

COVID-19 Information for Recycling and Composting Facilities

What do we know about COVID-19 and recycling and garbage?

- Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease that spreads from person to person. People get sick from close contact with a sick person. Contact with contaminated materials or surfaces plays a minimal role in how people get sick with this virus.
- Environmental surfaces can be contaminated with the virus that causes COVID-19, but the virus does not survive more than a few days on smooth surfaces like countertops and even less time on porous or rough surfaces like cardboard or newspaper.
- Recyclables and garbage would not be considered risky items because they are not handled by a sick person, and then immediately handled by a worker with bare hands. Workers wear gloves, and there is normally a time lag that would kill the virus. In addition, any virus that might be present is not likely to get into the air as materials are handled.
- To date, there is no evidence that recyclables, organics, or garbage pose a risk for illness.

How can you protect employees through social distancing?

- Remember that the greatest risk for getting COVID-19 is from contact with sick people, not from contact with recycling materials, organics, or garbage.
- If your facility receives recyclables from the public, devise a plan to maintain 6-foot between people as materials are dropped off.
- Consider the workflow at your facility to create methods to maintain social distancing. Possible ideas include:
 - Maintaining 6 feet between workstations.
 - Staggering start times, break times, and lunch times so that workers can keep their distance during these times.
- Using temporary measures to mark out 6-foot distances and follow CDC's [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>).

What personal protective equipment should employees use to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Employees should continue to wear all appropriate PPE as required by OSHA for their specific job duties. This includes appropriate gloves, eye protection and appropriate footwear. Additionally, a mask or cloth face covering should be used in areas where social distancing standards may be difficult to achieve. The mask or cloth face covering can be a simple dust masks or homemade cloth face covering. N95 masks should only be used for those activities where they are required by OSHA.*

- Employees should wear disposable gloves or gloves that can be washed and disinfected, washable coveralls or other protective outerwear, boots, and masks. Masks can be simple dust masks or homemade cotton masks.

- If rubber gloves available for dishwashing and household chores are used, they should be marked with the individual worker's name and cleaned and disinfected between shifts. Care should be taken to keep the insides of the gloves dry.

How should work areas and break rooms be cleaned and disinfected?

- Standard cleaning and disinfection protocols will kill the virus that causes COVID-19. Be sure to follow the correct contact time and dilution instructions for the products you use. Focus additional disinfection on high-contact and high-touch surfaces such as phones, doorknobs, keyboards, and equipment. CDC has excellent guidance on [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building-facility.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building-facility.html).

What can you expect if an employee is laboratory-confirmed with COVID-19?

- For laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) will call the ill employee to interview them. They may make recommendations about high-risk contacts of the infected person to stay at home (self-quarantine) for 14 days.
- The personal protective equipment (PPE) normally utilized at your workplace and the social distancing that you have instituted to limit person-to-person spread of COVID-19 among employees will influence the number of contacts who may be considered to be of high risk during this process.

What should you do if an employee is ill with symptoms of COVID-19?

- People with a fever $\geq 100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, headache, or muscle aches could have COVID-19.
- Employees should stay at home and, if possible, have their own room and bathroom to reduce risk to household members. The ill person should seek medical care if their symptoms worsen and they feel it is necessary. Advise them to call their doctor or clinic before they visit.
- They need to stay isolated at home until their symptoms have resolved and all three of these conditions are met:
 1. Symptoms have improved (in some people this can take up to 14 days) AND,
 2. At least seven days have passed since symptoms first appeared AND,
 3. At least three days have passed since fever has gone (without use of fever reducing medications).
- Co-workers can report to work as long as they are symptom-free. They will have to follow the health and safety guidelines you have developed for the facility, which should include:

- Social distancing.
- Using personal protective equipment appropriate for the job. This could include washable coveralls, boots, latex or leather gloves, and masks (homemade cotton face masks are adequate).
- Washing hands often.
- Avoiding touching their face, nose, mouth, or eyes.
- Covering their coughs and sneezes.
- Monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing, other symptoms as listed above). Workers should stop work and stay home if they develop symptoms.
- Household or intimate contacts are considered at higher risk of developing COVID-19. If a household or intimate contact of a worker develops a COVID-like illness, the worker should stay home and self-quarantine for 14 days and monitor for symptoms.

In general, co-workers of someone with COVID-19 can continue to work if they do not have symptoms, but they should continue to monitor for symptoms and stay home if they develop symptoms. A worker must understand that even with the mildest symptoms, he or she must stay home and there will be no consequences for their job.

How can we decrease exposure at work?

Remember, COVID-19 is a respiratory disease that spreads person to person primarily through droplets when a person coughs or sneezes. Social distancing and appropriate usage of PPE are the most important things you can do to keep your workers safe. Frequent handwashing, and cleaning and disinfection of environmental surfaces are also very important.

Latest updates and additional resources

- [MDH: Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html)
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- [CDC: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html)
- [MNOSHA Compliance: Novel Coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](http://www.dli.mn.gov/business/workplace-safety-and-health/mnosha-compliance-novel-coronavirus-covid-19) (www.dli.mn.gov/business/workplace-safety-and-health/mnosha-compliance-novel-coronavirus-covid-19)

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