Covid-19 Next Steps:
Ongoing Planning for Public Entities

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, employers have been inundated with information on preventing the spread of the virus. As we look to the future and anticipate restrictions being lifted, public entities and their employees may face a new set of unexpected challenges.

While many businesses have been closed during the pandemic, government agencies have remained open, providing services, and fulfilling critical missions in response to the pandemic. Local government responses have included having some employees work from home when possible or using rotating shifts in some departments to accomplish necessary work. Others have responded by making changes to work schedules to minimize employee contact with other employees or the public.

As a result, the "re-opening" process for many public entities is more likely to involve strategically managing the risks of bringing the operations back to scale safely over time while continuing to meet or exceed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other guidelines. This might include considering new approaches to common tasks or adding safety measures that may be needed in the short or long term. To help public entities return to "normal" operations while protecting the staff and public from unnecessary exposure, this overview provides:

- Discussion surrounding potential safety issues as normal operations resume; and
- Practical solutions to reduce health and safety exposures and facilitate a safe "return to work" environment, and
- Practical approaches to protecting the public from exposures while visiting your facilities.

Considerations for Resuming Operations

Consider the following when restrictions lift and operations return to normal:

- Which employees must be on premises for essential tasks and which employees can work remotely to minimize facility population?
- What are the potential and/or lingering existing exposures to COVID-19 on the premises, particularly regarding employees who could be asymptomatic?
- What social distancing guidelines should be implemented or continued?
- What actions need to be taken to protect the staff from the public?
- What measures will be taken for employees who report illness or symptoms indicating a possible exposure?
- What level of decontamination will be needed for staff and their interaction with the public?
- What personal protective equipment (PPE) should visitors be wearing and what PPE should be provided to staff? Is an inadequate supply of personal protective equipment, such as nitrile and latex gloves, respirators and/or masks available?

Implementing Controls to Prevent COVID-19 Exposures

Consider the following in preparation for return-to-normal operations:

- Decontaminate the common area/controls in your facility using accepted cleaning agents and following proper protocols, as there is a difference between cleaning and sanitizing a surface. While it is believed that the virus can live only a short time on a surface without a host to live on, it has been detected over 72 hours later on some surfaces, such as stainless steel and plastic. For more information on cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, click here.

- Implement the following CDC/OSHA recommendations for an extended period of time to limit virus exposure:
  - Continue social distancing with ongoing education on six-foot distancing. If workers within certain offices or work areas cannot be adequately separated, consider a small, clear plastic partition, similar to those now seen in retail stores.
  - Consider telework or work from home arrangements for some employees.
  - To space out employees, consider utilizing other municipal facilities such as recreation centers or community centers that will not be used until the social distancing and gathering limitations are removed.
  - Develop a plan to manage common areas such as copy rooms, break/lunchrooms or file rooms, ensuring frequent cleaning of shared surfaces/equipment and utilizing proper cleaning chemicals throughout the workday.
  - Develop a plan for overnight cleaning of facilities and frequently touched surfaces such as service counters where staff interact with the public. This should be in addition to the regular disinfecting efforts in areas like these throughout the day.
  - Consider barriers for staff interaction with the public if a barrier does not currently exist.

- o Perform staggered work breaks and lunches to reduce the number of employees gathering. If possible, have employees avoid eating in the lunchroom until the potential for additional waves of the virus has passed.
- Develop a written *Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan* that employees can refer to and provide documented education on the plan. Clearly state in the policy if personal (non-employer provided) respirators are acceptable. Contact your PMA Risk Control Consultant for assistance.
- Designate one member of the leadership team and one alternate to address, collect, and investigate any COVID issues that employees raise. Inform employees as to who is assigned this role. The designee should communicate updates to senior leadership and employees weekly or more quickly based on the situation.
- Obtain and review the Safety Data Sheets for any new cleaning products used or stored within the facility with all exposed employees.

Planning for the "Restart"

- Hold planning meetings with key personnel from administration, department heads, Emergency Management and the Health department.
    - o Leadership should be knowledgeable on how to manage and direct employees expressing concerns about COVID-19 or showing symptoms consistent with potential exposure.
- Attempt to call employees back on a Wednesday to provide a short week to acclimate their bodies to the physical and mental exertion of their work area.
- If only temporarily, implement a mandatory pre-shift and post-break stretching program to reduce the potential for strain-related injuries. While these would ideally be tailored to the specific job task, more generic versions could be performed if this is a short-term control.
- Ensure systems (HVAC, Electrical and all other critical operational systems) are ready to support normal operations.
- Ensure facilities have been appropriately cleaned/decontaminated prior to re-occupying areas that have not been in use.
- Train employees on COVID-19 protocols including handwashing and other personal hygiene matters (CDC guidelines) along with disinfecting procedures for their work areas.

Operational and Equipment Review

- Conduct departmental safety meetings prior to restarting production to address safety expectations and controls to reduce the potential for employee injuries common to public entity operations. Limit the number of employees in meetings to facilitate social distancing.
- Direct the maintenance staff to review all equipment critical to operations and safety-related items. Bringing equipment back from a long shutdown will likely present challenges not found on a Monday morning restart. Stress that lockout/tagout (LOTO) procedures must be followed.
- Check for the potential accumulations of solvents, dust and leaks.

- Ensure a sufficient supply of N-95 respirators in line with current State/ CDC guidelines are stocked, if employees request them. Employees should sign Sec. 29 CFR 1910.134, Appendix D—click here. Keep respirators under supervisory control.
- Provide non-latex gloves for staff and if latex gloves are provided, remind employees about latex allergies for themselves and the public.
- Ensure employees are not wearing half mask respirators without proper training, i.e., medical evaluation questionnaires are completed and reviewed by a licensed health care provider, fit testing is accomplished, and protocols are followed for a clean-shaven face if applicable, etc.
- If possible, assign vehicles to one driver to minimize cross contamination; or, if vehicles are going to be shared, they should be decontaminated between drivers.

Employee Communications

- Conduct documented, ongoing meetings with employees as the workforce returns where senior management communicates reassurance, policies, procedures, etc. on what the organization has done and what employees should do. Managers can help by openly communicating with reassurance and honesty. Meet with smaller groups of employees to maintain social distancing.
- Conduct a daily stand-up meeting with updates on COVID-19, even if only to communicate that no employees are known to have been affected. Assign a senior manager to facilitate these meetings; or, if not possible, qualified supervisors to communicate this information with their teams.   As with all meetings, social distancing protocols should be maintained.
- Ensure employees know who to report concerns or issues to on COVID-19, and that they know how to access your organization's EAP program.

PMA is proud of our longstanding commitment to protecting the health and safety of our employees and clients. We are here to support you. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact your local PMA Risk Control Consultant or email us at heretohelp@pmagroup.com.

Resources

CDC General Guidance for Businesses and Employers
OSHA Guidance for General Coronavirus Control and Prevention Measures
CDC Guidance for the Us and Removal of Contaminated PPE
CDC General Guidance and Information About Nationwide Coronavirus Data
OSHA 3990 Guidance on Preparing Workplace for COVID-19
OSHA's Respiratory Protection standard, 29 CFR 1910.134 /Appendix D
PMA Technical Bulletin: "Stretching Program – Shoulder and Neck Exercises"
PMA Technical Bulletin: "Stretching Program – Hand Exercises"
PMA and Safety Source Videos on PMA Websource

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