

# RESPONDING TO COVID-19 IN CONSTRUCTION

LAST UPDATED: 9/15/21



LABORERS'  
HEALTH & SAFETY FUND  
OF NORTH AMERICA

The Laborers' Health & Safety Fund of North America (LHSFNA) recognizes that LIUNA signatory employers are committed to ensuring the safety and health of their workforce, including taking the appropriate steps to limit the spread of COVID-19. COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease that is spread from person to person, including through aerosol transmission of particles produced when an infected person exhales, talks, sneezes or coughs. COVID-19 can be spread by people who have no symptoms.

## Summary of Recommended Actions

### What Can Construction Employers Do?

- ▶ **Encourage workers to get the COVID-19 vaccine and make it convenient and easy for them to get vaccinated:**
  - Grant paid time off for vaccination.
  - Provide flexible work schedules.
  - Educate employees and answer questions.
- ▶ Perform a COVID-19 risk assessment of the jobsite.
- ▶ **Emphasize protections on unvaccinated and otherwise at-risk workers:**
  - Implement policies and practices that maintain physical distance between workers.
  - Provide workers with face coverings when working indoors unless their work task requires a respirator or other personal protective equipment (PPE).
- ▶ Educate/train workers about general precautions and regularly communicate plans to limit the spread of COVID-19 in a language they understand.
- ▶ Reinforce good hygiene practices and take steps to make it easy for workers to frequently wash their hands.
- ▶ Perform routine cleaning and disinfection.
- ▶ Instruct all workers with COVID-19 symptoms to stay home from work. Both vaccinated and unvaccinated workers who have had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 should also stay home from work, self-quarantine and seek testing.
- ▶ Implement protections from retaliation and set up an anonymous process for workers to voice concerns about hazards related to COVID-19.
- ▶ Record and report COVID-19 infections and deaths.

### Who Are “At-Risk Workers”?

Some conditions, such as a prior transplant, as well as prolonged use of corticosteroids or other immune-weakening medications, may affect workers' ability to have a full immune response to vaccination. See the CDC's page describing Vaccines for People with Underlying Medical Conditions, for more information. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), workers with disabilities may be legally entitled to reasonable accommodations that protect them from the risk of contracting COVID-19 if, for example, they cannot be protected through vaccination, cannot get vaccinated or cannot use face coverings.

### What Can Construction Workers Do?

- ▶ **Report symptoms of COVID-19 immediately. If you are sick, stay home. If you feel sick and are at work, tell your supervisor.**
- ▶ Practice physical distancing.
- ▶ Wear a face covering when working indoors or working in close proximity to co-workers.
- ▶ Maintain good workplace hygiene, including hand washing practices and cough/sneeze etiquette.
- ▶ Cooperate with response measures instituted by your employer and those recommended by health officials at the federal, state and local level.
- ▶ Do not share other workers' phones, PPE or other work tools and equipment.

The following guidance is designed to assist construction employers with implementing these recommended actions.

## What Steps Can Employers Take to Limit the Spread of the Virus?

**Maintain ventilation systems when indoors. COVID-19 spreads more easily indoors than outdoors. Improving ventilation is a key engineering control that can be used as part of a layered strategy to reduce the concentration of viral particles in indoor air and the risk of virus transmission to unvaccinated workers in particular. Recommendations below are based on ASHRAE Guidance for Building Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic:**

- ▶ Ensure the HVAC system(s) is operating in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and design specifications and conduct all regularly scheduled inspections and maintenance procedures.
- ▶ Maximize the amount of outside air being supplied.
- ▶ Install air filters with a Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) 13 or higher.
- ▶ Maximize natural ventilation in buildings without HVAC systems by opening windows or doors.
- ▶ When conditions allow, consider the use of portable air cleaners with High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters in spaces with high occupancy or limited ventilation.

**Ensure workers are able to follow good handwashing practices.**

- ▶ Provide clean water and soap for workers to use several times a day. On construction jobsites, this may take the form of temporary water stations, such as setting up water jugs and hand soap throughout the jobsite.
- ▶ If clean water and soap are not available, provide hand sanitizer. Ensure that stations in toilets stay stocked at all times and provide additional hand sanitizer when needed.

**Utilize work practices** when feasible to limit the number of potentially exposed workers on the jobsite at one time. This may include scheduling (e.g., staggering shift start/end times) or rotating crew access to a designated area during a shift. Stage the jobsite to stagger work and limit overlap of work crews.

**Restrict access to enclosed and confined spaces.** Confined and enclosed spaces (e.g., trailers) should be identified and access should be restricted to essential personnel only. Enclosed spaces (e.g., toilets, break areas) must be viewed as potential transmission areas and treated accordingly. Time spent in these areas should be reduced as much as possible.

**Limit the number of workers gathering together at one time.** Modify jobsite communications and planning to reduce or eliminate group gatherings. This includes communal break areas and any other activity that would bring a group of workers together on a jobsite. Create policies around the delivery of materials and visits by third parties to the jobsite.

**Require customers, visitors and guests to wear face coverings,** especially in public-facing job tasks, if there are unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk workers in the workplace who are likely to interact with these customers, visitors or guests.

**When possible, practice social distancing.** Instruct workers to maintain a distance of at least six feet apart as much as possible on the jobsite, whether indoors or outdoors, unless the task warrants otherwise (e.g., when performing a team lift).

**Allow the voluntary use of N95 respirators.** At this time, the level of exposure risk on a typical construction jobsite does not warrant employer-mandated use of respirators for all workers.

**Record and report COVID-19 infections and deaths.** Under mandatory OSHA rules in 29 CFR 1904, employers are responsible for recording work-related cases of COVID-19 illness on OSHA Form 300 logs if: (1) the case is a confirmed case of COVID-19; (2) the case is work-related (as defined by 29 CFR 1904.5); and (3) the case involves one or more relevant recording criteria (set forth in 29 CFR 1904.7) (e.g., medical treatment, days away from work). Employers must follow the requirements in 29 CFR 1904 when reporting COVID-19 fatalities and hospitalizations to OSHA. Employers should also report outbreaks to health departments as required and support their contact tracing efforts.

## Practices for Cleaning and Disinfecting High-Risk Transmission Areas

**Frequently clean and sanitize surfaces in common areas** (e.g., break rooms, lunch areas, changing areas) as well as toilet facilities.

**Place handwashing stations**, hand sanitizer or other hand cleaning methods at the entry and exit to the project or jobsite.

**Workers performing this cleaning and disinfecting should:**

- ▶ Wear PPE. This may include N95 respirators, disposable gloves, protective clothing and eye protection. Gloves should be discarded after each cleaning.
- ▶ Clean dirty surfaces using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- ▶ Be trained on safe donning, doffing and disposal of PPE to avoid infectious disease transmission. Clean hands immediately after PPE is removed.
- ▶ Be medically able to wear the type of respirator needed and trained on how to use it.

## Assessing Workers for Symptoms

Symptoms of COVID-19 may include mild to moderate respiratory illness, fever, cough and shortness of breath. Both vaccinated and unvaccinated workers who present symptoms, such as fever or difficulty breathing, should call their health care provider. Workers should stay home if they are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, regardless of vaccination status. Both vaccinated and unvaccinated workers who have had a known exposure to a person with a confirmed case of COVID-19 or suspect they may be infected but don't yet have symptoms should stay home, self-quarantine and seek testing.

Workers who experience these symptoms at work should report it immediately to a supervisor, be isolated from fellow workers and leave the site. For more information on return to work protocols following COVID-19 symptoms, refer to the LHSFNA's *COVID-19 Screenings and Assessments* guidance.

Employers may consider implementing daily wellness checks before workers access the project or jobsite. Suggested assessment methods could include a questionnaire about potential symptoms and travel and/or a temperature check performed by a designated supervisor wearing the following PPE: an N95 respirator, protective clothing, disposable gloves and eye protection. If temperature checks are conducted, workers with a temperature of 100.4°F should be sent home and referred to their health care provider for further instructions. Because a person infected with coronavirus can pass the virus to others without exhibiting symptoms, temperature checks alone may not be sufficient to limit the spread of the virus. For additional information on options to screen and assess workers to protect the jobsite, refer to the LHSFNA's *COVID-19 Screenings and Assessments* guidance.

## Additional Resources

Additional information about transmission risk, signs and symptoms, travel restrictions and steps for the general public to limit the spread of the virus can be found in the Fund's fact sheet: *Coronavirus & COVID-19*, which is available at [www.lhsfna.org](http://www.lhsfna.org).

**CDC** – Coronavirus (COVID-19) – [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov)

Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers – [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html)

**OSHA** – Guidance on Mitigating and Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace  
[www.osha.gov/coronavirus/safework](http://www.osha.gov/coronavirus/safework)

**NIOSH** – Coronavirus Disease-2019 – [www.cdc.gov/niosh/emres/2019\\_ncov.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/emres/2019_ncov.html)