



So You Think This COVID Thing Has Ended? Not So Fast! 5 Tips for Employers to Prepare for Cold, Flu, and COVID Season

Insights

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For many businesses, the pandemic seems like a distant memory, but COVID-19 is not entirely behind us. Indeed, as the cold and flu season approaches, the CDC predicts that COVID-19 cases will increase across the country. Such surges have already started to impact workforces, making now a good time to review and update your COVID-19 policies to ensure business continuity when employees are out sick. Here's a brief guide with five tips to effectively address respiratory illness in the workplace in today's changing landscape.

1. Review the Latest CDC Guidance

While the CDC's strict guidelines have been lifted, current guidance notes that last year's cold and flu season "provided ongoing evidence of the changing face of respiratory diseases," and that "COVID-19 remains an important public health threat, but it is no longer the emergency that it once was."

The CDC further explains that COVID-19's symptoms and health impacts "**increasingly resemble those of other respiratory viral illnesses**, including influenza and RSV." This has allowed the agency "to provide updated guidance proportionate to the current level of risk COVID-19 poses while balancing other critical health and societal needs."

Based on the revised CDC guidance, **the policies your organization adopted during the height of the pandemic may need to be dusted off and revised**, as compliance with the new CDC standards still has an impact on your workforce and business operations today.

2. Revise Your Current COVID-19 Policies or Implement a New Policy

Many employers have not updated their policies since the height of the pandemic when masking in public was mandated in many states and the CDC was recommending extended periods of quarantine for individuals who tested positive for COVID-19.

While the CDC recommended quarantine periods at height of the pandemic, **the agency now recommends treating COVID-19 the same as other respiratory viruses**, like the common cold, influenza, and RSV. "Quarantine" is now a concept of the past and individuals who contract COVID-

19 and other respiratory illnesses are permitted to reenter the workforce as soon as any fever resolves, leading to fewer days of lost time.

The CDC guidelines are now symptom based. Thus, employers can relax policies that previously required 14-day quarantines for employees who were exposed to COVID-19 or required employees to stay out of work until they tested negative for the virus.

It is essential to **create a clear policy** on how your company handles COVID-19 or other respiratory illness is essential — and a best practice is to align your policy with the CDC's current recommendations.

3. Stay Updated on Current CDC Guidelines

So what are the CDC's current guidelines your organization should be following? The CDC says that individuals experiencing respiratory virus symptoms — such as a fever, chills, fatigue, cough, runny nose, and head and body aches — should stay home and away from others.

Individuals can return to work (and other normal day-to-day activities) only when both **their symptoms are improving overall *and* they have not had a fever within the last 24 hours.**

But regardless of whether employees are still showing symptoms, they may still be contagious, and the CDC recommends **taking added precautions for five days.** Precautions include:

- taking additional steps for cleaner air and hygiene;
- masking;
- physical distancing; and/or
- regular testing.

Be mindful, though, that CDC guidelines may change, even throughout the current cold and flu season. Relying on stale policies that cite to previous guidance could severely and unnecessarily disrupt business operations. [So, check the CDC's website for the latest updates.](#)

4. Continue to Implement Health and Safety Protocols

While no longer mandated under the CDC guidelines, you may also want to continue your workplace health and safety protocols to try to prevent the spread of infectious disease. This can include:

- enhancing cleaning protocols for high-touch surfaces and common areas, like break rooms and office lobbies;
- providing disposable face masks for employees who wish to wear them; and
- making hand sanitizers available throughout the workplace.

Employers can also **make CDC-issued guidance readily available to employees** regarding effective handwashing techniques and the efficacy of COVID-19 vaccinations and booster shots.

In addition, you should **encourage employees to stay home** when they are showing symptoms of a respiratory disease to avoid spreading the disease in the workplace. Implementing an attendance policy allowing for certain types of unexcused absences or a paid sick leave policy —whether required by state or local law or not — will encourage employees to stay home when they are sick, without fear of repercussions.

If your business allows for it, you also can provide employees with **the option to work remotely** when they are feeling under the weather or if they have been exposed to COVID-19 or another respiratory illness.

5. Create a Plan for Business Continuity

Finally, it is critical to ensure that your company can continue to operate effectively even when employees are out sick during cold and flu season. Some practical tips may include **cross-training certain employees to handle multiple job functions** so they can fill in for employees who are out sick. This can help mitigate disruptions to business operations.

You should also **assess digital tools and platforms to facilitate remote work**, if it is feasible for your business. Ensure employees have access to the necessary technology they need to work efficiently and effectively from home.

Conclusion

Adhering to current COVID-19 guidelines and implementing effective workplace measures can help protect employee health and ensure business continuity. By using the above guidance to prepare for potential disruptions, you can maintain a safe and productive workplace.

We will monitor developments in this area and provide updates as warranted. Make sure you are subscribed to [Fisher Phillips' Insight System](#) to get the most up-to-date information. If you have any questions, contact the authors of this Insight, your Fisher Phillips attorney, or any member of our [Workplace Safety Practice Group](#).

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