Balancing your on-site needs and employee accommodations

06/18/2020
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Today’s Topics:
Medical Accommodations – What are my responsibilities as an employer?

When does COVID become a work-related exposure?

When is it safe for my staff to return to work post-exposure?

Strategies for handling employee anxiety
Balancing your on-site needs and employee accommodations
Medical Accommodations

What are my responsibilities as an employer?
How to prioritize the safety of your employees and customers

• Masking saves lives and protects others
• If an employee can’t mask may not be able to work in close proximity to others
Applying, ADA Reasonable Accommodation Interactive Process

- Remote work
- Different workspace configuration
- Leave of absence
- And more
When to consider leave of absence

- Employee with a serious health condition
- Employee medically at high risk to be near others
- If not sure consult an attorney
How to listen for concern

Key Phrases

• Is employee asking for a reasonable accommodation?
• Ask for clarity
• Are they nervous?
• Share your safety details
  • Masking
  • Physical distancing
  • Cleaning and hygiene
When does COVID become a work related exposure?
OSHA guidance: Causality and COVID Infection

Work Associated, Causality, and Recordability

• With a diagnosis using CDC criteria
• When there is no other reasonable explanation
• Community transmission and occupational risk are considered as part of the equation
OSHA guidance: Work related condition

- Several cases among employees who work in close proximity
  - No alternative explanation
- Contracted after close exposure to a customer or coworker
  - Person is confirmed COVID-19
  - No alternative explanation
- Job duties include frequent and close exposure to the general public
  - Location with ongoing community transmission
  - No alternative explanation
OSHA guideline: Important reminders

• Recording a COVID-19 does not mean an OSHA standard was violated
• Respect privacy
• Investigate the exposure history
• Do not violate the employee’s expectation of medical privacy
When is it safe for my employees to return to work post-exposure?
COVID: Where knowledge meets emotion

• Basic biology is lacking
• Industries have different risks of transmission and outbreak
  • Meat processing
  • Congregate care facilities

• Consult an occupational medicine specialist
  • About the disease
  • About return to work

• Perception
• Political Spin
• Fake News
• Core News
• Core Science
Returning the employee to work

- For an ill employee
  - Use ONLY PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing
  - Antibody testing utility is unknown
  - Testing and contact tracing are key public health strategies

- Strategies for Return to Work

  **Time based = after diagnosis**
  1. 10 Days after diagnosis by first symptoms (or POS test if no symptoms,)
  2. Improvement in respiratory symptoms
  3. Three days no fever without fever meds

  **Test based strategy**
  1. Two consecutive negative tests -24 hours apart
  2. After the positive -problematic due to continued viral shed over time
How to safely return to work

- Daily symptom screen
- Social distance - reduce exposure intensity
- Clean surfaces regularly - per CDC guidelines
- Face coverings
  - Employees
  - Customers
  - Control coughs
- Hand hygiene
- Ventilate - fresh air, HEPA filter exchanged air centrally thru HVAC
- Keep obviously ill employees and customers home
- Vaccinate against other illnesses like flu
Strategies for handling employee anxiety:

Thriving in the unknown: How to take control of stress and anxiety in the workplace
Intra-Covid Anxiety is Normal

Anxiety: Normal, Expected, Predictable

- Protects from harm—keeps us ‘on our toes’
  - Is part of the Fight, Flight, or Freeze response to danger (& a pandemic is danger)
- Provides information
  - Lets us know what to focus on to maintain safety
- Provides a burst of energy and focus attention
  - Helps us get things done; ‘nervous energy’

Anxiety: Potentially Harmful

- The body can’t tell the difference between modern stress and a life threatening event—the same hormones are released with both
- Stress hormones (cortisol/adrenaline) can lead to increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, depression and anxiety
- Can lead to absenteeism, presentism, and low morale

The Big Idea: Anxiety is the Normal response to Abnormal events
Signs and Symptoms of Stress and Anxiety

**Physical Signs**
- Muscle tension, dizziness
- Nausea/bowel problems
- Frequent colds
- Increase heart rate, decrease sex drive

**Behavioral Signs**
- Appetite changes
- Sleep changes
- Nervous habits (nail biting)

**Emotional Signs**
- Moody/irritable
- Depressed/anxious
- Unable to relax
- Lonely/isolated

**Cognitive Signs**
- Decreased memory, concentration
- Difficulty making decisions
- Worrying, negative thinking

The Big Idea: Be on the look-out for these signs of stress and anxiety.
Reducing Anxiety in a *Intra*-Covid World

1. Normalize Anxious Response to COVID
   - Fight, Flight, or Freeze (i.e. anxiety) is the normal, hardwired response to stressors—plan for that response

2. Provide objective information on regular and frequent intervals
   - “Feelings aren’t facts” – when stressed, “executive functioning” goes off-line

3. Provide a sense of control
   - Control over one’s environment and circumstance decreases anxiety
   - Over-communicate with staff and gather input, questions, fears

The Big Idea:
Provide **objective information** and a **sense of control**
Plan for Predictable Stress and Anxiety

Hold an Informational Meeting
(Cameras on if remote)

Set the stage:
• Leader provides **factual information** about return to workplace
• Offer **reassurance** about physical safety and health
• Ask for staff’s help to plan for emotional/psychological safety and health
• **Normalize** stress, anxiety, and worry – share normal responses to stress
• Collect questions, concerns, worries, anxieties from staff – **don’t respond on the spot!**
• **Acknowledge** concerns expressed

Hold a Response Meeting
(Cameras on if remote)

Set the stage:
• Provide any **factual update** you have on planning process
• Go through list of questions, concerns, worries and respond to each one objectively
• Collect additional questions, concerns, worries

**Repeat!**

The Big Idea:
Provide **multiple opportunities** for staff to express **worries** and **concerns**
Latest CDC Guidelines on Testing
Testing Update

- Northern Light Health Testing Expansion
- State Testing Expansion
- Utility of Screening Tests – Recent Study
New tools you can use each week:

https://northernlighthealth.org/Resources/Safe-Return-to-Business
Questions: Let our experiences help guide you
Remember to use the chat function to ask questions.

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Beacon Health

Paul Bolin, MBA
SVP, Chief Human Resources Officer
Northern Light Health

Howard Jones, MD
Medical Director
Northern Light Work Health

Angela Fileccia, LCSW
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Northern Light Acadia

Jim Jarvis, MD, FAAFP
Medical Director, Clinical Education
Northern Light EMMC
COVID Response Incident Commander

Northern Light Health
June 23, Maine State Chamber Hosting Employer Session that will focus on the “legalese” of some of these Return-To-Work issues
Welcome

Tim Dentry, MBA
President and CEO
Northern Light Health

Honorable Senator
Angus S. King Jr.
(I) Maine

Balancing your on-site needs and employee accommodations
Contact:
Lanie Abbott
Director of Communications
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Join us next Thursday June 25, 11 am - noon:
Risk Mitigation through Infection Prevention, Communication, and De-escalation

Our Speakers:
Suzanne Morehouse, MD, FACP
Infection Control Specialist
Northern Light Health

Tanya M. Clark, LPC, CAC
employee Assistance Program Counselor
Wolfeboro

Suzanne Szars, ADP
Chief Marketing and Communications Officer
Northern Light Health

Jennifer Rollins, RN, FAPRN
Medical Director, Clinical Education
Weekly COVID-19 Updates on Telegram
Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center

Moderated by:
B. Gilroy, MD, MS, MBA, FACP
Senior Physician Executive
Bangor Health System

PLEASE REGISTER BY CLICKING HERE BEFORE JOINING THE MEETING

If you are unable to attend or your customer is unable to attend, feel free to forward them details of the webinar. You may also forward this session to your employees and customers. This webinar will cover the following topics:

- Basic infection prevention strategies: what precautions you need to take to keep employees and customers safe.
- Why, when, why, and how to communicate for employees and customers.
- Practical advice on how to de-escalate an upset customer.
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Resources:

- NLH Web Page Screening tool
  https://covid.northernlighthealth.org/covidcheck
- https://www.workhealthllc.org