INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS WITH WORKERS AT HIGH RISK

As workplaces consider a gradual scale up of activities towards pre-COVID-19 operating practices, it is particularly important to keep in mind that some workers are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. These workers include individuals over age 65 and those with underlying medical conditions. Such underlying conditions include, but are not limited to, chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, hypertension, severe heart conditions, weakened immunity, severe obesity, diabetes, liver disease, and chronic kidney disease that requires dialysis. Workers at higher risk for severe illness should be encouraged to self-identify, and employers should avoid making unnecessary medical inquiries. Employers should take particular care to reduce workers' risk of exposure to COVID-19, while making sure to be compliant with relevant Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) regulations. First and foremost, this means following CDC and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidance for reducing workplace exposure for all employees. All decisions about following these recommendations should be made in collaboration with local health officials and other State and local authorities who can help assess the current level of mitigation needed based on levels of COVID-19 community transmission and the capacities of the local public health and healthcare systems. In addition, the guidance offered below applies to workplaces generally; specific industries may require more stringent safety precautions. Finally, there may be essential workplaces in which the recommended mitigation strategies are not feasible. CDC is releasing this interim guidance, laid out in a series of three steps, to inform a gradual scale up of operations. The scope and nature of community mitigation suggested decreases from Step 1 to Step 3. Some amount of community mitigation is necessary across all steps until a vaccine or therapeutic drug becomes widely available.

Scaling Up Operations

- **In all Steps:**
    - Establish and maintain communication with local and State authorities to determine current mitigation levels in your community.
    - Protect employees at higher risk for severe illness by supporting and encouraging options to telework.
    - Consider offering workers at higher risk duties that minimize their contact with customers and other employees (e.g., restocking shelves rather than working as a cashier), if agreed to by the worker.
    - Encourage any other entities sharing the same work space also follow this guidance.
    - Provide employees from higher transmission areas (earlier Step areas) telework and other options as feasible to eliminate travel to workplaces in lower transmission (later Step) areas and vice versa.
- **Step 1**: Scale up only if business can ensure strict social distancing, proper cleaning and disinfecting requirements, and protection of their workers and customers; workers at higher risk for severe illness are recommended to shelter in place.
- **Step 2**: Scale up only if business can ensure moderate social distancing, proper cleaning and disinfecting requirements, and protection of their workers and customers; workers at higher risk for severe illness are recommended to shelter in place.
- **Step 3**: Scale up only if business can ensure limited social distancing, proper cleaning and disinfecting requirements, and protection of their workers and customers.

Safety Action

Promote [healthy hygiene practices](#) (Steps 1-3)

- Enforce [hand washing](#), covering coughs and sneezes, and using [cloth face coverings](#) when around others where feasible;
- however, certain industries may require face shields.
- Ensure that adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol, tissues, paper towels, and no-touch trash cans.
- Post signs on how to [stop the spread](#) of COVID-19 [properly wash hands](#), [promote everyday protective measure](#)s, and [properly wear a face covering](#).

Intensify cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation (Steps 1-3)

- [Clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces at least daily and shared objects between use.
- Avoid use or sharing of items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected.
- Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants.
- Ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible such as by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk to individuals and employees using the workspace.
- Take steps to ensure that all water systems and features (for example, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown to minimize the risk of [Legionnaires' disease](#) and other diseases associated with water.

Promote social distancing (Steps 1-3)

- Limit service to drive-throughs, curbside take out, or delivery options, if possible (Step 1).
- Consider installing physical barriers, such as sneeze guards and partitions, and changing workspace layouts to ensure all individuals remain at least six feet apart.
- Close communal spaces, such as break rooms, if possible (Step 1) or stagger use and clean and disinfect in between uses (Steps 2 & 3).
- Encourage telework for as many employees as possible.
- Consider rotating or staggering shifts to limit the number of employees in the workplace at the same time.
- Replace in-person meetings with video- or tele-conference calls whenever possible.
- Cancel all group events, gatherings, or meetings of more than 10 people (Step 1), of more than 50 people (Step 2), and any events where social distancing of at least 6 feet cannot be maintained between participants (all Steps).
- Restrict (Step 1) or consider limiting (Step 2) any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations.
- Limit any sharing of foods, tools, equipment, or supplies.

Limit travel and modify commuting practices (Steps 1-3)

- Cancel all non-essential travel (Step 1) and consider resuming non-essential travel in accordance with state and local regulations and guidance (Steps 2 & 3).

- Ask employees who use public transportation to consider using teleworking to promote social distancing.
- Train all managers and staff in the above safety actions. Consider conducting the training virtually, or if in-person, ensure that social distancing is maintained.

Monitoring and Preparing

Checking for signs and symptoms (Steps 1-3)

- Consider conducting routine, daily health checks (e.g., temperature and symptom screening) of all employees.
- If implementing health checks, conduct them safely and respectfully, and in accordance with any applicable privacy laws and regulations. Confidentiality should be respected. Employers may use examples of screening methods in CDC's General Business FAQs as a guide.
- Encourage employees who are sick to stay at home.

Plan for when an employee becomes sick (Steps 1-3)

- Employees with symptoms (fever, cough, or shortness of breath) at work should immediately be separated and sent home.
- Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone sick to their home or to a healthcare facility.
- Notify local health officials, staff, and customers (if possible) immediately of a possible case while maintaining confidentiality consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other applicable federal and state privacy laws.
- Close off areas used by the sick person until after cleaning and disinfection Wait 24 hours to clean and disinfect. If it is not possible to wait 24 hours, wait as long as possible before cleaning and disinfecting. Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants and keep disinfectant products away from children.
- Inform those who have had close contact to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and to follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop. If a person does not have symptoms follow appropriate CDC guidance for home isolation.
- Sick employees should not return to work until they have met CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation.

Maintain healthy operations (Steps 1-3)

- Implement flexible sick leave and other flexible policies and practices, such as telework, if feasible.
- Monitor absenteeism of employees and create a roster of trained back-up staff.
- Designate a staff person to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Employees should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- Create and test communication systems for employees for self-reporting and notification of exposures and closures.
- Support coping and resilience among employees.

Closing

Steps 1-3

- Check State and local health department notices daily about transmission in the area and adjust operations accordingly.
- Be prepared to consider closing for a few days if there is a case of COVID-19 in the workplace or for longer if cases increase in the local area.