



Hazard Recognition

U.S. Department of Defense/Seaman Rob Aylward (U.S. Navy)

For most people in the United States, including most types of workers, the risk of infection with COVID-19 is currently low. This webpage provides information for workers and employers of workers with increased risk of exposure to COVID-19.

What is the risk to U.S. workers?

The risk from COVID-19 to Americans depends on characteristics of the virus, including how well it spreads between people; the severity of resulting illness; and the medical or other measures available to control the impact of the virus and the relative success of these measures. The CDC provides [detailed information](#) about this topic.

How does COVID-19 Spread?

Although the ongoing outbreak likely resulted originally from people who were exposed to infected animals, COVID-19, like other coronaviruses, can spread between people. Infected people can spread COVID-19 through their respiratory secretions, especially when they cough or sneeze. [According to the CDC](#), spread from person-to-person is most likely among close contacts (about 6 feet). Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It's currently unclear if a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

Given what has occurred previously with respiratory diseases such as MERS and SARS that are caused by other coronaviruses, it is likely that some person-to-person spread will continue to occur.

There is much more to learn about the transmissibility, severity, and other features associated with COVID-19, and investigations are ongoing.

Workers Who May Have Exposure Risk

Despite the low risk of exposure in most job sectors, some workers in the United States may have exposure infectious people, including travelers who contracted COVID-19 abroad. Workers with increased exposure risk include those involved in:

- Healthcare (including pre-hospital and medical transport workers, healthcare providers, clinical laboratory personnel, and support staff).
- Deathcare (including coroners, medical examiners, and funeral directors).
- Airline operations.

- Waste management.
- Travel to areas, including parts of China, where the virus is spreading.

Identifying Potential Sources of Exposure

OSHA [standards](#), including those for personal protective equipment (PPE, [29 CFR 1910.132](#)) and respiratory protection ([29 CFR 1910.134](#)), require employers to assess the hazards to which their workers may be exposed.

In assessing potential hazards, employers should consider whether or not their workers may encounter someone infected with COVID-19 in the course of their duties. Employers should also determine if workers could be exposed to environments (e.g., worksites) or materials (e.g., laboratory samples, waste) contaminated with the virus.

Depending on the work setting, employers may also rely on identification of sick individuals who have signs, symptoms, and/or a history of travel to COVID-19-affected areas that indicate potential infection with the virus, in order to help identify exposure risks for workers and implement appropriate control measures.

The [Control and Prevention](#) page provides guidance for controlling exposures among workers with risk.

Additional Information

The CDC provides [information about risk assessment](#) for COVID-19.