

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Information



MassCOSH

What is coronavirus?

Coronavirus is an illness similar to the flu. It causes a fever, cough, shortness of breath, and in some cases pneumonia. There is about a 2% chance that a patient dies.

How can I get infected?

- By being sneezed or coughed on. This can affect you if you work closely with the public, especially within 6 feet of a person who is infected.
- By touching a surface that an infected person touched, coughed or sneezed on, then touching your face, mouth, or nose.

Am I at risk of getting coronavirus?

As of early March 2020, the risk of coronavirus in Massachusetts remains low. However, the number of cases has increased and a state of emergency has been declared, which have caused many events to be cancelled and some businesses to close temporarily.

If you are at risk of coronavirus, the MA Department of Public Health or your town or city's local health agency may ask you to quarantine yourself and take other precautions. If you think you have been exposed to coronavirus, call the MA Department of Public Health at 617-983-6800.

For more information

CDC: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) or 800-232-4636

MA DPH: 617-624-6000
[mass.gov/orgs/department-of-public-health](https://www.mass.gov/orgs/department-of-public-health)

City of Boston Public Health Commission: 617-534-5050 or [bphc.org](https://www.bphc.org)

MassCOSH: [masscosh.org](https://www.masscosh.org) or 617-825-7233

Note that this situation is frequently changing.

What should I do to stay safe and healthy at work?

- **Wash your hands!** Use soap and water for 20 seconds. Wash your hands when entering the workplace, if in contact with a sick person, and before eating.
- You have the right to use the bathroom when you need to, including to wash hands (OSHA 1910.141). Use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- **Your employer should have or create (with your input as a worker) an infectious disease preparedness plan** that includes cleaning and disinfecting, social distancing, handwashing, paid sick time, working remotely, and more. Contact MassCOSH if you would like support in creating a plan.
- For more information, refer your employer to **OSHA's Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19** ([osha.gov](https://www.osha.gov)).
- **If your workplace temporarily closes** and you cannot work from home, review your company's policy regarding paid time off. If you are laid off or your hours are cut, you may be eligible for unemployment payments.

If you feel sick, do not come in to work.

Under MA law, workers at companies with over 11 employees earn minimum 1 hour paid sick time for every 30 hours worked, up to 40 hours total sick time per year. You might have more sick time under your union contract or your employer's policy. You need to tell your employer if you are using sick time but you *do not* need a doctor's note unless you are out of work for 3 or more days. Ask your employer or your union what to do if you are sick but run out of sick time.

Do I need to wear a mask or gloves?

In general, all workers have the right to personal protective equipment that will keep you safe from a hazard (OSHA 1910.132). Because the risk of infection is low in most jobs, you likely do not *need* to wear a mask. If you work in cleaning services or in frequent, close contact with many people, gloves are a good idea.

- Blue plastic (nitrile) gloves will keep you from touching infectious surfaces. Your employer should provide them to you and show you how to remove them safely.
- A surgical mask is not airtight so it will not protect you from coronavirus. You should wear one if you are sick to keep from sneezing or coughing on others.
- The N95 respirator will protect you from breathing in the virus. Those at higher risk should wear it: if you are elderly, immunocompromised, or are in direct contact with others who are infected.

