COVID-19 INDUSTRY GUIDANCE:

Communications Infrastructure

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covid19.ca.gov

OVERVIEW

On March 19, 2020, the State Public Health Officer and Director of the California Department of Public Health issued an order requiring most Californians to stay at home to disrupt the spread of COVID-19 among the population.

The impact of COVID-19 on the health of Californians is not yet fully known. Reported illness ranges from very mild (some people have no symptoms) to severe illness that may result in death. Certain groups, including people aged 65 or older and those with serious underlying medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease or diabetes, are at higher risk of hospitalization and serious complications. Transmission is most likely when people are in close contact with an infected person, even if that person does not have any symptoms or has not yet developed symptoms.

Precise information about the number and rates of COVID-19 by industry or occupational groups, including among critical infrastructure workers, is not available at this time. There have been multiple outbreaks in a range of workplaces, indicating that workers are at risk of acquiring or transmitting COVID-19 infection. Examples of these workplaces include long-term care facilities, prisons, food production warehouses, meat processing plants, and grocery stores.

As stay-at-home orders are modified, it is essential that all possible steps be taken to ensure the safety of workers and the public.

Key prevention practices include:
- ✓ physical distancing to the maximum extent possible,
- ✓ use of face coverings by employees (where respiratory protection is not required) and customers/clients,
- ✓ frequent handwashing and regular cleaning and disinfection,
- ✓ training employees on these and other elements of the COVID-19 prevention plan.

In addition, it will be critical to have in place appropriate processes to identify new cases of illness in workplaces and, when they are identified, to intervene quickly and work with public health authorities to halt the spread of the virus.

Purpose

This document provides guidance for the communications infrastructure industry to support a safe, clean environment for workers.

> **NOTE:** Employers engaged in construction or retail operations for communications infrastructure should follow the guidance for limited service providers available on the COVID-19 Resilience Roadmap website.

The guidance is not intended to revoke or repeal any employee rights, either statutory, regulatory or collectively bargained, and is not exhaustive, as it does not include

county health orders, nor is it a substitute for any existing safety and health-related regulatory requirements such as those of Cal/OSHA. [1] Stay current on changes to public health guidance and state/local orders, as the COVID-19 situation continues. Cal/OSHA has comprehensive guidance on their [Cal/OSHA Interim General Guidelines on Protecting Workers from COVID-19 webpage](). CDC has additional requirements in their [guidance]() for businesses and employers.

Worksite Specific COVID-19 Infection Prevention Plan

- Establish a written, worksite-specific COVID-19 prevention plan at every facility, perform a comprehensive risk assessment of all work areas, and designate a person at each facility to implement the plan.

- Identify contact information for the local health department where the facility is located, for communicating information about COVID-19 outbreaks among employees.

- Train and communicate with employees and employee representatives on the plan.

- Regularly evaluate the facility for compliance with the plan and document and correct deficiencies identified.

- Investigate any COVID-19 illness and determine if any work-related factors could have contributed to risk of infection. Update the plan as needed to prevent further cases.

- Identify close contacts (within six feet for 15 minutes or more) of an infected employee and take steps to isolate COVID-19 positive employee(s) and close contacts.

- Adhere to the guidelines below. Failure to do so could result in workplace illnesses that may cause operations to be temporarily closed or limited.

Worksite Specific Emergency Plan

- Telecommunications and network operators need to have clear crisis-time operational plans, protecting their own employees as much as possible while ensuring that staff is able to safely address network issues, including in premises of self-isolating customers.

- Telecommunications and network operators must be able to rectify network outages promptly and to mitigate any effects of network degradation. Test network capability and ensure call centers are equipped to handle increases in volume consistent with physical distancing practices regardless of geographic location.

- Develop a plan and process to prioritize work in areas involving exposure to hazardous substances, including prioritization of work orders and requests.

Topics for Employee Training

- Information on COVID-19, how to prevent it from spreading, and which underlying health conditions may make individuals more susceptible to contracting the virus.

- Self-screening at home, including temperature and/or symptom checks using CDC guidelines.

- The importance of not coming to work if employees have a frequent cough, fever, difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, recent loss of taste or smell, or if they or someone they live with have been diagnosed with COVID-19.

- To seek medical attention if their symptoms become severe, including persistent pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, or bluish lips or face. Updates and further details are available on CDC's webpage.

- The importance of frequent handwashing with soap and water, including scrubbing with soap for 20 seconds (or using hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol when employees cannot get to a sink or handwashing station, per CDC guidelines).

- The importance of physical distancing, both at work and off work time (see Physical Distancing section below).

- Proper use of face coverings, including:

  o Face coverings do not protect the wearer and are not personal protective equipment (PPE).

  o Face coverings can help protect people near the wearer, but do not replace the need for physical distancing and frequent handwashing.

  o Employees should wash or sanitize hands before and after using or adjusting face coverings.

  o Avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth.

  o Face coverings should be washed after each shift.

- Ensure temporary or contract workers at the facility are also properly trained in COVID-19 prevention policies and have necessary PPE. Discuss

these responsibilities ahead of time with organizations supplying temporary and/or contract workers.

- Information on employer or government-sponsored leave benefits the employee may be entitled to receive that would make it financially easier to stay at home. See additional information on government programs supporting sick leave and worker's compensation for COVID-19, including employee's sick leave rights under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and employee's rights to workers' compensation benefits and presumption of the work-relatedness of COVID-19 pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order N-62-20.

Individual Control Measures and Screening

- Provide temperature and/or symptom screenings for all workers at the beginning of their shift and any vendors, contractors, or other workers entering the establishment. Make sure the temperature/symptom screener avoids close contact with workers to the extent possible. Both screeners and employees should wear face coverings for the screening.

- If requiring self-screening at home, which is an appropriate alternative to providing it at the establishment, ensure that screening was performed prior to the worker leaving the home for their shift and follows CDC guidelines, as described in the Topics for Employee Training section above.

- Encourage workers who are sick or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 to stay home.

- Employers should provide and ensure workers use all required protective equipment, including face coverings and gloves where necessary.

- Employers should consider where disposable glove use may be helpful to supplement frequent handwashing or use of hand sanitizer; examples are for workers who are screening others for symptoms or handling commonly touched items.

- Face coverings are strongly recommended when employees are in the vicinity of others. Workers should have face coverings available and wear them at work, in offices, or in a vehicle for work-related travel with others. Face coverings must not be shared.

- Non-employees entering the facility should be restricted to only those classified as essential by management and they must complete a temperature and/or symptom screening before entering. Contractors,

vendors, and all others entering the facility are required to wear face coverings.

- Provide the necessary equipment and accommodations for field technicians that may need to visit customers or respond to outages, including all required safety equipment for crews operating in areas with high numbers of infections.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Protocols

- Perform thorough cleaning on high traffic areas, such as break rooms, lunch areas and changing areas, and areas of ingress and egress including, stairways and stairwells, handrails, and elevator controls, etc. Frequently disinfect commonly used surfaces, including, doorknobs, steering wheels, toilets, and handwashing facilities.

- Clean touchable surfaces between shifts or between users, whichever is more frequent, including but not limited to working surfaces, tools, handles and latches, and controls on stationary and mobile equipment, including surfaces in the cabs of all vehicles.

- Avoid sharing phones, office supplies, other work tools, or handheld mobile communications equipment wherever possible. Individually-assigned peripheral equipment (keyboards, handsets, headsets, chairs, etc.) should be provided wherever possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after each use. Never share PPE.

- Provide time for workers to implement cleaning practices during their shift. Cleaning assignments should be assigned during working hours as part of the employee's job duties.

- Ensure sanitary facilities restrooms and handwashing stations with soap, water, paper towels, and hand sanitizer are provided at all sites. Ensure that sanitary facilities stay operational and stocked at all times and provide additional soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer when needed. Provide hand sanitizer to all field staff.

- Install hands-free devices, if possible, including motion sensor sinks, soap dispensers, sanitizer dispensers, and paper towel dispensers.

- When choosing cleaning chemicals, employers should use product approved for use against COVID-19 on the [Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved](#) list and follow product instructions. Use disinfectants labeled to be effective against emerging viral pathogens, diluted household bleach solutions (5 tablespoons per gallon of water), or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol that are appropriate for the surface. Provide employees training on manufacturer's directions and

Cal/OSHA requirements for safe use. Workers using cleaners or disinfectants should wear gloves as required by the product instructions.

- For those field technicians others using such equipment, require that hard hats and face shields be sanitized at the end of each shift. Clean the inside of the face shield, then the outside, then wash hands.

- Consider installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrading the building's air filters to the highest efficiency possible, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in offices and other spaces.

- Modify offerings in any on-site cafeterias or dining rooms, including using prepackaged foods, and safe options for drink, condiment, and flatware dispensing.

Physical Distancing Guidelines

- Implement measures to ensure physical distancing of at least six feet between workers. These can include use of physical partitions or visual cues (e.g., floor markings or signs to indicate to where workers should stand).

- Develop a process workflow with questions and talking points for employees to use at the customer's door to identify suspected COVID-19 concerns. The workflow will give employees the flexibility to gauge the situation prior to entering a home/building.

- Consider offering workers who request modified duties options that minimize their contact with customers and other employees (e.g., managing inventory rather than working as a cashier or managing administrative needs through telework).

- Allow field technicians and personnel to call a "safety stop" when they are reluctant to enter a dwelling, including due to indications of an infected inhabitant in a residence or due to persons unwilling or unable to maintain physical distancing. A field worker should call a supervisor and discuss essential vs. non-essential work and proper precautions to take.

- Contact customers before visits to confirm appointments and check if there are infected people on premises, check again when workers are at the door. Request customers use face coverings during the visit and maintain distancing of at least six feet from workers.

- Limit exposure for field technicians and personnel by implementing remote diagnostics and self-install/repair strategies, e.g. support through video calls and instruction videos, wherever possible.

- Adjust meetings to ensure physical distance and instead implement smaller meetings at facilities to maintain physical distancing guidelines.

- Transition all meetings and interviews to phone or virtual platforms or hold outside or in a space allowing for at least six feet of physical distance between employees.

- Utilize work practices, when feasible, to limit the number of workers on site at one time. This may include scheduling (e.g. staggering shift start/end times) or rotating access to a designated area during a shift. Stage facilities to stagger work and limit overlap of work crews.

- Place additional limitations on the number of workers in enclosed areas, to ensure at least six feet of separation to limit transmission of the virus.

- Stagger employee breaks, in compliance with wage and hour regulations, to maintain physical distancing protocols.

- Close breakrooms, use barriers, or increase distance between tables/chairs to separate workers and discourage congregating during breaks. Where possible, create outdoor break areas with shade covers and seating that ensures physical distancing.

- Designate separate entrances and exits and post signage to this effect.

- Reassign lockers or limit or stagger locker use to increase distance between employees.

- Ensure information and communications technology resources are appropriate to accommodate increased use of remote work arrangements consistent with business continuity plans, without compromising security. Consider conducting planned stress tests for these arrangements.

- For field workers operating in a restricted area or containment zone, organizations should consider:

  o Offering alternate lodging, such as mobile homes and RVs equipped with washer/dryers, showers, and kitchens.

  o Dividing workers into small teams and keeping those teams separated with assigned vehicles and different base camp / staging area locations. Consider rental options to keep the number of workers in a single vehicle low.

o Instituting triple wellness checks with mandatory temperature readings at arrival, at mid-shift, and when going off-duty, with a health survey.

Additional Considerations for Telecommunications

- Conduct daily safety briefings prior to field workers going on service calls and develop internal communications that can be regularly updated on the use of PPE and other mitigation requirements.

- For work performed at healthcare facilities or other higher risk locations, contact the facility to conduct cleaning and arrange physical distancing in necessary work areas prior to the arrival of communications personnel. Personnel should be provided the same PPE as non-clinical staff at the facility. No work should be performed in areas where COVID-19 confirmed or suspected patients may be, except in emergencies.

- Crews on shift work schedules should be segregated. System operators should be split (days/nights or split individual shifts) between primary and backup control centers. Operating night shifts and day shifts in different locations will provide a 12-hour window between occupation to allow for enhanced cleaning.

- Identify a dedicated building entrance that can be opened automatically or without touching the pull or handle for use by all personnel working in the control center.

- Outside visitors should not be allowed in control centers (e.g., no tours or non-essential personnel from the same organization).

- Consider which, if any, personnel can perform their jobs in spaces adjacent to an existing control room.

- Consider control room functions that can be performed remotely, like monitoring or data analytics.

- Control center support staff (engineering, transmission scheduling, compliance, etc.) should be allowed to work remotely to the extent permissible.

- In any scenario where a shift of control center personnel is not in the same room, the lines of communication between employees should remain open, clear, and easily accessible.

- Workstations should allow for at least six feet of space between employees. Take into account room design and other physical space limitations, including the placement of wiring that may restrict options for where workstations can be located in the control room.

- Contractors or vendors should be screened with a health questionnaire and temperature check before being allowed onsite for deliveries, repairs, etc., and access should be limited to critical activities only.

- Logistics to house operators onsite, including bedding, hygiene facilities, entertainment, and food accommodations should be developed.

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[1]Additional requirements must be considered for vulnerable populations. The communications infrastructure industry must comply with all Cal/OSHA standards and be prepared to adhere to its guidance as well as guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). Additionally, employers should be prepared to alter their operations as those guidelines change.