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COVID-19 eBook

Back to Work: Managing a Positive COVID-19 Test

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What should I do if an employee gets COVID-19?

While there is so much out of your control during the COVID-19 pandemic, you can still stay positive and focus on what you *can* control. That includes being as prepared as you can be for the possibility of an employee testing positive for COVID-19. This informative guide will help you create an action plan if an employee is diagnosed, so you can keep your workplace safe and your business up and running.

What is COVID-19?

While there are many types of coronaviruses (including the common cold), COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus, a new and dangerous strain that humans have no immunity to since it has not been previously seen. COVID-19 is highly contagious and is currently thought to be spread mainly through respiratory droplets.

How do I protect employees from COVID-19?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends avoiding close contact with people (staying at least 6 feet from others), wearing a face-covering around others, washing your hands often, disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, and monitoring your health daily. Learn more at CDC FAQ.

**Questions?**

Call our team at **(808) 791-4900.**

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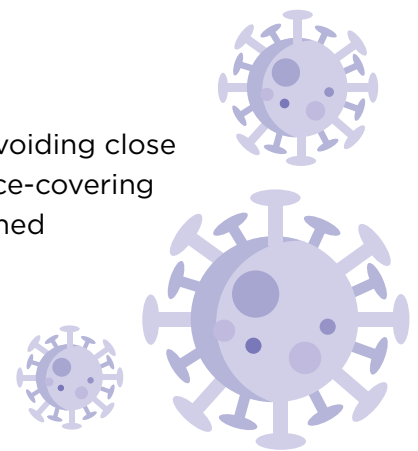
Back to Work: COVID-19 Prevention and Preparation

For the safety of your employees, prevention is critical to keeping your workplace secure from infection. However, a COVID-19 positive case may inevitably occur. Employers must be prepared with clear information, defined emergency procedures, and best practices for managing employees during this challenging time.

WORKPLACE PREVENTION TIPS
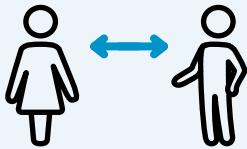
Maintain 6 feet from others at all times or when practically possible

Wear face-coverings, especially when in close contact with others

Wash hands often for at least 20 seconds

Disinfect frequently touched surfaces throughout the day with a 50/50 bleach solution or 70% isopropyl alcohol

Consider temperature checks before entering the workplace

If you have a fever (commonly 100.4º F and above), employees must stay home

If possible, increase ventilation and circulation of clean outdoor air within the workplace

Conduct a thorough hazard assessment of your workplace to identify potential areas of risk for COVID-19 transmission

Modify workspaces, meeting areas, and furniture to foster social distancing and safety

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During a pandemic, the ADA allows employers to ask COVID-19-specific questions to their employees before entering the workplace. You may ask employees if they have symptoms of COVID-19, if they have been tested for COVID-19, and/or if they currently have COVID-19. If the answer is "yes" to any of these questions, the employer can prevent the entry of the employee to preserve the health and safety of co-workers.
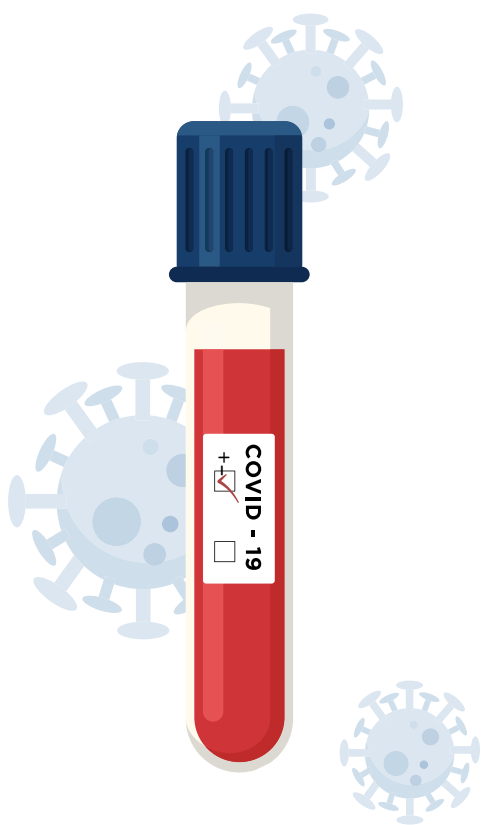
PREPARE FOR A POTENTIAL COVID-19 CASE

☐   Inform and train all employees and management of COVID-19-specific workplace rules and operating procedures.

☐   Designate a point of contact for any COVID-19-related concerns.

☐   Provide training to employees and cleaning staff on the proper use and disposal of PPE (personal protective equipment).

☐   Talk to building management about cleaning procedures in case there is an infection.

☐   Listen to your employees' questions and concerns.

☐   Designate a waiting room or area away from others in case medical care is needed.

☐   Connect with simplicityHR for more guidance.

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If an Employee Tests Positive for COVID-19: Act Quickly

The most important step to take if an employee tests positive for COVID-19 – or is ill and believes they may have the virus – is to act quickly. The clock is ticking to keep your employees safe, so be prepared with an emergency plan for your business.

ACT QUICKLY CHECKLIST:

☐ Don't panic. Address your employee with understanding.

☐ If your employee is feeling ill or has a confirmed case at work, send them home immediately.

☐ Have them wait in your designated waiting room away from others if they require medical attention or are waiting for transportation. Limit exposure and wear a mask.

☐ If a test is confirmed positive, ask the employee to make a list of co-workers, clients, or vendors they've come in close contact with (within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or more within a 24-hour period) in the last 2 days.

☐ Communicate the potential exposure to these contacts, but **DO NOT identify the employee to protect their privacy, as required under various federal and state laws.** Advise them to self-isolate, monitor symptoms, and consult their doctor.

☐ Send home any employees identified and advise them to self-quarantine for the amount of time designated by CDC guidelines.

☐ Communicate the illness to your employees while keeping the affected employee(s) confidential.

☐ In communications to employees, calm fears but stick to the facts. See Communication is Key section.

☐ Disinfect the immediate worksite following CDC guidelines. Inform building management so they can also disinfect common areas.

☐ Your designated COVID point person should contact affected employees to share benefits-related information and keep updated on their conditions.

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If an Employee Tests Positive for COVID-19: Stop the Spread

If one of your employees tests positive for COVID-19, your priority, for your workplace and community, is to stop the spread. Take steps to disinfect affected workplace areas and start contact tracing to minimize the extent of the virus.

STOP THE SPREAD CHECKLIST:

☐ Identify areas used by infected employee(s) and close them off.

☐ Increase ventilation to the areas by opening windows and doors.

☐ Inform your building management of the infection so they can disinfect common areas.

☐ To reduce exposure, wait up to 24-hours before disinfecting.

☐ Wear proper PPE, including masks, gloves, eye protection, and gowns throughout the cleaning process.

☐ Clean and disinfect all areas used by affected employee(s) and all high-touch surfaces throughout the workplace. Cleaning with soap and water reduces germs on the surface, while disinfectants kill germs.

☐ Wash hands frequently for 20 seconds or longer during this process.

☐ The affected workplace spaces can be opened after it has been thoroughly disinfected.

☐ Continue to clean and disinfect regularly. For more information, read the CDC's Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility and Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting.

☐ If a test is confirmed positive, ask the employee to make a list of co-workers, clients, or vendors they've come in close contact with (within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or more within a 24-hour period) in the last 2 days. Communicate the potential exposure to these contacts, but **DO NOT identify the employee to protect their privacy, as required under various federal and state laws.** Advise them to self-isolate, monitor symptoms, and consult their doctor.

☐ For employers, you may need to indicate a positive COVID-19 test on your OSHA Form 300 log.

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If an Employee Tests Positive for COVID-19: Communication is Key

During these challenging times, uncertainty can be a source of anxiety. So, if you have a confirmed COVID-19 case at work, be sure to clearly communicate the situation and the solutions your business will take to address it.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY CHECKLIST:

☐ This is a vulnerable time for the affected employee. Be understanding, listen, and reassure them that they have your support.

> "I know this is a scary situation. I want you to take care of your health first. We'll figure out your work situation as this develops. You have our support, and be assured that your identity will remain confidential."

☐ Ask the positive-test employee to make a list of co-workers, clients or vendors they've come in close contact with (within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or more within a 24-hour period) in the last 2 days. Communicate the potential exposure to these contacts, but **DO NOT identify the employee to protect their privacy, as required under various federal and state laws.**

> "We regret to inform you that a co-worker has just tested positive for COVID-19. They have identified you as someone they may have had close contact with in the past 2 days. For your safety and the safety of others, please go home immediately to self-isolate, consult your doctor, and monitor your symptoms. We understand this is a difficult situation. We will continue to keep you updated as we learn more."

☐ Communicate the illness to any remaining employees while keeping the affected employee(s) confidential. Calm fears and be understanding. When in doubt, simply stick to the facts.

> "We regret to inform you that a co-worker has tested positive for COVID-19 on (date) and is now self-isolating. Close contacts have been notified and were also asked to self-isolate. Due to privacy laws, we are unable to identify the affected co-workers. We will be taking steps to disinfect all areas and minimize further risk, so our offices will be closing from (date) to (date). Please consult your manager for further instructions. Please consult your doctor if you have questions about COVID-19 or visit the CDC website at cdc.gov/coronavirus or State of Hawai'i Department of Health at health.hawaii.gov/coronavirusdisease2019. Your safety is our priority, and we're here to support you during this difficult time. If you have questions or concerns, please contact (HR contact)."

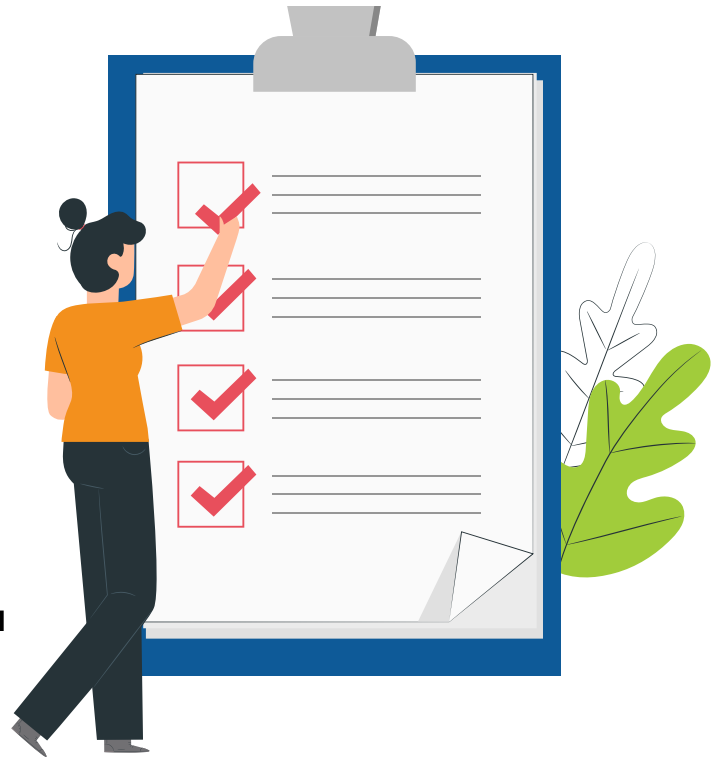**Questions?**

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If an Employee Tests Positive: Support Your Team

Your employees and co-workers are like family, so a COVID-19 diagnosis will be challenging. During this time, be sure to keep communications open, be understanding, and show your support by being as helpful and informative as possible.

SUPPORT YOUR TEAM CHECKLIST:

☐   Remind affected employee(s) to seek medical care, stay home, and isolate from others in their house in a well-ventilated area, if possible.

☐   Remind them and their household members to wear a face mask when in contact with each other. Wash hands and disinfect high-touch surfaces often.

☐   Remind them to follow doctor's orders with consistent temperature and oxygen checks, hydration, and take prescribed medication. Seek immediate medical attention if they have trouble breathing or if they feel persistent chest pain.

☐   **Remember to keep the identities of affected employee(s) confidential, as required under various federal and state laws.**

☐   Share important company benefits and pay policies that may apply during this illness.

☐   An employee who tested positive may qualify for Workers' Compensation if the contraction was a work-related exposure and determined by State Department of Health contact tracing.

☐   Affected employee(s) may also qualify for paid leave benefits under the Family First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI), and/or other company-paid benefits.

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If an Employee Tests Positive: Safely Return to Work

So, when is it safe for the affected employee(s) to come back to work? There are many factors that employers must consider to ensure the safety of their workplace. Here are a few standards to measure:

SAFE RETURN TO WORK CHECKLIST

☐ If an employee had a fever and symptoms, but did not test positive for COVID-19, they may return to work if it's been at least ten days since the symptoms have started, they've gone at least 24 hours with no fever (typically 100.4º F) without medication, and their symptoms have improved. See CDC's When you can be around others after you had or likely had COVID-19.

☐ If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19, they may return to work following the criteria above, and once they receive a negative COVID-19 test* and obtain a doctor's clearance.

☐ If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19 and they've required hospitalization, the CDC recommends the employee discuss a return to work plan with their physician to determine the safest course of action.

☐ When returning to work, continue to reinforce the practices of 6 feet of social distancing, mask-wearing, and regular cleaning and disinfection to reduce the risks of COVID-19.

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*Per CDC guidance, two negative COVID-19 test results are recommended for healthcare professionals. These tests must be administered by a medical professional and be taken at least 24 hours apart.

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COVID-19 Resources Cheat Sheet

As an employer, you should be as informed as possible about COVID-19, prevention methods, and actions to take if an employee tests positive for the virus. Here are some helpful links with more background to help you create an action plan that fits your business' specific needs.

CDC Facts About Coronavirus

CDC Guidance for Businesses and Employers

CDC Safety Practices for Workers Who May Have Had COVID-19 Exposure

CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting your Facility

CDC Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting

CDC COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings

CDC COVID-19 FAQ

State of Hawai'i Department of Health – COVID-19

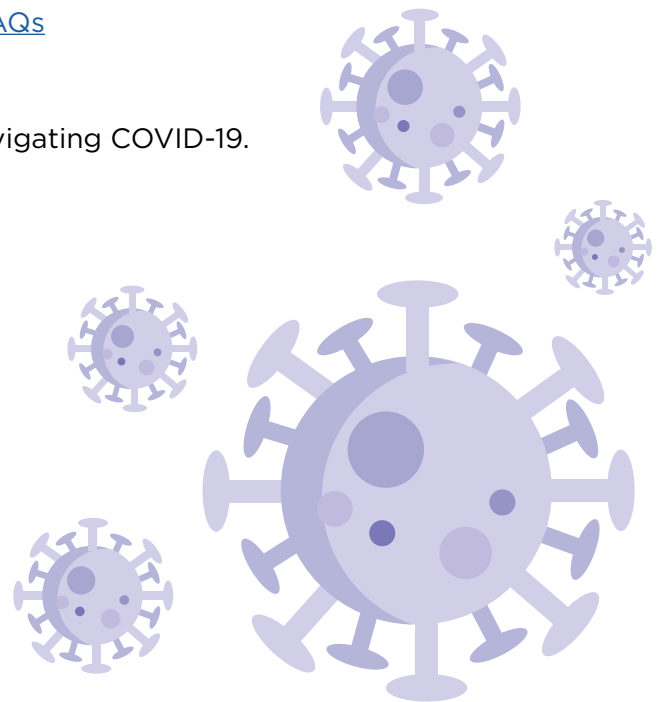Hawaii Department of Health: What to do if a person at your worksite has COVID-19

State of Hawai'i Department of Labor COVID-19 FAQs

simplicityHR COVID-19 Employer Resource Page:
Helpful information, resources, and training for navigating COVID-19.

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From the Remote Desk of Barron Guss

To our clients and members of our business community,

COVID-19 continues to change the landscape of Hawai'i business profoundly. The constant flow of everchanging information regarding the crisis continues to overwhelm business owners. At simplicityHR we always do our best to simplify this information so you can make informed decisions and do what's best for your company.

For the last 50 years, we've taken to heart our responsibility to not only serve, but to make a difference with our clients and our community. While tomorrow's business landscape may look different, our commitment will remain the same – to support your business today, tomorrow, and for the next 50 years.

Sincerely,

Barron L. Guss
President and CEO

About Us

simplicityHR by ALTRES serves as the human resources "back office" for more than 2,200 local businesses. We provide expert payroll processing, HR administration, workers' compensation coverage and claims management, health care plans, and exceptional employee benefits packages, as well as training for managers and staff.

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