COVID-19 Exposure at Work

COVID-19 is still a serious workplace hazard. It is caused by the coronavirus, and can spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or comes into close personal contact with others. It can also spread when people touch their mouth, nose, or eyes after touching a contaminated surface or object, or from shaking hands with someone else.


In addition, Gov. Jay Inslee on Jan. 5 announced the Healthy Washington — Roadmap to Recovery Proclamation 20–25.12 et seq. (www.coronavirus.wa.gov/what-you-need-know/safe-start) for Washington state to continue reopening some businesses safely and allow essential businesses to continue operating. The roadmap includes guidance on how to reopen and other resources for businesses and workers.

This fact sheet was updated on Mar. 22, 2021. As conditions change, please check for additional updates at www.Lni.wa.gov/CovidSafety.

Note: All references to leadership in this fact sheet refer to law enforcement leaders or elected or government officials, who are responsible for officer and employee safety.

Educate Workers

Law enforcement agencies such as police departments, sheriff offices, state patrol, etc., must provide basic workplace hazard education about COVID-19 prevention to deputies, officers, agents, and other employees in the language(s) they best understand. This includes information about:

- The signs, symptoms, and risk factors associated with COVID-19.
- How to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, including steps being taken in the workplace to establish social distancing, wearing masks, frequent hand washing, and other safety practices.
- The importance of staying at least six feet away from other people.
- Instruction on why and how to wear cloth face coverings, respiratory protection, and personal protective equipment (PPE).
- The importance of washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and not touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands or gloves.
- Instruction on why, when, and how to clean frequently touched or shared items, such as tools, cell phones, and other equipment.

Ways to meet the requirement:

- Communicate daily about safety practices.
- Hang signs or posters in prominent spots in the work site to remind employees, visitors, and customers about your required safety practices.
(such as social distancing, frequent hand washing, wearing face coverings and required PPE, respiratory etiquette, and illness reporting).

- Display posters or other COVID-19 prevention information from your local public health agency, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other health authorities.
- Provide a variety of meaningful ways for workers to express their concerns and ideas to improve safety.

**The Public and Face Coverings**

Face coverings are mandatory in all public spaces in Washington, under an order issued by Gov. Inslee, to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. This means leadership cannot allow the public to enter their premises without wearing face coverings.

To comply with the order and to protect officers and staff, leadership must, at a minimum:

- Post prominent signs at their building entrances reminding the public of the face-covering requirement. Signs should be in the language(s) used by members of the public who most frequently use the building.
- Communicate to the public they must wear face coverings to visit the precinct, under the state order. This might require posting officers or other staff at entrances or actively monitoring shared spaces and talking to members of the public who aren't wearing face coverings.
- Include public face-covering policies and procedures in their COVID-19 law enforcement safety programs.
- Designate a leadership member or supervisor to oversee the law enforcement COVID-19 safety program at each precinct while officers and staff are present.

**Reasonable Accommodations for Officers and Staff with Medical Issues or Disabilities**

Leadership must ensure that workplaces remain safe and healthy for all, including employees with medical issues or disabilities. This may require leadership to adjust rules and practices. In general, leadership should follow the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) process at www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/fact-sheet-disability-discrimination.

For some officers and staff, medical issues or disabilities make face coverings unsafe to wear. To be considered exempt from face-covering requirements, employees must provide their employer with an accommodation statement from their health care provider.

The statement must specify that the officer or staff member should not wear a face covering because of a health condition or disability. Leadership must work with officers and staff who are unable to wear masks, and must take alternative steps to prevent the spread of the virus. For instance, accommodations could include a neck-sealed face shield or hooded, powered air-purifying respirator; both would ensure the workplace is safe for others.

In addition, officers and staff may remove their masks to communicate with people who are deaf or hard of hearing so they can read facial cues or lip-read. When doing so, they must keep at least six feet of distance or a physical barrier between them and the employer must ensure alternative protections are in place to prevent the spread of the virus.

**Protecting Officers and Staff from Exposure to COVID-19**

Leadership must ensure officers and staff stay at least six feet away from each other and the public, and practice social distancing as work duties permit. When duties do not make social distancing possible, other prevention measures are required. Those could include physical barriers to block droplets from sneezes and coughs, negative-pressure ventilation, or other measures.

Leadership also must:

- Require all officers and staff to wear a face mask inside and outside the workplace.
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, goggles, face shields and gloves when required for specific activities. Leadership can issue face masks or approve worker-supplied cloth face coverings if shortages occur. If required, respirators must be used according to Chapter 296-842 WAC. See L&I’s *Which Mask for Which Task* at www.Lni.wa.gov/go/F414-168-000.
- Provide supplemental washing facilities or supplies, such as those below, to allow
additional handwashing when workers handle objects touched by others.
- Hand sanitizer stations
- Wipes or towelettes
- Tepid water and soap in portable containers.

Ensure that workstations are arranged at least six feet apart or reduce the number of workstations in use at the same time.

Ensure meetings with officers and staff are limited by the maximum occupancy specified in the governor’s Roadmap to Recovery Proclamation 20–25.12 et seq. (www.coronavirus.wa.gov/what-you-need-know/safe-start).

Regular and Frequent Cleaning

Leadership must:

- Establish a housekeeping schedule that details regular, frequent, and periodic cleaning, depending on how the area is used.
- Provide appropriate and adequate supplies for scheduled cleaning, spot cleaning, and cleaning after suspected or confirmed coronavirus cases.
- Ensure floors, counters, workbenches, and other surfaces are regularly cleaned with water and soap or other cleaning liquids to remove dirt and residue that can harbor viruses.
- Make sure high-touch surfaces are properly and frequently disinfected using an Environmental Protection Agency-approved product. See www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2.
- Make sure officers and staff follow effective cleaning procedures and wear gloves and eye-and-face protection (goggles and/or face shields) when mixing, spraying, and wiping with liquid products such as diluted bleach.
- Make sure shared work-vehicle interiors are sanitized after each use by a different person.
- Make sure Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) for all disinfectants on-site are available to officers and staff, and train officers and staff who use disinfectants according to the requirements of WAC 296-901 Hazard Communication.
- Make sure workers don’t mix chemicals; many are incompatible. Dilute and use chemicals according to the manufacturers’ directions.

- Wash and rinse visible dirt and debris from equipment, tools, and other items before disinfecting.
- Cover fabric and rough surfaces with smooth materials so they are easier to clean.

Hand Washing and Facilities

Leadership must require officers and staff to wash their hands frequently. Leadership must provide readily available fixed or portable hand washing stations with soap and either hot and cold running water, or tepid running water.

Ways to meet the requirement:

- To facilitate frequent cleaning of hands, provide secondary washing or sanitizing stations with hand sanitizer, wipes, or towelettes.
- Create a schedule to ensure that hand-washing supplies are restocked and trash is emptied.
- Create and implement procedures so officers and staff always wash their hands:
  - When they arrive at work.
  - After touching any surface or tool suspected of being contaminated.
  - Before and after eating, drinking, using the restroom, using tobacco products, and touching their face.

Leadership can provide gloves to workers whose hands are irritated by frequent washing and sanitizing. But gloves must be washed regularly, too.

Procedures for Officers and Staff Who Are Sick or Have COVID-19 Symptoms

Leadership must have practices in place to:

- Require officers and staff to stay home or go home if they feel or appear sick. Common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Other symptoms include loss of smell and/or taste, body aches, fatigue, and diarrhea.
- Identify, isolate, and send home workers who become ill at work.
- Identify and collect contact information for everyone who had contact with an ill officer or staff member for two days before their symptoms began.
Immediately shut down areas occupied by sick officers or staff to keep others away. Keep those areas closed until they can be cleaned and disinfected.

Clean and disinfect all surfaces in areas touched by the sick officer or staff member, following normal safety procedures (for example, lockout/tagout) if equipment or mechanical systems will be cleaned.

Ways to meet the requirement:

- Monitor officers, staff, contractors, suppliers, and the public entering the workplace for COVID-19 symptoms. Consider using a touchless thermometer and/or a short questionnaire to identify symptoms.
- Notify officers and staff who had close contact with any sick person at work (without disclosing the person's identity). Inform officers and staff about cleaning, disinfecting, and other efforts underway in response to possible exposure.


**Respirators, Face Coverings, and Face Shields for Officers and Staff**

Under Gov. Inslee’s order, all employees are required to wear face coverings, except when working alone in an office, vehicle, or at a job site when there is no interaction with people.

Face coverings are appropriate for a range of tasks performed by officers and staff, but a higher level of protection could be required when risk for transmission is considered medium, high, or extremely high as described in L&I’s *Coronavirus Hazard Considerations for Employers (except COVID-19 care in hospitals and clinics)* at www.Lni.wa.gov/MaskConsiderations.

Leadership must also consider whether a higher level of protection is necessary against other airborne contaminants, such as lead or asbestos.

Leadership must provide and pay for cloth face coverings, masks, and respirators for officers and staff when their use is required. Officers and staff may choose to wear their own cloth face covering at work if it meets minimum requirements. See L&I’s *Which Mask for Which Task?* at www.Lni.wa.gov/go/F414-168-000 or use the mobile-friendly eTool Selection Guide for Face Coverings, Masks, and Respirators at http://wisha-training.Lni.wa.gov/training/articulate/maskselection/story.html.

Face shields can be used with cloth face coverings to prevent direct exposure to sneezes or coughs; they also provide splash protection from cleaning chemicals and disinfectants. Cloth face coverings are still required when using face shields.

When respirators are required, follow L&I’s Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) Directive 11.80 and the program requirements in the Respirators Rule (Chapter 296-842 WAC) to ensure proper selection, fit, use, and care.


**Other Protective Measures**

Officers and staff should be trained to avoid touching their mouth, nose, eyes, and nearby surfaces when putting on, using, and removing PPE and masks. They should wash their hands before and after putting on, taking off and adjusting PPE and masks.

Law enforcement canines that get sick after being exposed to a person or setting with COVID-19 should be examined by a veterinarian. The veterinarian should be apprised of the canine officer’s exposure so that the canine can be properly evaluated for treatment.

Officers and staff should only clean a canine officer’s fur or paws with products that are approved for use on animals.

Leadership should update their agency’s Accident Prevention Program (APP) to include awareness and prevention measures for transmissible diseases and viruses.

Leadership should check with L&I, and state and local public health agency websites for coronavirus updates.
Resources

Free safety and health assistance for leadership from L&I’s Consultation Program DOSHConsultation@Lni.wa.gov or www.Lni.wa.gov/DOSHConsultation

DOSH COVID-19 webpage and fact sheets for specific industries. Includes resources from the CDC, DOH, and U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
www.Lni.wa.gov/CovidSafety

Additional links from our federal government partners

OSHA COVID-19 webpage
www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19

CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Leadership

Protecting workers from retaliation or discrimination

It is against the law for leadership to fire, demote, retaliate, or discriminate against employees for exercising their safety and health rights. Those include the right to:

- Raise safety and health concerns with leadership.
- Participate in union activities related to safety and health.
- File safety and health complaints.
- Participate in DOSH investigations.

Workers can file retaliation complaints with DOSH and/or with OSHA within 30 days of the alleged incident.

Learn more at www.Lni.wa.gov/WorkplaceDiscrimination.

Upon request, foreign language support and formats for persons with disabilities are available. Call 1-800-547-8367. TDD users, call 711. L&I is an equal opportunity employer.

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