, refer to KDHE's COVID-19 webpage at [coronavirus.kdheks.gov](https://coronavirus.kdheks.gov) or the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment website at [jocogov.org/coronavirus-covid-19-update](https://jocogov.org/coronavirus-covid-19-update).

Sincerely,

Workplace Name

**Letter for LOW-RISK EXPOSED EMPLOYEE**  
**(Copy text on to your organization's letterhead)**

DATE

Workplace Name

Dear (name of Low-Risk Exposed Employee),

The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment has notified us of an employee who has tested positive for COVID-19. Following an evaluation of who this individual was in contact with, it has been determined that you were around this individual, but you had a **low-risk** exposure. This means that your risk of contracting COVID-19 from this individual is LOW because you wore a mask and practiced physical distancing.

Per public health recommendations, you may continue to work since this is a **LOW-RISK** exposure. When outside of work, you are encouraged to self-quarantine at home for 14 days and watch for symptoms to develop.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include, but not limited to, fever, cough, loss of smell and/or taste, chills, fatigue, loss of appetite, shortness of breath, muscle aches, chest pain, headache, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, sore throat, and runny nose. If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 disease while in your 14-day quarantine period, please notify your health care provider.

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COVID-19 is circulating at high levels in our community and everyone should be washing their hands with soap and water frequently, wearing a mask in public, and maintaining 6 feet of physical distance to prevent its spread.

For current information and facts regarding COVID-19 in Kansas, refer to KDHE's COVID-19 webpage at [coronavirus.kdheks.gov](https://coronavirus.kdheks.gov) or the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment website at [jocogov.org/coronavirus-covid-19-update](https://jocogov.org/coronavirus-covid-19-update).

Sincerely,

Workplace Name

**Letter for NON-EXPOSED EMPLOYEE**  
**(Copy text on to your organization's letterhead)**

DATE

Workplace Name

Dear (name of Non-Exposed Employee),

The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment has notified us of an employee who has tested positive for COVID-19. Following an evaluation of who this individual came into contact with, it has been determined that you were **not** exposed to the virus. At this time, you do not need to take any additional precautions.

However, COVID-19 is circulating at high levels in our community and everyone should be washing their hands with soap and water frequently, wearing a mask in public, and maintaining 6 feet of physical distance to prevent its spread. This is especially important because people can spread coronavirus before they start feeling sick.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include but not limited to fever, cough, loss of smell and/or taste, chills, fatigue, loss of appetite, shortness of breath, muscle aches, chest pain, headache, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, sore throat, and runny nose.

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, please notify your health care provider. Johnson County Department of Health and Environment offers free testing for those who live and work in Johnson County. For additional information and to schedule an appointment, visit [jocogov.org/schedule-covid-19-test](https://jocogov.org/schedule-covid-19-test).

For current information and facts regarding COVID-19 in Kansas, refer to KDHE's COVID-19 webpage at [coronavirus.kdheks.gov](https://coronavirus.kdheks.gov) or the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment website at [jocogov.org/coronavirus-covid-19-update](https://jocogov.org/coronavirus-covid-19-update).

Sincerely,

Workplace Name