

Staying Healthy While Working During the COVID-19 Outbreak: Guidance for Managers and Employees from VLCT PACIF Loss Control

With many municipal operations considered to be essential functions, employees continue to report to work to ensure continuity of operations. To limit exposure to COVID-19, some municipalities are working on a rotating or alternating shift basis to avoid exposing their entire departmental workforce, while others have reduced shift sizes or work crew sizes.

To help members reduce the potential for exposures within their departments and adhere to infection control best practices, below are some reasonable measures that should be followed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and ensure that essential functions can continue without major disruption.

Practice Physical Distancing

Physical distancing means applying common sense distancing techniques between individuals to reduce the risk of airborne virus transmission. This does not mean isolation. It is simply an approach to interpersonal interactions that limits the frequency of being in close proximity to other people. When interactions do occur, appropriate physical spacing can reduce the potential for virus transmission.

The coronavirus travels through the air when an infected person breathes, talks, coughs, or sneezes. As a result, maintaining an appropriate separation distance of at least six (6) feet apart from one another has been recommended by the CDC as an important control measure. It will make an enormous difference if people follow these simple social distancing guidelines:

- Avoid any activities that put you close to other people. This includes things like social gatherings, public transportation, and non-essential travel. Co-workers traveling together in a vehicle would not be appropriate unless it is absolutely necessary or an emergency.
- Limit contact with family members and friends who are sick. This includes anyone who has symptoms of a cold, flu, or contagious stomach illnesses.
- Avoid travel out of state and follow current Executive orders and CDC guidance.

Safe Work Practices

Take these everyday preventive actions to help stop the spread of the virus:

- Wear a cloth face covering over your nose and mouth when you are in the presence of others.
- Wash your hands at every opportunity, but particularly after activities that involve touching tools, objects, and surfaces. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. **Hand washing has been found to be the most effective method of reducing the spread of the virus.**
- Stay home if you have a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, or are simply not feeling well.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with an elbow or tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. Wash your hands afterwards!

- Avoid close contact with other employees whenever practical. Apply the 6-foot social distancing rule.
- Maintain smaller or separate crews and stagger work shifts whenever possible. The benefit of using a smaller crew or having fewer employees on shift is that if someone was a carrier, or the crew was exposed to an infected person, far fewer people are exposed.
- Avoid gathering in groups for roll calls or meetings and instead embrace virtual technology as a tool to keep employees connected. If meetings are critical to operations, maintain six or more feet of space between individuals at all times.
- Prioritize essential tasks. Defer non-critical tasks to minimize group exposures.
- Limit vehicle occupants to one per vehicle.
- Perform post-use disinfection of all vehicles that could be used by more than one driver. This includes vehicles used by highway, law enforcement, fire, and EMS staff. The driver of each vehicle should be responsible for disinfecting all contact surfaces after he/she finishes using the vehicle. Adding a requirement to disinfect the vehicle *prior* to a shift provides double protection for employees. The cleaning and disinfection should focus on *contact surfaces* such as doors, handles, steering wheels, transmission shifting levers, radio and communication equipment, AC/heater controls, etc.
- Avoid stopping at public facilities whenever possible.
- Remove and spread out chairs from break rooms. Limit the number of people sitting and increase spacing.
- Stagger breaks/meal times and provide a brief cleaning period between break and mealtimes.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in facilities including bathrooms, kitchens, break rooms, and office spaces. Focus on high use contact surfaces such as tables, door knobs, light switches, handles, hand and power tools, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks, telephones, etc. Employees should routinely disinfect their own spaces.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Only CDC and EPA approved disinfectants should be used.
- If objects or surfaces are visibly soiled, they should be cleaned prior to disinfection, using household cleaners or soap and water. Disinfection does not work well on heavily soiled surfaces.
- For disinfection of hard surfaces, use an EPA-registered disinfectant, bleach solution, or alcohol solution with at least 70% alcohol.
- Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims ([here](#)) are expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).

- Diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer’s instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.

Bleach Solution Recipe

- ✓ 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon (128 oz.) of water, or
 - ✓ 4 teaspoons bleach per quart (32 oz.) of water
- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning and disinfecting surfaces. Gloves should be discarded after each cleaning. Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water immediately after gloves are removed.
- For soft (porous) surfaces such as carpeted floor, rugs, and drapes, remove visible contamination if present and clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces.
- After cleaning, launder porous items if appropriate, in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions. If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely, or use products with the EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims ([examples here](#)) that are suitable for porous surfaces.

Keeping the workforce safe and on the job requires everyone to do their part in preventing the transmission of COVID-19. Following the simple steps of social distancing, contact surface disinfection, and regular hand washing will greatly increase the likelihood that employees can continue to work safely, while maintaining the essential services of operating a municipality.

For more information on employee safety measures, disinfection, etc., please contact your PACIF Loss Control Consultant at losscontrol@vlct.org or call us at 800-649-7915.