What Waste Collectors and Recyclers Need to Know about COVID-19
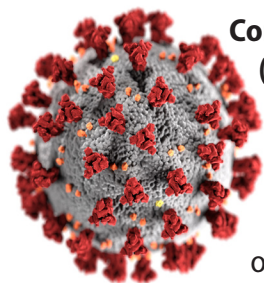
Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms often include cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell. Our understanding of how the virus spreads is evolving as we learn more about it, so check the **CDC website** for the latest information.

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person:

Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet)
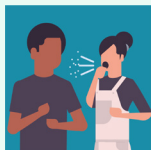
Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks

Recent studies indicate that the virus can be spread by people who are not showing symptoms. It may be possible that 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. This is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads, but we are still learning more about this virus. Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19.

As a waste collector or recycler, how can I protect myself and slow the spread?

For waste collectors and recyclers, potential sources of exposure include having close contact with a coworker or member of the public with COVID-19, or by contacting surfaces touched or handled by a person with COVID-19.

- Notify your supervisor and stay home if having symptoms.

- Follow CDC-recommended steps if you are sick. You should not return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met, in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.

- Follow CDC-recommended precautions and notify your supervisor if you are well but have a sick family member at home with COVID-19.

- Limit close contact with others by maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet when possible.

- CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. Cloth face coverings may prevent people who don't know they have the virus from transmitting it to others. These face coverings are not surgical masks or respirators and are not appropriate substitutes for them in workplaces where masks or respirators are recommended or required.

- Practice routine cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces, such as steering wheels, door handles, levers, and control panels. Key times for cleaning include:
  - » At the beginning and end of every shift
  - » After anyone else uses your vehicle or workstation

- Wear your normal personal protective equipment (PPE) as you go about your day. This may include work gloves, eye protection (such as safety glasses), and a work uniform or coveralls.

- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered disinfectantexternal icon to clean eye protection at the beginning and end of your shift.

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- Replace work gloves when they become damaged (for example, if they are ripped or torn).

  » Practice proper hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette. These are important infection control measures. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Key times to clean hands include:

    ♦ Before and after work shifts and work breaks

    ♦ After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing

    ♦ After using the restroom

    ♦ Before eating or preparing food

    ♦ Before putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings

- Avoid contact with body fluids, if possible. Use gloves if you have to touch surfaces contaminated by body fluids.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Be extra careful when putting on or taking off PPE.

- Stay up to date on your company's current policies on COVID-19. Follow the social distancing guidance provided by your employer.

What steps should my employer take?

Employers should have a COVID-19 health and safety plan to protect employees, following CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers. This plan should be shared with you and your coworkers. Employers should:

Reduce transmission among employees

- Take steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if an employee is sick.

  » Actively encourage sick employees to stay home.

  » Sick employees shouldn't return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met, in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.

- Provide employees with accurate information about COVID-19, how it spreads, and risk of exposure.

  » Be aware that some employees may be at higher risk for severe illness, such as older adults and those with chronic medical conditions. Implement specific policies to minimize face-to-face contact between these employees or assign work tasks that allow them to maintain a distance of 6 feet from other workers, customers, or visitors.

  » Provide employees training on proper handwashing practices, cough and sneeze etiquette, and other routine infection control precautions. This will help reduce the spread of many diseases, including COVID-19.

- Provide employees access to soap and clean running water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol at their worksite, which may include inside a vehicle.

Maintain a healthy work environment

- Institute measures to physically separate and increase distance between employees and customers, such as:

  » Rearrange workstations so that employees can stay at least 6 feet away from other employees.

  » Stagger shifts, start times, and break times to reduce the number of people in work and break areas at one time.

  » Remove or rearrange chairs and tables, or add visual cue marks, in employee break rooms to support social distancing practices between employees. Identify alternative areas to accommodate overflow volume.

  » Communicate through use of text messaging, phone, and email and personal mobile phones to communicate instead of face-to-face contact.

  » Cancel or postpone in-person meetings and trainings whenever possible. If you must meet, spread out to a distance of 6 feet or more between attendees.

» If possible, limit waste collectors to one person per truck.

- Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, and proper hand hygiene practices at the entrance to the workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.

- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces within the facility or vehicle. If the surfaces are visibly dirty, clean them prior to disinfecting. To disinfect, use products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2, diluted household bleach solutions prepared according to the manufacturer's label for disinfection, or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and ensure products are appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's directions for use.

  » Clean and disinfect at the beginning and end of each shift, particularly if tools, workstations, or vehicles are shared among workers.

    ♦ In facilities, these may include shared equipment such as cart handles, knives or other tools, buttons, levers, and

    ♦ In vehicles, these could include the steering wheel, gearshift, signaling levers, door handles, and seatbelt buckles.

  » Conduct frequent cleaning of employee break rooms, restrooms, and other common areas.

  » Require employees to clean out lockers nightly to facilitate overnight deep cleaning processes.

- Provide disposable disinfectant wipes so that surfaces commonly touched can be wiped down.

- Follow all applicable worker safety and health federal regulations and public health agency guidelines.

Maintain healthy business operations

- Designate a person who is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Employees should know who this person is and how to contact them.

- Consider using a hotline for employees to voice concerns anonymously.

- Implement flexible worksites, such as telework, for staff who can perform their job functions remotely.

- Implement flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices. Consider drafting non-punitive emergency sick leave policies if sick leave is not offered to some or all employees. Employers should not require a positive COVID-19 test result or a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or to return to work.

- Provide information on who to contact if employees become sick. If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

- Explore alternative other ways to promote hand washing if there is difficulty sourcing hand sanitizer and waste collectors and recyclers cannot utilize use public restrooms. For example, provide a large (5+ gallon) bucket with a lid and tap that can be used to provide water for handwashing. Buckets should we cleaned with detergent between uses.

  » Maintain adequate supplies of water, soap, and single use paper towels on the truck.

  » Place hand sanitizers in multiple locations to encourage hand hygiene

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Where can I get more information?

Stay informed. Talk to your employer, supervisor, or union representative who is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Utilize these sources for more information on worker exposures to COVID-19:

- CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 website

- NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic website

- CDC COVID-19 website

- OSHA COVID-19 website

- National Waste & Recycling Association COVID-19 website

- National Safety Council Guidance for Employers: COVID-19 and the Workplace website

- CDC INFO: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348 | website

cdc.gov/coronavirus