

COVID-19 AND WASTE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES Sheet 2

What to do if an employee shows the symptoms of COVID-19 infection

The information contained in this document is time sensitive. It was first produced on 2 April 2020. Subsequent Government advice may change.

You should first always follow the latest Government advice.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

Government activity on COVID-19 is being led by the Department of Health and Social Care and PHE in conjunction with the devolved administrations. In Northern Ireland the Public Health Agency (PHA) are taking the lead and co-ordinating all advice and information. Their website can be accessed via the link below and should contain the most up to date local information and guidance:

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

This document also takes account of advice published on the HSENI website:
(<https://www.hseni.gov.uk>)

Please note that the intent of this document is to provide basic waste industry related advice on COVID-19. It is not a comprehensive 'one-stop-shop' for advice on COVID-19. You should also read and understand the freely available Government advice (as detailed in the addresses located above) and use this in conjunction with this document.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Common symptoms of infection by COVID-19 have been reported as fever, dry cough, difficulty breathing, headache, pneumonia with the potential to progress to more critical illness. It may also cause gastrointestinal symptoms and loss of smell and/or taste. These symptoms may be more severe than those associated with common flu.

We do not yet have the full information on the symptoms encountered by individuals.

What to do if an employee shows the symptoms of COVID-19

Please refer to Government and NHS advice:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19#what-to-do-if-someone-develops-symptoms-of-coronavirus-covid-19-on-site> and at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms-and-what-to-do/>.

Current Public Health England advice is that:

“If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>)”.

“If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection”.

Therefore, if a person has only been in indirect/potential contact with someone who has or is under investigation of having COVID-19, and is not showing any symptoms, there is no reason for them to stop work and go home. Likewise, even if an employee has been confirmed or is under investigation of having COVID-19 there is no need to send the whole of the workforce home. One example would be if a household collections operative has been confirmed as having or is being investigated for COVID-19 then the collections crew they work directly with should be sent home, but not all other collection crews based at the same site (unless they are also displaying the symptoms).

Thorough cleaning of the area they work in (office/rest room/vehicle cab etc) is required (using soap and water or alcohol based wipes). Other deep cleaning techniques are available and the example below shows one of our local companies using an aerosol dispersant technique.



Photo courtesy of Regen Waste Ltd.

Workers recovering from symptoms are also required to stay away for 7 days from the commencement of the symptoms.

Managers need to be aware of any vulnerable persons in their employment such as pregnant women and also carers of people who are identified as high risk. Such persons may require additional protection or isolation.

Manager advice: Should an employee show the symptoms of COVID-19:

- Instruct them to leave work immediately and follow Government advice, even if they feel well enough to continue working;
- Instruct them to stay at home to recover and follow Government advice, which is currently to self-isolate unless symptoms become worse, in which case they should follow NHS advice via <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19> ;
- Advise them to minimise contact with other people and not return to work until free of fever, feeling well enough **AND** a minimum of 7 days have elapsed since the first onset of symptoms (see also Government advice on this – may need to be longer);
- Instruct them to contact their workplace should they be confirmed as having COVID-19 (provided they are well enough to make such contact);
- Instruct them to contact their workplace after the 7 days have elapsed and when they are well enough to return to the workplace.

Returning employees

Employees who have recovered from COVID-19 are likely to have acquired immunity to the disease in its current form. As such they can provide a valuable resource should other employees be absent from work.

Manager advice:

Managers should record the number of employees who have been absent with COVID-19. This will facilitate the relocation of other staff to different departments as replacement labour (within constraints such as drivers' hours/personal capabilities/training etc.).

Area/Senior managers should be informed of returning employees as should human resources/personnel teams. This will enable cover to be provided where required minimising disruption to services.

Cleaning procedures

Cleaning procedures should be of a high order on any waste site for basic hygiene reasons.

Government advice on this is available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876221/COVID19_Guidance_Cleaning.pdf and at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcaresettings>.

Managers should reinforce cleaning arrangements and consider the following:

- Ordinary cleaning will kill any virus, e.g. soap and water, alcohol sprays, normal cleaning agents or disinfectant;
- Damp dusting should replace any dry dusting;
- Telephones and computer equipment should also be cleaned with wipes or by other means by following Government guidance;
- If an employee has gone off sick with COVID-19, their workstation, including telephone and keyboard, vehicle cab etc should be cleaned using normal cleaning materials and methods;
- Cleaning of crockery and utensils can be conducted using hot water and detergents.

Disclaimer and WISHNI

The Waste Industry Safety and Health (WISHNI) Forum in Northern Ireland exists to identify, devise and promote activities to improve industry health and safety performance.

This information document has been prepared by health and safety practitioners associated with WISHNI to assist health and safety improvements in the waste management industry. It is not formal guidance and represents good practice, which typically may go beyond the strict requirements of health and safety law.

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