



CORONAVIRUS IN THE WORKPLACE: FIVE RULES FOR EMPLOYERS

by Gray Reed's Labor & Employment Department
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COVID-19 is spreading around the globe, and employers must act now to take steps to protect their employees before it is too late. We recommend employers follow these five rules in an effort to control the spread of this deadly virus in the workplace.

1. Watch for symptoms. Employees should all be made aware of the symptoms of COVID-19 which include fever, respiratory illness, coughing and difficulty breathing. Any employee exhibiting these symptoms should be sent home from work and advised to seek medical care. In the event that an employee needs to take a leave of absence because of a confirmed case of COVID-19 or potential case of COVID-19, employers must be mindful of the requirements under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) to avoid any potential pitfalls or liabilities.

2. Communicate with your employees. Your employees are the only people who can help you combat the spread of any illness in the workplace. It is critical that employers make clear to their employees that they should not come to work if they are sick. We prepared a sample informative notice that you can provide to all of your employees, which is available [here](#).

3. Support and educate employees about the importance of hand-washing. Employers should emphasize that the very best way to prevent the spread of this virus is frequent hand-washing. Employees should be reminded to wash their hands with soap and water on a regular basis. The most recent guidance from the CDC recommends the use of antibacterial soap for at least 20 seconds, so employers should provide employees with hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes in common areas. There are also guidelines for appropriate hand-washing, which are available [here](#).

4. Restrict international travel. Employers should restrict travel to any country that is on the [CDC's Level 2 or Level 3 warning list](#) for the COVID-19 outbreak. If any employees or any member of their household travel to one of the countries listed as a Level 2 or Level 3 risk, the employee should notify their employer. As stated in the communication notice, employees who travel to these identified countries should know that they must stay at home for two weeks after returning to the United States.

5. Prepare for offsite employees. Organizations should consider the possibility that it may be necessary to close the workplace for some period of time in the event that an employee is infected or the spread of the virus becomes unmanageable. Employers can take steps now to ensure that the business can continue to operate while the business is closed. For example, work with your IT departments to develop an offsite work plan for key employees. Moreover, when the need for an offsite workforce arises, employers must be mindful of timekeeping requirements for non-exempt employees and should plan accordingly.

If you have any questions about how to handle a COVID-19 outbreak in your workplace, please [contact us](#) so that we can help you navigate this new and complex legal landscape.

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