

Public Health Madison and Dane County: Employers and employees advised to reconsider workplace safety

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COVID-19 shows no sign of slowing down in Dane County; hospitalizations continue to rise, and case counts are also increasing. Public Health Madison & Dane County strongly encourages everyone to limit all gatherings and close contact with others, including, when possible, contact through work.

“Many times work environments can be modified to be safer during the pandemic. This may mean employees working for home or adjusting your workspace even further to reduce people coming into close contact with others,” said Janel Heinrich, Director of Public Health Madison & Dane County. “Now is the time to reevaluate practices to make sure everyone is working in environments that are as safe as possible.”

As of the latest Public Health data snapshot, 404 cases were associated with a [cluster or facility investigation](#), which is an undercount, as not everyone is able to be interviewed or willing to share information. Facility investigations are taking place in both public and non-public facing workplaces.

“We are very concerned with the number of employees who are being exposed to the virus at work, and want to support employers in taking measures to protect their employees,” said Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, “We all have to find creative ways to keep doing business while keeping ourselves and our community safe.”

Enacting measures such as employees working from home or reconfiguring workspaces to reduce close contact is beneficial for employers. A person is considered a “close contact” if they are within 6 feet or less of an infected person for 15 cumulative minutes, even when face coverings are worn. To prevent close contact conditions in a workspace, consider staggering shifts to limit contact and/or utilizing additional work spaces to ensure that employees are distanced more than 6 feet at all times. Employees can do their part by reducing workplace socializing and staying at least two arms’ from each other. These measures can reduce absenteeism, as fewer people will have to isolate and quarantine should one get sick. It is also less likely that a COVID-19 outbreak would shut down a business.

“Our community is in the full throes of an unprecedented public health crisis which means the response to it must be unprecedented as well,” County Executive Joe Parisi said. “It’s imperative that employers realize that allowing workers whenever possible to work virtually is the best thing they can do for their workforces and long term well-being of their businesses right now. We are in store for a potentially horrendous few months and while none of this is ideal, easy, or convenient, we have to come together to keep our workers safe and not contribute to the startling COVID-19 case totals in our hospitals,” Parisi concluded.

It is critical that employers think about ways to reduce risk in their businesses because Public Health Madison & Dane County is [no longer able to call employers to inform them of employees who have tested positive](#). Individuals testing positive will be responsible for notifying their employer and working with their employers to identify other employees, clients, or customers they may have had close contact with during their infectious period.

In addition to [the toolkit on the Public Health website](#) for businesses to reduce the spread of COVID-19, current Public Health order requirements include:

- Anyone in a business wear a face covering, unless they are in an office or conference room alone with the doors closed.
- Limit business capacity to 50% or less depending on business type when considering the other requirements below.
- Limit staff and customers in offices, facilities, and stores. All businesses should, to the greatest extent possible, facilitate remote work and other measures that

limit the number of individuals present at an office, facility, or store.

- All businesses take the following measures to limit exposure to COVID-19 to staff, customers, and the public when remote work is not possible:
 - o Where possible, offer curbside pick-up and drop-off, and delivery of goods and services.
 - o Where possible, offer online or phone payments, appointments, and reservations.
 - o Ensure physical distancing is maintained between individuals.
 - Written hygiene, cleaning, and protective measures policies.
 - See the [current order](#) for all business requirements.

Public Health also recommends that employers be prepared for what to do if an employee is [exposed or infectious at work](#).

To report a business that is not in compliance with the current Public Health order, please send an email to compliance@publichealthmdc.com. Public Health will follow-up with education about the order or issue a citation.