

Compliance Alert: The 12 Things OHS Managers Need to Know about Coronavirus



The first thing you need to do to safeguard your workplace from coronavirus outbreak is go to school on the virus and current health situation. Because the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is so new, we have to rely on government health departments and global health agencies for information about it. Here's a breakdown of the 12 things OHS directors need to know about 2019-nCoV based on FAQs listed on the Canadian Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) dedicated website.

1. Where Does Coronavirus Come From'

Answer: Coronavirus is a respiratory virus that originated in China, specifically the city of Wuhan located in the Hubei Province. In addition to 4 cases in Canada (3 from Ontario and 1 from BC), other countries reporting cases include the US, UK, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Russia, UAE, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, Korea, Philippines and Australia.

2. What Are the Symptoms'

Answer: Symptoms of coronavirus range from common to severe respiratory illnesses and include:

- Fever;
- Cough; and
- Difficulty breathing; and
- Pneumonia, kidney failure and death have occurred in severe cases.

3. How Dangerous Is It'

Answer: More than 300 people have died of coronavirus, higher than the death toll from SARS. Even so, risk of death is considered low and most people with common coronavirus illness will recover on their own.

4. How Contagious Is It'

Answer: Very. There is evidence that the novel coronavirus can be spread before an individual develops symptoms. This poses a problem because people who do not know they are infected may continue to go to work, school, and other public places. People who are sick and have symptoms are more likely to stay home, which means fewer opportunities for the virus to spread from one person to another. When asymptomatic transmission occurs, infection control experts and public health officials may need to take additional measures, such as social distancing, isolating patients, or using quarantines.

5. How Likely Are Canadians to Get the Virus'

Answer: The PHAC has assessed the public health risk associated with 2019-nCoV as low for Canada. Those who have traveled to or had contact with people from Wuhan are at the highest risk. That's why the Canadian government has recommended avoiding:

- All non-essential travel to China; and
- All travel of any kind to Hubei Province, China, including Wuhan city.

6. What to Do If You Develop Symptoms'

Answer: If you've traveled to Wuhan and develop symptoms of 2019-nCoV, the PHAC recommends that you avoid contact with others and contact a health care professional and report:

- Your symptoms;
- Where you've been travelling or living;
- if you had direct contact with animals (for example, if you visited a live animal market);
- if you had close contact with a sick person, especially if they had a fever, cough or difficulty breathing.

7. Is There a Vaccine for the Virus'

Answer: There's currently no vaccine to protect against 2019-nCoV infection. And this year's flu vaccine doesn't protect against coronaviruses.

8. Is There a Treatment for the Virus'

Answer: There's currently no specific treatment for coronavirus infection, although there may be steps your health care provider can recommend to relieve the symptoms. The good news is that most people with the virus recover on their own without specific treatment.

9. How Can People Protect Themselves from the Virus'

Answer: According to the PHAC, you can protect yourself and others against infection by:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available;

- Not touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands;
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick; and
- Using proper cough and sneeze etiquette, such as by covering your mouth and nose with your arm to reduce the spread of germs and disposing of tissues as soon as possible and washing your hands after you do.

10. Do We Have a Legal Obligation to Protect Workers from Infection'

Answer: Yes, to the extent exposure is a real or potential hazard to your workers, you must take reasonable measures to prevent it.

11. What Measures Should We Implement to Protect Workers'

Answer: Things you can do to prevent and contain the spread of coronavirus include:

- Notifying and educating exposed workers about 2019-nCoV risks, symptoms and available prevention measures;
- Requiring workers to wash their hands before starting work, after sneezing and coughing and after touching potentially infected surfaces or objects, e.g., doorknobs or equipment handled by sick co-workers;
- Implementing effective cleaning and disinfection procedures;
- Requiring workers to report if they've traveled to Wuhan or other 2019-nCoV risk area;
- Requiring workers to stay home when they're sick;
- Limiting personal contact and space between workers;
- Preparing for potential 2019-nCoV work refusals; and
- Ensuring you have an overall infectious illness exposure control and response policy or plan **in place**.

12. Where Can I Get Up-to-Date Coronavirus Information'

Answer: You can stay on top of the virus and latest situation by going to the PHAC's Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) web page.