

COVID-19 AND ACUTE RESPIRATORY ILLNESS (ARI) WORKSITE REPORTING Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: Why did Public Health change reporting requirements for workplaces from reporting clusters of confirmed COVID-19 infection to clusters of acute respiratory illness?

A: Public Health has integrated **COVID-19 reporting** into an Acute Respiratory Illness (ARI) symptom-based reporting protocol for non-healthcare community settings. This change is designed to help more proactively detect and manage outbreaks early, even before testing is completed. Since symptoms of various respiratory infections often overlap, a symptom-based approach allows for earlier identification of potential outbreaks, regardless of the specific cause.

Q: Are employers now required to track specific symptoms reported by employees?

A: No, employers are not required to develop tools for detailed symptom tracking. Instead, the reporting thresholds are designed to help employers identify concerning trends in illnesses reported by employees, regardless of test results. Employers who are already tracking COVID-19 cases can use this information to help identify potential clusters of illness.

Q: How does this change benefit employers?

A: Employers can now identify and report potential clusters of illness earlier, before all test results are available. This allows for quicker identification of and response to potential outbreaks and better protection within the workplace.

Q: Are employers still required to track cases of COVID-19 when employees report positive test results?

A: Yes, employers must continue to track, investigate, and respond to COVID-19 cases in the workplace, as outlined by the [LA County Health Officer Order](#) and [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#).

Q: What is the threshold for reporting clusters of COVID-19 and Acute Respiratory Illness (ARI)?

A: Employers should report to DPH when they identify a cluster of sick individuals reporting similar symptoms, independent of test results, if the cluster meets one of the following thresholds:

- **Among an exposed group** (i.e., individuals who were together in the same location when at least one person was sick):
 - Within a 7-day period, a minimum of 3 people have symptoms and/or test positive for an acute respiratory illness (including COVID-19).
- **Across the entire site:**
 - Within a 3-day period, at least 10% of the average daily attendance (minimum 5 people) are absent and/or report symptoms of and/or test positive for an acute respiratory illness.

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Q: How should an employer apply these thresholds with the new symptom-based guidelines?

A: Here are some examples:

- **Example 1:** A staff member calls out sick with flu-like symptoms. The next day, two more employees reporting similar symptoms and are sent home. All 3 employees work in cubicles in the same large office area (approximately 50,000 cubic feet). This scenario meets the threshold for a reportable cluster, reported immediately without waiting for test results.
- **Example 2:** One staff member tests positive for COVID-19. A second employee has similar symptoms but tests negative. A third employee leaves work early due to symptoms but does not report a test result. The employees all work on a retail pharmacy floor where they regularly interact with the public and each other during the day for at least a cumulative total of 15 minutes. This meets the threshold for a reportable cluster, reported immediately before the third case reports a COVID-19 test result.
- **Example 3:** Two employees call out sick on Tuesday and Wednesday of the same week. Both report positive COVID-19 tests. On Friday afternoon, a third employee working on the same film set develops symptoms of acute respiratory illness and is sent home. The three employees work in different areas of the set but interacted closely during a scene shoot on Monday. This cluster would be reported when the third employee was sent home, without waiting for the test result.
- **Example 4:** Three employees in different departments call out sick with flu-like symptoms over the course of a week, and two report positive COVID-19 tests. Since they work in separate areas of the facility and do not interact with one another, they do not meet the definition of an "exposed group," and reporting is not required.
- **Example 5:** A supermarket experiences a spike in employee absenteeism where over 10% of staff call out sick with flu-like symptoms over the course of three days. Even though some employees do not have confirmed test results, this high absentee rate meets the threshold for a reportable cluster for the entire site.

Q: Are employers required by to make testing available to employees if they are close contacts to a case?

A: Yes, under Cal/OSHA regulations, employees must make testing available to all close contacts during paid time. Refer to [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#) for more information.

Q: When can COVID-19 positive workers return to work?

A: COVID-19 positive workers can return to work after:

- Being fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication, and
- Experiencing mild and improving symptoms

Upon returning, they must wear a mask for 10 days from the onset of symptoms or from the date of the first positive test if asymptomatic. Employers may enforce stricter policies than those required by LAC DPH or Cal/OSHA.

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Q: When can workers with ARI symptoms and no test or a negative COVID antigen test return to work?

A: Workers with respiratory illness symptoms should stay home until:

- They have been fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication, and
- Their other symptoms are improving

For complete instructions, click the link [here](#) to read the COVID-19 and Acute Respiratory Illness (ARI) Community Guidelines.

