

## COVID-19 in the Workplace – Employee Protection

As we all navigate through these trying times caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we at First Benefits Insurance Mutual Loss Control Department hope to provide some valuable guidance on protecting your employees and customers. OSHA and the CDC have provided general guidance for all workplaces, and additional guidance based on the risk level associated with various industries/occupations. Please review and utilize the following information for your operations.

### General Guidance for All Workers and Employers

For all workers, regardless of specific exposure risks, it is always a good practice to:

- Allow workers to work from home, if possible!
- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When soap and running water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60% alcohol.
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and equipment.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Practice good respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes.
- Maintain 6 feet between employees and customers, or provide barriers.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Have employees stay home if sick. (paid leave is strongly encouraged)
- Recognize personal risk factors. According to U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), certain people, including older adults and those with underlying conditions such as heart or lung disease or diabetes, are at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19.

### Guidance for Workers and Employers of Workers at Lower Risk of Exposure

For most types of workers, the risk of infection is similar to that of the general public. Workers whose jobs do not require contact with people known to be, or suspected of being, infected nor frequent close contact with (i.e., within 6 feet of) the general public are at lower risk of occupational exposure.

Employers should monitor public health communications about COVID-19 recommendations, ensure that workers have access to that information, and collaborate with workers to designate effective means of communicating important COVID-19 information. Frequently check the OSHA and CDC COVID-19 websites for updates.

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

### Guidance for Workers and Employers of Workers at Increased Risk of Occupational Exposure

Certain workers are likely to perform job duties that involve medium, high, or very high occupational exposure risks. Many critical sectors depend on these workers to continue their operations. Examples of workers in these exposure risk groups can include those in: healthcare, retail operations, waste management, environmental services, in-home repair services, distribution and any other occupation requiring travel to areas where the virus is spreading.

Workers' job duties affect their level of occupational risk. Employers should assess the hazards to which their workers may be exposed; evaluate the risk of exposure; and, select, implement, and ensure

workers use controls to prevent exposure. Control measures may include a combination of engineering (barriers) and administrative controls (limits on customers), safe work practices (distancing), and personal protective equipment (PPE).

If your operations fall into this increased level of risk, the following recommendations can help minimize the spread of infection:

1. **Identify and Isolate any suspected cases** – remove sick workers (or those more susceptible) from workplace
2. **Cleaning and Decontamination** – clean with approved disinfectants (continually)
3. **Employee training** – train employees on sign/symptoms and methods of protection

#### Rules Specific to NC

#### Executive Order 131 Part 1 - POLICIES FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING IN RETAIL STORES

This Order offers clear requirements that essential businesses must implement in order to safeguard the health of customers and employees. Some of the directives include:

- Setting limits of how many people can be in a store at one time, 5 people per 1,000 square feet of retail space or 20% of fire marshal posted occupancy limits
- Marking 6 feet of distance for areas where people gather like checkout lines
- Requiring specific cleaning measures for retail stores

The Order encourages:

- Implementing hygiene recommendations for employees and customers, like hand sanitizer at the doors and face coverings for workers
- Establishing designated shopping times designated for high-risk groups
- Creating barriers between customers and employees at checkout to lower the risk of required interactions

The Order states these requirements will last for thirty days unless extended by further executive action. (April 9, 2020)

It is our hope this information will assist you in protecting your workers during these trying times. We look forward to seeing you in the near future. As always, if you require additional assistance, contact us at [losscontrol@firstbenefits.org](mailto:losscontrol@firstbenefits.org)