As COVID-19-related restrictions relax, more people will congregate outside the home, including in the regular workplace, resulting in increased likelihood of transmission and disease. Employers need to be prepared to respond when a case of COVID-19 is identified or when there is a possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace.

A case is a person who has a positive diagnostic viral (swab or saliva) test for COVID-19 and/or who has been told by a healthcare provider that they have COVID-19. Each employer should have a plan in place in advance, so that when a case is reported among employees anyone who may be infected is sent home to self-isolate, and any close contacts to cases with a positive COVID-19 test are sent home to self-quarantine. The employer should consider including a protocol for access to COVID-19 testing for all quarantined employees as part of the plan in order to clarify the extent of spread in the workplace and possible risk to other employees.

Effective strategies for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace include, but are not limited to the following:

- Physical distancing (separation of all employees, customers, visitors by at least 6 feet)
- Universal face covering for source control
- Promotion of frequent hand washing
- Environmental cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces
- Ensuring HVAC systems are in good working order, and ventilation has been increased, where possible. (See posted guidance on improving ventilation)
- Establishing non-punitive sick leave policies that allow employees to stay home when ill and to stay home to care for sick household members. Make sure that employees are aware of these policies.
- Symptom checks before employees enter the workspace.
- Immediate exclusion from work of symptomatic staff with recommendation for follow up with their provider and testing for COVID-19.
- Immediate isolation of all COVID-19 cases
- Immediate quarantine of all workplace close contacts to a case with a positive COVID-19 test with recommendation for testing for COVID-19.

All employers should follow LAC DPH business re-opening checklists to prevent spread of COVID-19 in their settings. In most situations, these measures can successfully prevent and curb further spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

Contact Investigation

Once a case with a positive COVID-19 test is identified among employees, the employer should conduct an investigation to identify all close contacts associated with the workplace (both employees and non-employees who spent time at the site) who had exposure to the case during the infectious period. A case is considered to be infectious from 2 days before their symptoms first appeared until they are no longer required to be isolated (as described in Home Isolation Instructions for People with COVID-19). A person with a positive COVID-19 test but no symptoms is considered to be infectious from 2 days before their test was taken until 10 days after their test.
A close contact is any individual within the workplace with the following exposures to a case with a positive COVID-19 test while the case was infectious:
- Presence within 6 feet of the case for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, or
- Contact with the case’s body fluids and/or secretions, for example, being coughed or sneezed on, sharing of a drink or food utensils.

Any close contacts to a case with a positive COVID-19 test are required to quarantine for 14 days from the date of the last exposure to the case. It is recommended that all close contacts be tested for COVID-19. Staff instructed to isolate or quarantine who cannot work remotely should be given paid sick leave.

**Targeted Testing:**
Targeted testing is an important strategy for preventing uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 at the worksite and should be part of each employer’s response plan. Targeted testing focuses on close contacts of a COVID-19 case, and on testing them even in the absence of symptoms. If testing identifies additional asymptomatic cases, a new contact investigation is initiated around the newly confirmed case so that their close contacts can be identified and tested. This protocol is repeated for each identified case at the facility. In certain situations where individual close contacts cannot be identified, such as when physical distancing was not maintained for any of a variety of reasons, the entire workplace may be considered exposed and quarantine and testing will occur for the entire workplace.

If there are three or more laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases identified at a workplace, the employer must report the cluster to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health at 888-397-3993.

**Role of Targeted Testing:**
It is important to recognize the benefits and limitations of targeted testing and to understand how targeted testing will and will not affect case management.

**Targeted testing may help:**
- Identify unrecognized, asymptomatic COVID-positive employees among those who have had contact with a case so that further spread can be limited or averted.

**Targeted testing does NOT however:**
- Eliminate the need for investigation to determine who has had contact with a case or for quarantine of close contacts. An individual may test negative soon after exposure and then go on to develop infection, placing those around them at risk.
- Reveal if a close contact to a COVID-19 case will develop disease. Testing provides information at a single point in time. A person who tests negative during the incubation period (the time period between exposure to disease and disease onset) may still develop disease later. This means any close contacts will need to quarantine and take appropriate precautions for the full 14-day period even if their test is negative.
- As a result, testing does not allow a close contact to return to work any sooner. Asymptomatic employees with a positive COVID-19 test may be released from isolation and return to work 10 days after the initial positive test, as long as they do not develop symptoms.

**Return to Work:**
If an ill employee that is sent home for evaluation tests negative on a molecular COVID-19 test or is told by their provider that they do not have COVID-19 they may return to the workplace 24 hours after their fever has resolved without the use of fever reducing medications and their symptoms have improved.
If they fail to get tested or be seen by a provider, they should stay home from work and remain isolated for the full 10 days from the start of their symptoms and 24 hours after they are fever free and their symptoms have improved.

Individuals who are cases can return to work after completion of their isolation period according to Health Officer orders. Contacts to lab confirmed cases may return after their period of quarantine is completed. Staff that meet these requirements can return to work and resume usual activities. Neither Public Health clearance nor a negative COVID-19 test is required for return to work.

**Outbreak Response:**
If a cluster is identified at a worksite (defined as 3 cases of COVID), the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health will initiate a cluster response which includes providing infection control guidance and recommendations, technical support and site-specific control measures. A public health case manager will be assigned to the cluster investigation to help guide the facility response.

**Testing Resources:**
- Employees with insurance can be instructed to call their provider and arrange for testing and then report results to the employer.
- Employees with no insurance or whose providers cannot provide testing, can visit [covid19.lacounty.gov/testing](http://covid19.lacounty.gov/testing) or call 211 for help locating a free testing site. Here again, results must be reported to the employer.
- In large workplaces, Employee Health may be able to provide the testing.
- Wherever testing of close contacts occurs, employees must report results to the employer. This permits the employer to carry out additional cycles of contact identification, quarantine and testing if a close contact of the original case tests positive.

**Summary**
With widespread community transmission of COVID-19, employers should assume everyone in the workplace is possibly infected and therefore require that everyone wear face coverings and maintain physical distancing (for employees that cannot work remotely). The number of people in the workplace should be limited and environmental cleaning, and good health/hand hygiene must be observed. Contact LAC DPH to manage clusters when they do occur. Targeted testing of asymptomatic close contacts in the workplace is a recommended tool for employers to use to assess if additional workplace exposures may have occurred.

**Additional Information:**
- Home quarantine instructions for close contacts to COVID-19 [ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine](http://ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine)
- Home isolation instructions for people with COVID-19 [ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation](http://ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation)

See the LAC DPH COVID-19 website for additional resources related to COVID-19.