

6-15-48: These 3 Numbers Offer A Simple Way To Understand Contact Tracing In The Workplace

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Perhaps the most challenging aspect of encountering a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 among your employees as you reopen your business is identifying those employees who worked near the infected worker – and thus must also be quarantined. Luckily, there is a simple numerical sequence you can remember that will enable you to follow the CDC contact tracing guidelines for general businesses: **6-15-48**.

You will need infected employees to identify others who worked within 6 feet of them, for 15 minutes or more, within the 48 hours prior to the sick individual showing symptoms, or later.

As described below, remembering these three numbers will offer you an easy way to navigate the CDC's often complex and confusing guidance.

Determine Who Worked Within 6 Feet Of The Infected Employee

The first step requires you to inquire with the infected employee about those who worked within close proximity of them. The CDC generally defines a direct exposure to COVID-19 as an individual who is a household member with an infected person, intimate partner with an infected person, or an individual who has had close contact (

For Those Who Worked Within 6 Feet, Was It For 15 Minutes Or More?

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Another challenge for employers during this pandemic has been the constantly changing guidance from government agencies on how to address various workplace topics. The CDC's definition of "prolonged period of time" is no exception. The current CDC guidance on this issue states that "recommendations vary on the length of time of exposure, but 15 minutes of close exposure can be used as an operational definition." Thus, after identifying the employees who worked within six feet of the individual worker, you should determine if any remained within that proximity of the sick employee for 15 minutes or more.

Was The Direct Exposure For A Prolonged Period Of Time During The 48 Hours Before The Infected Employee Exhibit Symptoms Or Later?

The CDC defines the key period of time for determining if an employee was exposed to an infected worker as the "period from 48 hours before symptoms onset until" the infected employee is cleared to discontinue self-isolation. For purposes of contact tracing, the key here is to look at the 48 hours before the sick employee had symptoms and was still working in the workplace. If a sick employee worked on Monday and Tuesday, started showing symptoms at 8:00 a.m. on Wednesday, and immediately left the workplace, you should look for employees working near them starting at 8:00 a.m. on Monday.

Ask The 6-15-48 Employees To Remain Home For At Least 14 Days

After following the above three steps, you have identified the 6-15-48 employees. Although asking the sick employee to identify these workers is likely the best contact tracing tool, you may want to check video surveillance to confirm the accuracy of the 6-15-48 employees the sick worker identifies.

Once identified, the CDC guidance for non-critical businesses provides that the 6-15-48 employees should take the following steps:

- Stay home until 14 days after last exposure and maintain social distance (at least six feet) from others at all times
- Self-monitor for symptoms
 - Check temperature twice a day
 - Watch for fever, cough, or shortness of breath
- Avoid contact with people at higher risk for severe illness (unless they live in the same home and had same exposure)
- Follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop



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If your company is part of the nation's critical infrastructure, you may follow different CDC guidelines in lieu of quarantining 6-15-48 employees who are asymptomatic. However, all companies can use the guidance above to identify exposed, or 6-15-48, workers.

Conclusion

As orders allowing businesses to reopen continue to be issued, you will face new legal and practical challenges in the workplace. Addressing confirmed COVID-19 cases in your workplace will unfortunately become reality for many employers. Now is the time to prepare for such an event. This is a constantly evolving area, with new guidance being issued nearly every day. To ensure your response is consistent with current guidance, you will want to seek the advice of counsel. For further information, contact your Fisher Phillips attorney, or any member of our Post-Pandemic Strategy Group Roster.

Fisher Phillips will continue to monitor the rapidly developing COVID-19 situation and provide updates as appropriate. Make sure you are subscribed to Fisher Phillips' Alert System to get the most up-to-date information. As you begin the process of reopening, you should keep handy our 4-Step Plan For Handling Confirmed COVID-19 Cases When Your Business Reopens in the event you learn of a positive case at your workplace. For a more thorough analysis of the many issues you may encounter from a labor and employment perspective, we recommend you review our FP BEYOND THE CURVE: Post-Pandemic Back-To-Business FAQs For Employers and our FP Resource Center For Employers.

This Legal Alert provides an overview of a specific developing situation. It is not intended to be, and should not be construed as, legal advice for any particular fact situation.