

## Pharmacy Employer Guidance on Personnel Safety During COVID-19

### Overview

As the Coronavirus continues to spread across the country, the likelihood that one of your employees will test positive for COVID-19 increases. While some guidelines for this scenario exist, there are few one-size-fits-all recommendations. Each state and locale will have different requirements and consequently, each pharmacy or practice setting will need to respond differently. Below are some best practices for prevention as well as some recommendations on what to do if you or an employee exhibit symptoms or tests positive (+) for the virus. In addition, you can visit the [NCPA Coronavirus Resource Center](#) for more information and best practices.

### Prevention

- Stay current on Coronavirus activity in your area.
- Prepare for a worse-case scenario. Run through as many “What happens if…” strategies as you can think of and ensure each employee knows what to do in each case.
  - Identify pharmacists on current staff who could fill in in your absence with little to no notice.
  - Compile a duties and responsibilities document so staff will know exactly what is expected/required.
  - Cross train personnel.
- Create a reserve by identifying potential pharmacists and other staff who could assist in the event of an emergency.
  - Contact other pharmacists in your area who would be willing to work to prevent a potential emergency closing.
  - Contact your state pharmacy association for a list of pharmacists and technicians looking for hours.
  - Contact local schools of pharmacy to solicit student help. APPE students needing hours to meet graduation requirements may be interested and willing to assist. [Contact ACT for more information.](#)
- Have a sick leave policy in place for all employees.
- Sanitize regularly; consider setting a timer to remind employees to wash hands and wipe down commonly touched surfaces hourly. Refer to the CDC “[Environmental Cleaning and Disinfecting Recommendations.](#)”
  - Treat everything coming into the pharmacy as infectious and limit the number of individuals handling items that have not been sanitized. The virus can live on different surfaces for several hours up to several days. Identify a holding area for incoming deliveries if not able to sanitize immediately.
- Employees should wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, masks, eye protection or face shields, if available and depending on exposure risks. Refer to [CDC guidance on use of PPE.](#)
- If space allows, place barrier table(s) or clear shower curtain in front of the pharmacy counter to ensure at least 6 ft separation between staff and patients. Consider hanging or building plexiglass barriers at the pharmacy counter.
- Utilize drive thru/curbside pick-up/home delivery to reduce risk of in-store exposure.
  - Consider placing meds on hood of car to minimize face-to-face interaction with curbside pick-up
  - Limit number of patients in pharmacy at any given time.
- Minimize patient interaction via prescription drop off and check out.
  - Request electronic prescriptions from providers to limit paper handling.
  - Require patients to call the pharmacy with their name, date of birth and credit card information. Limit cash and debit card (PIN required) use. Employees may write COVID-19 on signature pad on behalf of patients when allowed by PBMs.

- Monitor employees daily for symptoms.
- Implement split team approach if staffing levels permit to limit staff exposure with each other. Consider assigning staff to one workstation during shift to minimize community spread.

### **What to Do If an Employee Exhibits Symptoms or Tests Positive**

- Under the law as it stands today, there is no requirement to close the pharmacy if an employee tests positive or displays symptoms.
- Use CDC guidance for [determining risk of exposure](#).
- Require symptomatic employees to self-quarantine. See the recommendations from CDC on [criteria for returning to work](#).
- Notify other staff that an employee has symptoms or positive test.
- Conduct daily symptom check-ins with employees. Don't allow an employee to enter the pharmacy if he/she has a fever, shortness of breath or cough. Be aware that not all infected individuals exhibit a fever.
- Deep clean/sanitize all surfaces using approved disinfectants referred to above. This should include work surfaces, equipment, phones, pens, clipboards, credit card machines, door handles, sliding windows, shared spaces, etc.
  - Set reminders to regularly sanitize on an hourly basis.
- Adjust operating hours as needed depending on staffing level.
  - Report any change in operating hours including temporary closings to state boards of pharmacy.
  - As a courtesy and if possible, notify area physicians of any changes to your operation.
- Contact individuals in your Reserves if needed to help with pharmacy coverage.

### **What to Do If I Exhibit Symptoms or Test Positive**

- Self-quarantine following CDC recommendations for returning to work. Let staff know how you may have been exposed so they can sanitize and/or mitigate their exposure risk.
- Contact individuals in your Reserves if needed to help with pharmacy coverage.
- Notify the board of pharmacy if you need to reduce/alter operating hours or close your pharmacy.
  - Forms can usually be found on the state board's website and can be submitted electronically.
- IF you must close your pharmacy:
  - If the pharmacy is closed due to known exposure from an individual who has tested positive for the virus, refer to the CDC "[Environmental Cleaning and Disinfecting Recommendations](#)".
  - Every pharmacy has a contingency plan because it is required by HIPAA. Review the contingency plan and make modifications to access dispensing records as needed. [HHS has called out](#) Apple FaceTime, Facebook Messenger video chat, Google Hangouts video, or Skype as acceptable video chats during the COVID-19 public health emergency.
  - Communicate to patients about how and where they can fill/refill scripts during the temporary closure.
    - Utilize signage, social media, and IVR messages.
    - Check with your state board regarding allowances for patients to refill medications at other pharmacies while you are closed. Many states allow for an emergency 30-day supply of certain medications if the patient can present the prescription container.
  - Plan to have someone perform a regular check of the pharmacy (security, refrigeration, etc.)