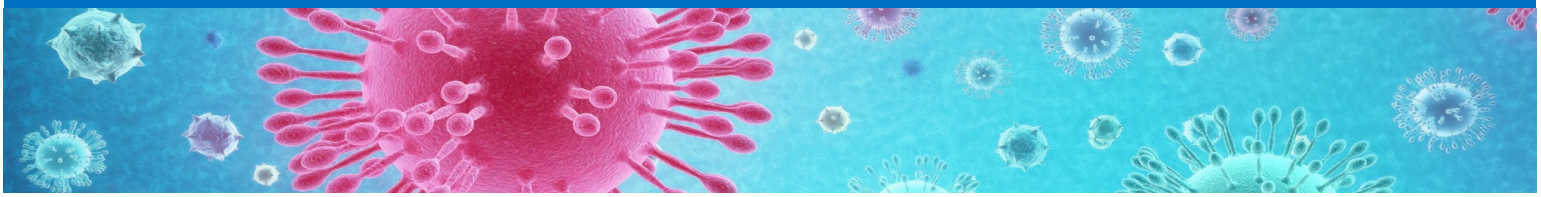
Getting Businesses Back on Track – Practical Advice from Healthcare Allies



As the Governor's ***Back on Track*** plan rolls out, many businesses are requesting information on safe business practices as they reopen. Businesses and employees have a key role in preventing and slowing the spread of COVID-19 by being flexible in their business practices and responding to new information as it is available in the coming weeks. Revising policies while realizing that they may change as emerging science reveals additional information will give employees peace of mind. Policies may include activities in one or more of the following areas:

- reduce transmission among employees
- maintain healthy business operations,
- maintain a healthy physical workplace

This guidance is provided for informational purposes and should not be considered all-inclusive for safely returning employees to work. Businesses are strongly encouraged to stay current with national, state, and local guidance so timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses. Local conditions will influence the decisions that public health officials make regarding community-level strategies. Visit the state or local health department's website to stay up to date on current information. Click on the blue hyperlinks for more information.

To help maintain a healthy physical workplace, here are five key areas for businesses to address**:**

Screening:

- Businesses may consider daily, active health screening for symptoms of all employees.
- Employees who appear to have symptoms (i.e., including but not limited to, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell) upon arrival at work or who become sick during the day should be separated from other employees, customers, and visitors and referred to a healthcare professional for further guidance on testing and return to work.
- All information must be kept private and secure.
- Consider Human Resource policies to support symptomatic employees by implementing flexible sick leave and supportive practices. Visit the Department of Labor's and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's websites.

Masking:

Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover/mask when around others**.** This is important because you could spread COVID-19 to others even if you do not feel sick.

- The cloth face cover/mask is meant to protect other people in case you are infected.
- The cloth face cover/mask is not a substitute for social distancing. Continue to keep about 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) between yourself and others.
- Note: Certain N95 masks with front valves protect the people wearing them but do not stop virus droplets from escaping and infecting others nearby. N-95 Masks with valves should not be used to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Hand Hygiene:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Discourage handshaking – encourage the use of other noncontact methods of greeting.

Social Distancing:

- Important because some people without symptoms may be able to spread the virus.
- Employees should stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from other people and not gather in groups.
- Employers may consider:
    - Continuing or implementing flexible worksites and flexible work hours
    - Increasing physical space between employees at the worksite including break rooms and conference rooms
    - Increasing physical space between employees and customers with such things as drive throughs and Plexiglas partitions
    - Implementing flexible meeting and travel options

Routine Surface Cleaning:

- Clean AND disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, and doorknobs.
- If surfaces are dirty, clean them using detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection. Then, use a household disinfectant.
- To disinfect, use products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2 (see https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2)

Testing of all employees is currently not recommended. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) indicate the following priorities when determining testing:

- Hospitalized patients with symptoms
- Healthcare facility workers, workers in congregate living settings, and first responders with symptoms
- Residents in long-term care facilities or other congregate living settings, including prisons and shelters, **with** symptoms
- Persons **with** symptoms of potential COVID-19 infection, including fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, new loss of taste or smell, vomiting or diarrhea, and/or sore throat
- Patients age 65 and older **with** symptoms consistent with COVID-19, patients with underlying health conditions with symptoms of COVID-19, including lung or heart disease, or who are immunocompromised, obese or pregnant women
- Persons experiencing homelessness
- Patients who expire **with** suspected COVID-19 symptoms
- Persons without symptoms who are prioritized by health departments or clinicians.

As testing criteria can change with time, please visit the ISDH website for the most up-to date recommendations
Read more at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/clinical-criteria.html
and https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/files/IN_COVID-19_testing_03.25.2020.pdf

Background on Testing for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19):
Virology testing (PCR) identifies current infection with COVID-19. This can help diagnose acute infection in symptomatic individuals. Currently, several limitations make it less ideal as a screening test for asymptomatic individuals:

- Review of the limited data shows a sensitivity of ~70% which can result in a false negative test, especially prior to the development of symptoms. In other words, the sensitivity of a test is a measure of how well it identifies patients with a disease. For example, if 100 patients with COVID-19 virus are tested, current tests will be positive for about 70 of them.
- Virology tests only give results for that fixed point in time. The results of the test can change from day-to-day if people are subsequently exposed to COVID-19.

High false negative rates may falsely assure employers and employees that the individual is not infectious at work, at home and in the community. Instead, the focus should be placed on infection prevention.

Serology testing determines antibody production, an indication of past infection. An antibody is our body's immune response to an infection. It is a protein our body produces that may help fight off the infection if it is ever encountered again in the future.

Review of the limited data on serology antibody testing revealed several issues for consideration:

- Antibody tests for COVID-19 may react to antibodies developed to other common cold coronaviruses and therefore are not specific to SARS-COV-2 (COVID-19).
- Patients and employers could be falsely reassured. It has yet to be proven that testing positive for antibodies equals immunity. Even if antibodies do mean the person has immunity, at this time, it is unknown how long immunity will last.

Future recommendations:

- At this time, serology testing can assist in understanding the level of exposure in a community. Studies being performed at the state and local level, such as contact tracing, can be used as an additional data point for decision-making.
- Additional research is still needed before antibody testing can be used to inform patients and employers regarding the risk of future infection from this virus.

Until further research proves a link between the presence of antibodies and protection from subsequent COVID-19 related illness, the concern is that antibody testing may simply promote a false sense of reassurance for individuals and workplace environments.

Indiana Hospital Association

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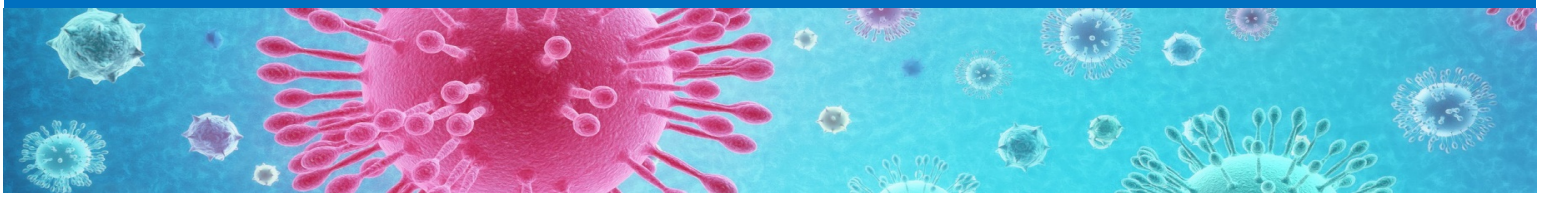

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