



COVID-19 INDUSTRY GUIDANCE: Energy and Utilities

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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 or in a poorly ventilated area 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 hospitals, 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 workers (where respiratory protection is not required) and customers/clients,
- ✓ frequent handwashing and regular cleaning and disinfection,
- ✓ training workers 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 energy and utilities industry to support a safe, clean environment for workers.

NOTE: Employers engaged in construction of energy and utilities infrastructure should also refer to the guidelines for construction employers available on the [COVID-19 Resilience Roadmap website](#).

The guidance is not intended to revoke or repeal any worker 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 more comprehensive guidance on their [Cal/OSHA General Guidelines on Protecting Workers from COVID-19 webpage](#). CDC has additional guidance [for businesses and employers](#).

Required Use of Face Coverings

On June 18, CDPH issued [Guidance on the Use of Face Coverings](#), which broadly requires the use of face coverings for both members of the public and workers in all public and workplace settings where there is a high risk of exposure.

People in California must wear face coverings when they are engaged in work, whether at the workplace or performing work off-site, when:

- Interacting in-person with any member of the public;
- Working in any space visited by members of the public, regardless of whether anyone from the public is present at the time;
- Working in any space where food is prepared or packaged for sale or distribution to others;
- Working in or walking through common areas, such as hallways, stairways, elevators, and parking facilities;
- In any room or enclosed area where other people (except for members of the person's own household or residence) are present when unable to physically distance;
- Driving or operating any public transportation or paratransit vehicle, taxi, or private car service or ride-sharing vehicle when passengers are present. When no passengers are present, face coverings are strongly recommended.

Complete details, including all requirements and exemptions to these rules, can be found in the [guidance](#). Face coverings are strongly encouraged in other circumstances, and employers can implement additional face covering requirements in fulfilling their obligation to provide workers with a safe and healthful workplace. Employers must provide face coverings to workers or reimburse workers for the reasonable cost of obtaining them.

Employers should develop an accommodation policy for any worker who meets one of the exemptions from wearing a face covering. If a worker who would otherwise be required to wear a face covering because of frequent contact with others cannot wear one due to a medical condition, they should be provided with a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape attached to the bottom edge, if feasible, and if the medical condition permits it.

Businesses that are open to the public should be cognizant of the exemptions to wearing face coverings in the [CDPH Face Covering Guidance](#) and may not exclude any member of the public for not wearing a face covering if that person is complying with the [guidance](#). Businesses will need to develop policies for handling these exemptions among customers, clients, visitors, and workers.



Worksite Specific Plan

- Establish a written, workplace-specific COVID-19 prevention plan at every location, perform a comprehensive risk assessment of all work areas and work tasks, and designate a person at each establishment to implement the plan.
- Incorporate the [CDPH Face Covering Guidance](#) into the Workplace Specific Plan and include a policy for handling exemptions.
- Identify contact information for the local health department where the operation is located for communicating information about COVID-19 outbreaks among workers or customers.
- Train and communicate with workers and worker representatives on the plan and make the plan available to workers and their representatives.
- Regularly evaluate the establishment 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.
- Implement the necessary processes and protocols when a workplace has an outbreak, in accordance with [CDPH guidelines](#).
- Identify close contacts (within six feet for 15 minutes or more) of an infected worker and take steps to isolate COVID-19 positive worker(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.



Strategic Operation Plan

- Identify whether decisions to increase/suspend/reduce operations at key accounts will impact load balancing.
- Determine whether the organization has identified facilities critical to the operation of the energy grid and has made accommodations for sequestering at those facilities (on-site food/water/hygiene/medical, family services, personal protective equipment, etc.).
- Develop a plan and process to prioritize work in areas involving exposure to hazardous substances, including prioritization of work orders and

requests and response times for leaks.

- Implement or expand programs that provide utility assistance such as the low-income home energy assistance program or similar methods that provide financial assistance for home air conditioner use.



Topics for Worker 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 a worker has symptoms of COVID-19 as [described by the CDC](#), such as a fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea, OR
 - If a worker was diagnosed with COVID-19 and has not yet been released from isolation, OR
 - If, within the past 14 days, a worker has had contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and is considered potentially infectious (i.e. still on isolation).
- To return to work after a worker receives a COVID-19 diagnosis only if 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, their symptoms have improved, and the worker has had no fevers (without the use of fever reducing medications) for the last 72 hours. A worker without symptoms who was diagnosed with COVID-19 can return to work only if 10 days have passed since the date of the first positive COVID-19 test.
- 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 (preferred) or 70% isopropanol (if the product is inaccessible to unsupervised children) when workers 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:
 - Face coverings do not protect the wearer and are not personal protective equipment (PPE).
 - Face coverings can help protect people near the wearer, but do not replace the need for physical distancing and frequent handwashing.
 - Face coverings must cover the nose and mouth.
 - Workers should wash or sanitize hands before and after using or adjusting face coverings.
 - Avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Face coverings must not be shared and should be washed or discarded after each shift.
- Information contained in the [CDPH Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings](#), which mandates the circumstances in which face coverings must be worn and the exemptions, as well as any policies, work rules, and practices the employer has adopted to ensure the use of face coverings. Training should also include the employer's policies on how people who are exempted from wearing a face covering will be handled.
- Ensure any independent contractors, temporary, or contract workers at the facility are also properly trained in COVID-19 prevention policies and have necessary supplies and PPE. Discuss these responsibilities ahead of time with organizations supplying temporary and/or contract workers.
- Information on paid leave benefits the worker 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 workers' compensation for COVID-19](#), including workers' sick leave rights under the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) and workers' rights to workers' compensation benefits and presumption of the work-relatedness of COVID-19 pursuant to the Governor's [Executive Order N-62-20](#) while that Order is in effect.



Individual Control Measures and Screening

- Provide temperature and/or symptom screenings for all workers at the beginning of their shift and any personnel entering the facility. Non-workers 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. Make sure the temperature/symptom screener avoids close contact with workers to the extent possible.
- 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 Worker Training section above.
- Encourage workers who are sick or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 to stay home.
- Employers must provide and ensure workers use all required protective equipment, including eye protection 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.
- Provide the necessary equipment and accommodations for line crews that may need to respond to grid disruption, including all required safety equipment for crews operating in areas with high numbers of infections.
- 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.



Cleaning and Disinfecting Protocols

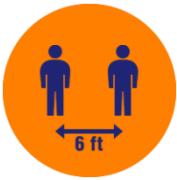
- Perform thorough cleaning in high traffic areas, such as break rooms, lunch areas, and changing areas, and areas of ingress and egress, including stairways and stairwells, handrails, and elevator controls. Frequently disinfect commonly used surfaces, including doorknobs, toilets, and handwashing facilities.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

mobile equipment (including surfaces in the cabs of vehicles, two-way radios, gas detectors, electricity meters, and controls in aerial lift buckets).

- Avoid sharing phones, handheld mobile communications, office supplies, other work tools, or equipment wherever possible. Individually-assigned peripheral equipment (keyboards, handsets, headsets, chairs, etc.) should be provided wherever possible. Never share PPE.
- Ensure that sanitary facilities stay operational and stocked at all times and provide additional soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer when needed. Provide additional sanitary facilities if several workers need to take use the restroom at the same time, e.g., during scheduled breaks.
- To minimize the risk of [Legionnaires' disease](#) and other diseases associated with water, [take steps](#) to ensure that all water systems and features are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown.
- Provide time for workers to implement cleaning practices during their shift. Cleaning assignments should be assigned during working hours as part of the worker's job duties.
- When choosing disinfecting chemicals, employers should use products 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 workers training on the chemical hazards, manufacturer's directions, ventilation requirements, and Cal/OSHA requirements for safe use. Workers using cleaners or disinfectants should wear gloves and other protective equipment as required by the product instructions. Follow the [asthma-safer cleaning methods](#) recommended by the California Department of Public Health and ensure proper ventilation.
- For those field technicians 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. Provide hand sanitizer to all field staff.
- Where possible, do not clean floors by sweeping or other methods that can disperse pathogens into the air. Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter wherever possible.
- 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 on-site cafeterias, 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 where workers should stand).
- Develop a process workflow with questions and talking points for workers to use at the customer's door to identify suspected COVID-19 concerns. The workflow will give workers the flexibility to gauge the situation when the response requires entering a home/building.
- 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 safe distancing of at least six feet from workers.
- Consider offering workers who request modified duties options that minimize their contact with customers and other workers (e.g., managing inventory rather than working as a cashier or managing administrative needs through telework).
- Allow field personnel to call a "safety stop" when they are reluctant to enter a dwelling or other building. A field worker should call a supervisor and discuss what work is essential to complete immediately and proper precautions to take.
- 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 safety meetings to ensure physical distance and implement smaller safety 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 workers.
- 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.

- Where physical distancing cannot be maintained, crews responding to outages or other service calls should drive separate vehicles if feasible. If not feasible, require that workers keep the cab well ventilated and do not reassign or comingle crew members.
- Stagger worker 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 workers.
- Information and communications technology resources should be 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:
 - Offering alternate lodging, such as mobile homes and RVs equipped with washer/dryers, showers, and kitchens.
 - 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.
 - Instituting triple wellness checks with mandatory temperature and/or symptom screenings at arrival, at mid-shift, and when going off-duty, with a health survey.



Additional Considerations for Protecting Control Centers

- Identify essential workers to develop effective strategies for mitigating their risk of infection. Develop a plan if they need to be removed from the workforce.
- 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.
- 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.
- In any scenario where a shift of control center personnel is not in the same room, the lines of communication between workers should remain open, clear, and easily accessible.
- Workstations should allow for at least six feet of space between workers. 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. Physical barriers between workers can be used for additional protection when six feet of distance is not possible.
- Contractors/vendors should be screened with a health questionnaire and/or temperature check before being allowed onsite for deliveries, repairs, etc. Access should be limited to critical activities only.
- 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 (e.g., VPN) to the extent permissible.
- Logistics plans for housing operators onsite, including bedding, hygiene facilities, entertainment, and food accommodations, should be developed.

¹Additional requirements must be considered for vulnerable populations. The energy and utilities 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.

