11 Steps to Limit Organizational Exposure and Disruption - COVID-19

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Below are 11 important steps your organization should consider taking to help limit its exposure to, and disruption by, the coronavirus:

Step #1:

Communicate accurate and up-to-date information to your employees about the transmission and symptoms of the coronavirus. According to the CDC, the virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet). The virus generally is contained in the respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but the CDC has indicated that this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. Because new information is being discovered about the spread and incubation time of the disease, check regularly with the CDC for accurate and up-to-date information on its website.

Symptoms for the coronavirus can be similar to the flu and include fever, cough, and shortness of breath and can appear from two to 14 days after exposure to the virus. There is no vaccine for the coronavirus or drug treatment currently, but most cases of the coronavirus have been relatively mild and treated effectively with symptom-relieving medications, such medication as to reduce fever. Also consider posting the CDC's "What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)" in your workplace.

(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf).

Step #2:

Have a plan to address potential COVID-19 outbreaks and distribute policy. Review your leave, paid time off, compensation, and attendance policies to determine how they will be implemented   in the event of a major coronavirus outbreak. Consider suspending any medical certification requirements during an outbreak and allowing employees to use paid leave for any coronavirus-related absence. Include a plan to address possible employee absences related to their children's illness. Also identify jobs that can be performed from employees' homes and how your business will operate if short-staffed. Post and distribute "What to do if you are sick (COVID-19)"

(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf).

Step #3:

Train employees on steps they can take to prevent the spread of infections. Emphasize the importance of limiting the spread of disease through proper hand washing, coughing into tissues, disposing of used tissues, and avoiding toughing eyes, nose, and mouth.

Note, too, the CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, and recommends use only if a healthcare professional recommends it. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms. Consider distributing "Stop the Spread of Germs (COVID-19)".

(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs.pdf).

Step #4:

Collaborate among departments to ensure you have a work environment that promotes personal hygiene. For example, provide tissues, no-touch trash cans with plastic liners, hand soap, hand sanitizer, disinfectants, and disposable disinfecting towels for workers to clean their work surfaces.

Step #5:

Make certain you have procedures in place to regularly clean workspaces and surfaces. Bathrooms and break areas are obvious places that should be scrubbed, but do not forget to clean phones, computer keyboards, desktops, and doorknobs. Encourage employees to wipe down their personal workspaces at the end of each day.

Step #6:

Limit business travel to countries with documented exposure to the COVID-19 virus, including China, Japan, South Korea, and Italy. Encourage employees to avoid personal travel to these countries until the outbreaks are contained. Refer to the CDC website for travel information.

(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html)

Step #7:

Ask employees to stay home if they have coronavirus symptoms. In particular, the CDC recommends that employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness should stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever, signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. ibuprofen and cough suppressants).

Allow the use of paid leave if available and do not penalize employees who take the time off for this reason. Encourage employees to follow the suggestions from the CDC, including going to their healthcare provider and self-quarantine if they are diagnosed with the coronavirus.

Note that most cases of coronavirus likely will not meet the serious health condition definition for coverage under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), just as most cases of the flu typically are not covered by the FMLA. However, more severe cases that require more than two visits to a health care provider and continuing treatment, such as those involving pneumonia, or that require inpatient care will be protected by the FMLA.

Step #8:

Send employees home who become ill at work, regardless of whether you think it is coronavirus, the flu, or simply a bad cold. Try to minimize their contact with other employees until they can go home to limit the potential spread of the virus. Encourage them to seek medical treatment from their health care providers and self-quarantine if they think this is COVID-19.

Step #9:

Keep medical information related to employees who have the coronavirus confidential. Remember, both the ADA and FMLA require you to keep medical information about employees confidential, including information about the coronavirus.

Step #10:

Provide time off for employees with sick children or other family members they must care for who have, or are suspected of having, COVID-19. As with their own illnesses, allow the use of paid leave if available and do not penalize employees who take the time off for this reason.

Step #11:

Keep up to date with the latest information on the COVID-19 from the CDC and local health authorities. Monitor outbreaks in your community and check the CDC's coronavirus website on a regular basis for new recommendations for responding to any outbreak.

(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html)