Cowlitz County Health & Human Services Department

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How are positive COVID-19 test results reported to Cowlitz County Health & Human Services?
A: Per WAC 246-101, all healthcare providers and laboratories must report certain diseases or conditions to Cowlitz County Health & Human Services, including COVID-19. This is done through a 24/7 secure fax line and "on-call duty officers" using a 24/7 answering service.

Q: Will my business be notified if one of my employees tests positive for COVID-19? If so, how?
A: If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, they will be interviewed by a Cowlitz County public health nurse who will determine if the person works or lives in a high-risk setting (such as a skilled nursing facility, adult living facility, hospital, first responder or law enforcement agency, inpatient behavioral health, homeless shelter, jail/correction facility, food packing facility, or large manufacturing facility). If the person works in a high-risk setting, or has been in person at a K-12 school, the nurse will reach out to the employer or facility to determine if there were exposures. If the person does not work in a high-risk setting, it will be the employee's responsibility to inform their employer. The employer should then determine if there were any close contacts in the work place.

Q: Who is responsible for contact tracing if an employee tests positive for COVID-19? Does the employer have a role to play in contact tracing?
A: If the person does not work in a high-risk setting (explained above) it will be the employee's responsibility to inform their employer. The employer should then determine if there were any close contacts in the work place. If the person works in a high-risk setting or has been in person at a K-12 school, a Cowlitz County public health nurse will reach out to the employer or facility to determine exposures.

Q: How can an employer prepare for contact tracing?
A: Employers can prepare floor plans or maps of facilities to be able to locate areas where employees may work together or congregate. Depending on the number of possible contacts, lists of people working in different locations onsite as well as those working on corresponding shifts could also be useful. If outside contractors are exposed, lists of those people or entities could also help.

Q: What are steps should employers take to perform contact tracing?
A: Contact tracing for COVID-19 can be broken down into three main steps:

1. Initial notification to the positive case. This initial outreach is done in a language the case understands and may take place over phone, email, or other by a public health nurse. Contact tracing should be initiated as soon as possible after a positive case is identified.

2. Interviewing the case. This includes a discussion about confidentiality, verification of demographic information (such as age, sex, and race), and efforts to build trust. It might also be necessary to collect information to complete the case report and identify risk factors for severe illness such as underlying medical conditions. The interview will involve walking

through the entire infectious period day-by-day to help the case understand when they were contagious and could have exposed others.

3. <u>Locate and notify contacts</u>. Public health nurses will do contact notification and outreach to employers and facilities *ONLY IF* the case works or lives in a high-risk setting (explained above) where social distancing cannot be practiced.

In all other instances, public health nurses will help cases understand how to identify and notify their close contacts including anyone who has been within six feet of a COVID-19 case for a prolonged period of time. Cases should refer their close contacts to the county's toolkit for close contacts.

Q: If Cowlitz County Health & Human Services determines employees should be tested for COVID-19, who performs those tests?
A: Most health care facilities now offer COVID-19 testing. People who are unable to access testing through their regular health care provider, those who do not have a health care provider, or those who are uninsured can contact the Family Health Center to request a COVID-19 test. Visit the Washington State Department of Health's webpage to find testing locations across the state: https://bit.ly/2W0VuIr.

Q: Will the Cowlitz County Health & Human Services or another agency inspect our facility if we have an outbreak?
A: The Washington State Department of Labor & Industries is involved in worker safety and may contact employers during outbreaks. Information for requesting a voluntary consultation from L&I is available on their website.

Q: What are some things my employees can do to lower their risk?
A: Getting vaccinated is our best defense against COVID-19. Cowlitz County Health & Human Services encourages everyone over the age of 12 to get vaccinated. In times of high disease activity, everyone should wear face coverings (masks) in public indoor settings. Other effective methods include staying 6-feet apart from others, washing hands often, carrying hand sanitizer, keeping gatherings small and outside whenever possible, avoiding large outdoor gatherings (such as concerts, fairs, or festivals), staying home if sick or exposed to COVID-19, and getting tested if symptoms arise.

Q: What are some things I could do to encourage employees to get vaccinated?
A: Similar to hosting or offering annual workplace flu vaccination clinics, encouraging COVID-19 vaccination in the workplace offers many benefits to businesses and their employees. Widespread vaccination of employees should be an important consideration for businesses of any size when restarting operations, returning to the workplace, or continuing to offer telework options. Employers can learn how to host a workplace clinic for employers, encourage employers to get vaccinated locally, and reduce barriers to vaccination here: https://bit.ly/3xSLOwD.

Q: How can I access COVID-19 data for Cowlitz County?
A: The public can access state- and county-level COVID-19 case, hospitalization, death, and vaccination data on Cowlitz County Health & Human Services' COVID-19 Data webpage. The county provides cumulative case numbers and case demographic data on a regular basis. Washington State Department of Health dashboards are also available to navigate on the page.

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