

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**July 7, 2020**

**CONTACT: Heather Thomas, 425.508.4980**

[HThomas@snohd.org](mailto:HThomas@snohd.org)

## **HEALTH DISTRICT RELYING ON EMPLOYERS TO PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN COVID-19 RESPONSE**

### ***ORGANIZATIONS ENCOURAGED TO REVIEW REQUIREMENTS AND DEVELOP INTERNAL PROCEDURES***

**SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash.** – As new COVID-19 cases continue to increase in Snohomish County, the Snohomish Health District encourages all employers to review local and state requirements for re-opening. This includes the need to create a Safe Start plan according to sector guidelines, identify a COVID site supervisor for each location, and understand what is expected if one or more employees test positive for COVID-19.

#### **SAFE START PLANS**

Allowing more businesses and activities to reopen does not mean that it will be business as usual. There are guidelines that employers will need to follow through all of the phases, with the most updated [list of guidance for industries](#) available online.

In preparing for Phase 3, businesses will need a written safety plan to prevent the spread of COVID-19, per state requirements. [A template is available](#) to fill out or to guide them as they develop their own. The Department of Labor and Industries ([L&I](#)) [also has workplace safety information](#), and plans cannot be any less strict than what is outlined by L&I.

While the plans are not intended to be submitted to the Health District or another agency for review or approval, they still must be available at the business and provided during any inspection by a regulatory agency—including the Health District. An example would be a restaurant showing their plan when a member of the Health District's Food Safety team does a routine health inspection. These plans can also serve as a guide for staff training.

Now is also a good time to get signs or notices ready. These include signs requiring people to wear a cloth face cover, reminders in restrooms to wash hands, and stickers or other markers on the floor in areas like check-out lines to help people know where to stand to maintain six feet of distance. The Health District has [some materials available for free download](#).

## **COVID-19 SITE SUPERVISORS**

A site supervisor shall be designated by organizations for each location—indoor and outdoor—to monitor the health of employees and enforce the COVID-19 site safety plan. This supervisor also serves as a liaison to the Health District should an employee test positive for COVID-19.

To help the Health District quickly identify those supervisors, an online form has been created at [www.snohd.org/EmployerNotifications](http://www.snohd.org/EmployerNotifications). The Health District is requesting that all employers in Snohomish County fill out the form, which identifies a primary and back-up contacts. Completing this form will also ensure your organization is contacted promptly, and through your preferred channels of staff appropriately trained on what to do when contacted.

Information collected will only be used if an employee tests positive, or if another individual identifies that that location as a place they went while potentially contagious.

## **WHAT TO DO IF CONTACTED**

In the event an employee or visitor tests positive, a staff member from the Health District will contact you directly. Please note that depending on when and where the individual was tested, it is possible a healthcare provider notified them of a positive result before it is reported to the Health District. This is why developing a safety plan is important in preparing you and your organization on what to do in the interim. If you become aware of a positive result involving one of your employees, you can email [CDQuestions@snohd.org](mailto:CDQuestions@snohd.org) and request follow-up during regular business hours.

Prior to sharing the details, Health District staff will discuss the need for you to keep the name of the person confidential. They will be able to answer questions on who the information may and may not be shared with, such as human resources and/or a direct supervisor. In addition to maintaining appropriate confidentiality, employers are reminded that they cannot discriminate against an employee for having an illness.

The Health District will ask if you already been informed of positive test result. Even if the case has not informed you, the Health District can inform an employer if there is concern about possible exposure at the workplace.

Health District staff will work with you to identify other individuals who may have been a close contact, which is typically:

- Prolonged exposure (15 or more minutes) within 6 feet of case,
- Frequent sharing of tools or equipment with ungloved hands or not sanitized between users,
- Carpooling to and from worksite (whether getting to and from work, or during the course of the workday), or
- Eating lunch or taking breaks with co-workers.

Staff will also cross check dates when case worked while infectious with information that employer has. They will ask about case's work schedule, reconciling that with work schedule information given by the case. They will also review and provide technical assistance on COVID-19 measures which should be taken by employer in order to safeguard employees. The employer may be asked to provide the Health District with a list of employees or visitors that were onsite within a specific time period. That information should be sent immediately, or no more than four hours after requested.

Employers can request a site visit or further consultation if there is a case identified, and those requests will be grant as resources are available. However, if two or more cases are linked to an employer, the Health District will conduct a mandatory site visit--usually within 48 hours and Health District workload permitting. The Health District may also ask for assistance from the employer in coordinating an on-site testing event for employees as deemed necessary.

Employers should return all calls immediately and prioritize any requests made. Identifying and contacting all close contacts of a confirmed case within 48 hours is one of the metrics being reported on a weekly basis to the state, as it is an critical piece of being able to quickly contain and stop the spread of illness.

In accordance with [WAC 246-101-425](#), employers must be prepared to fully and promptly assist the Health District in a communicable disease case or outbreak investigation. Individuals that knowingly violate or refuse to assist the Health District in a case investigation can be found guilty of a misdemeanor as provided by [WAC 246-100-070](#). Furthermore, the Health District can petition the Snohomish County Superior Court to order cooperation. Neither of these options are preferred, as they are costly and time consuming efforts on all sides. However, they will be utilized as necessary. L&I may also be notified if the Health District has reason to believe that lack of cooperation with a workplace investigation poses an occupational health risk to employees.

### **NEW FACE COVERINGS REQUIREMENT**

Face coverings are required statewide in all public spaces because they are effective in slowing the spread of COVID-19, especially when combined with 6 feet of physical distance. This includes Governor Inslee's new statewide order directing businesses to require and enforce the use of face coverings by all customers or clients, which is now in effect.

Face coverings are required of employees, vendors, contractors, customers and visitors in the workplace, unless covered by a medical or other exemption. No individual is required to provide proof or documentation to anyone at any time about their health or medical status, except employers who may request medical documentation if an accommodation is requested by an employee.

If a customer or visitor is not wearing a face covering, businesses should take the following steps:

- A business representative or employee should politely educate the customer or visitor about the public health requirement to wear a mask or face covering. Businesses may choose to keep a supply of disposable masks to offer customers who do not have one.
- If the individual still declines to wear a mask or face covering, the business representative or employee should politely inquire as to whether the person has a medical condition or disability that prevents them from wearing a mask. Again, businesses cannot inquire about the details about a person's specific medical condition or disability or ask for proof or documentation of that condition.
- For customers who are unable to wear a face covering, businesses are encouraged to offer some kind of accommodation for the customer such as curbside pickup, delivery or a scheduled appointment when physical distancing can be ensured.
- If a customer or individual refuses to wear a face covering but does not have a medical condition or disability that prevents them from wearing a mask, they should be politely told that the business cannot serve them and that they need to leave the premises.
- Employees or business representatives should not attempt to physically block an individual from entering or physically remove them from the premises. If the individual refuses to leave, they should follow whatever procedures they normally follow if an individual refuses to leave the establishment when asked to do so (including contacting local law enforcement to indicate that the individual is trespassing).

Businesses with questions about the face covering orders or any other Safe Start related questions can contact the state's Business Response Center at

<https://coronavirus.wa.gov/how-you-can-help/covid-19-business-and-worker-inquiries>.

Customers or employees who are concerned that a business is not adequately enforcing the face mask order or other Safe Start requirements can submit an anonymous complaint. The link to the [complaint form is available](#) on the Safe Start page of coronavirus.wa.gov.

Violations can be enforced by L&I as a safety and health violation by the employer that could carry a penalty of nearly \$10,000 or more.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- [Getting to Safe Guide: Recommendations for Reopening Your Business During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Business Safe Opening Toolkit](#)
- [Healthy Workplace: The Role of Employers in Effective Contact Tracing](#)
- [COVID-19 Reopening Guidance for Businesses and Workers](#)
- [Voluntary Customer/Visitor Log](#)
- [Common Questions Regarding Worker Face Covering and Mask Requirements](#)

The community is encouraged to help prevent the spread of illness and to support the response to this outbreak by staying informed and sharing reliable information. This is a very fluid situation and information will be updated at [www.snohd.org/ncov2019](http://www.snohd.org/ncov2019) and the Health District's social media channels.

###