

Workplace Preparedness

With the Coronavirus (Covid-19) spreading quickly, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a global emergency and the Centers for Disease Control has Classified the virus as a pandemic. The virus is spreading at an alarming rate and faster than previous viruses, while the severity of the symptoms and outcomes also seems to be greater. As public concern rises, businesses need to be proactive to minimize the potential effects within their own organizations and do their part globally.

It is vitally important that businesses have a plan in place for a potential emergency such as a global pandemic. Having a thorough plan will not only help business continuation, but also protect employees by encouraging practices that limit the spread of the virus. Below are some key points to keep in mind when developing your business plan to combat a state of emergency:

- Assess your company functions, both internally and externally, to determine what materials, staff, procedures, and equipment are necessary in keeping the business operating. Also, how will you reorganize if such resources aren't available?
- Identify suppliers, shippers, and other vendors you deal with regularly to set up contingency plans should their operations be interrupted.
- Be specific. Plan what to do if your building, store, or plan isn't accessible. Are people able and set up to work from home?
- Define crisis management procedures and who should play a role in these procedures. It is also good practice to review procedures annually to ensure that they are up to date with the business.
- Continuously maintain open lines of communication with employees

OSHA

Although there are no specific OSHA standard covering Covid-19, there are some OSHA requirements that may apply in preventing occupational exposure.

- OSHA's Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) standards (in general industry, 29 CFR 1910 Subpart I), which require using gloves, eye and face protection, and respiratory protection.
 - When respirators are necessary to protect workers, employers must implement a comprehensive respiratory protection program in accordance with Respiratory Protection standard (29 CFR 1910.134)

- The General Duty Clause, Section 5(a)(1) of Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of 1970, 29 USC 654(a)(1), which requires employers to furnish to each worker “employment and a place of employment, which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm.”

Covid-19 can be a recorded illness if a worker is infected as a result of performing their work-related duties. However, employers are only responsible for recording cases of Covid-19 if all the following criteria is met:

1. The case is a confirmed case of Covid-19 (see CDC information on persons under investigation and presumptive positive and laboratory-confirmed cases)
2. The case is work-related, as defined by 29 CFR 1904.5
3. The case involves one or more of the general recording criteria set forth in 29 CFR 1904.7 (e.g. medical treatment beyond first-aid, days away from work).