An update on COVID-19 prevention at the workplace

THE LATEST ON THE COVID-19 GLOBAL SITUATION & HOW TO PREVENT AND MITIGATE COVID-19 AT WORK

LAST UPDATE: 28 JULY 2021
Overview

- Current global situation
- Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in workplaces
- Protection from SARS-CoV-2 at work
- Additional resources
Current global situation

CASES REPORTED TO WHO AS OF 27 July 2021

Number of cases: 194 million
Number of deaths: 4.1 million

Note: Data smoothed with 7-day moving average
Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 has occurred in a wide range of workplaces

Outside of healthcare facilities, COVID-19 outbreaks have been reported in workplaces with:

- Person-to-person contact
- Inadequate ventilation
- Common eating areas
- Shared work accommodation and shared travel to and from work

Photo: The Guardian

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-workplace-actions-policy-brief-2021-1
Several factors can contribute to SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the workplace

1. Occupation
2. Work Environment
3. Factors Outside Work
4. Socio Demographics

Risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the workplace

All these factors can contribute to SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the workplace
Occupational factors can increase the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the workplace

• Health workers have the highest risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection

• However, COVID-19 outbreaks have been described in*:
  - service and sales workers
  - workers in education
  - hospitality workers
  - construction workers
  - domestic workers
  - meat-processing factory workers
  - drivers and transportation workers

• Occupations that allow for remote work have shown a lower risk of infection

* This is not an exhaustive list

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-workplace-actions-policy-brief-2021-1
Work environments can increase the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the workplace

• Workplaces with person-to-person contact, inadequate ventilation and shared eating areas have reported higher rates of COVID-19

• Outbreaks have been identified in a number of different work environments, among others:
  - office environment
  - meat-processing facilities and other factories
  - fitness centres
  - Transportation (e.g. ships)
  - migrant work camps

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-workplace-actions-policy-brief-2021-1
Factors outside the workplace can increase the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the workplace

➢ Shared accommodation
➢ Commuting and work-related travel
➢ Social gathering of co-workers

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-workplace-actions-policy-brief-2021-1
Socio-demographic factors can increase the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the workplace

- Socio-demographic factors are associated with higher risk of occupational exposure to SARS-CoV-2 and include:
  - low-income
  - female gender
  - immigrant status
  - increasing age

- Workers with a post-secondary school education have less occupational risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2

[Link: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-workplace-actions-policy-brief-2021-1]
Protecting workers helps to prevent SARS-CoV-2 transmission at work and keeps workplaces open

1. Authorities need to adapt measures based on the level of COVID-19 transmission in the community

2. Governments and employers must consider the potential impact on socioeconomic wellbeing, including loss of income and access to services when implementing measures at work

3. Governments should define national policies to protect the health and safety of workers including policies to:
   - establish surveillance for COVID-19 in the workplace
   - ensure paid sick leave
   - enforce public health and occupational health and safety measures
   - encourage remote working

Considerations for public health and social measures in the workplace in the context of COVID-19 (who.int)
Planning for preventive measures should be guided by a risk assessment

- Performing a risk assessment of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 in the workplace may enable employers to better protect their workforce by implementing specific guidance based on risk profile.

A workplace risk assessment includes the following risk levels:

- **Low exposure risk**
  - Jobs or work tasks without frequent, close contact with the general public and other co-workers, visitors, clients or customers

- **Medium exposure risk**
  - Jobs or work tasks with work-related frequent and close contact with the general public, visitors, or customers (e.g., jobs at food markets, bus stations, public transport, schools)

- **High exposure risk**
  - Jobs or work tasks with high potential for close contact with people who are known or suspected of having COVID-19, as well as contact with objects and surfaces possibly contaminated with the virus (e.g., transportation or home care of persons infected with COVID-19)

1. Considerations for public health and social measures in the workplace in the context of COVID-19 (who.int)
How to plan for a safe work environment

- Ensure sufficient supplies
  - masks, hand hygiene supplies, physical barriers, educational materials

- Ensure sufficient resources
  - including safety and health expertise

- Remotely train all workers about reopening protocols before reopening the workplace

- Allow for partial reopening initially with selected workers who have minimal personal risk factors and low exposure risk

- Conduct a symptom survey of workers

- Establish rotational schedules to decrease workplace density

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-workplace-actions-policy-brief-2021-1
Protective measures to prevent SARS-CoV-2 transmission at the workplace

- Keep your distance
- Wash your hands frequently
- Cough & sneeze into your elbow
- Ventilate or open windows
- Wear a mask
- Cleaning and disinfection of environmental surfaces
Preventing and mitigating COVID-19 at work
https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-workplace-actions-policy-brief-2021-1

A safe and healthy return to work during the COVID-19 pandemic

OpenWHO course: COVID-19 and work

Considerations for public health and social measures in the workplace in the context of COVID-19
Considerations for public health and social measures in the workplace in the context of COVID-19 (who.int)

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Health and safety in the workplace