



Toolbox Talks

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Spotlight on Safety

Identifying & Protecting Against the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Health officials in the United States are extremely concerned about a new coronavirus that emerged from China and has rapidly spread across the world thanks to efficient global travel. The virus causing this coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold. This virus spreads very easily and is 10 times more violent than the common flu virus. At present, there is no vaccine or medicine to cure the virus.

There are many things employees can do to prevent themselves, their families, and their coworkers from coming down with COVID-19.

What are the signs that a person has the virus? Symptoms for COVID-19 include fever and shortness of breath, cough or a sore throat. Some people infected with the virus have experienced non-respiratory symptoms and others no symptoms at all. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure.

How does this virus spread? Like other flu viruses, COVID-19 is spread from person-to-person through coughing or sneezing. The virus can then travel through tiny respiratory droplets that travel through the air (about 6 feet). It could also be spread by touching a surface such as a cell phone, telephone, tablet, computer, equipment controls, hand tools, portable power tools, or a doorknob or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes.

How severe is this virus? Current symptoms reported have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. Most people afflicted with this virus have recovered after several days of illness. Hospitalizations and deaths have occurred--treat this virus seriously.

Who is at risk for serious illness from this virus? Early information shows some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, including older adults over 60, and adults with pre-existing serious medical conditions like suppressed immune systems, heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease. Pregnant women may have a higher risk of developing severe illness from these kinds of corona viruses.

How do I protect myself and my family from this virus?

- **Clean your hands often.** Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have shook hands, used a phone, tablet or computer other than yours, been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. Use a hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available.
- **Don't touch your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.** We all do it without knowing we are doing it.
- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.** Keep more distance between yourself and others. Don't shake hands with others. Knuckle or elbow bump if you feel the need to make contact with someone.
- **Take steps to protect others, like your family and coworkers.** Above all, stay home if you are sick and leave only to get medical care. Don't take your illness to work, even if you are working outdoors on a job site. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash--do not stuff them back in your pocket after use.
- **Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.** This includes cell phones, telephones, tablets, equipment controls, office and kitchen tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, vehicle handles, desks, phones, toilets, faucets, sinks, equipment controls, clipboards, and other shared construction tools.

In short: Wash your hands frequently. Don't touch your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Try to maintain a 6-foot space between you and others. Stay home if you are sick, and stay away from others who are sick.

This is a very dangerous virus and the only way our country is going to eliminate it is by all of us doing our part to protect ourselves, coworkers, and all our families.

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