



# Communications Workers of America

## **CORONAVIRUS: COVID-19**

### **BE VIGILANT. BE PREPARED. DON'T PANIC.**

The COVID-19 outbreak is caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. It has spread rapidly around the globe and now throughout the United States. The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified the outbreak as a pandemic. Federal health officials have said we should prepare for severe disruptions to group gatherings and public settings, such as schools and other workplaces, and everyday life, raising a number of concerns for CWA members and all working people.

#### **WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE VIRUS?**

The COVID-19 virus is spreading from person to person, and there has been community transmission in the United States. Workplace exposure is a serious concern. The virus can spread through the air and survive on surfaces. It can be transmitted even when people do not have symptoms; and symptoms may be mild and may not present for up to two weeks. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, dry cough, shortness of breath, muscle ache and fatigue, whereas a runny or stuffy nose and a sore throat are more common with the seasonal flu and common cold. The disease is more deadly than the seasonal flu, with a higher risk of severe disease or death among older people, individuals with underlying illness, and current and former smokers. Those left unprotected at work are at a greater risk of becoming infected and spreading the virus.

Information on the outbreak and virus is constantly evolving. See the links at the end for the most up-to-date information.

#### **CWA MEMBERS AT INCREASED RISK**

CWA members are on the front lines and have an increased risk of exposure as they frequently interact with potentially infected individuals. CWA members and workers, listed below, are on the frontlines of this crisis; however, as the outbreak evolves, all workers may be affected in some way:

- Health care workers taking care of us
- Emergency first responders (e.g. EMTs, law enforcement, firefighters)
- Telecom workers helping us all stay connected
- Public service workers who keep our communities running
- Retail workers working tirelessly to meet the needs of our communities

- Journalists and broadcast technicians who keep us all informed
- Manufacturing workers who are keeping supply chains running
- Airline workers

## PRIORITIES FOR WORKERS AND UNIONS

- Comprehensive workplace plans to identify potential exposure routes, controls to mitigate risk, such as isolation, social distancing and personal protective equipment, and training procedures.
- Emphasis on personal hygiene practices, hand-washing and respiratory etiquette.
- Protocols to clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Adherence to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations when hosting and attending events or large gatherings. *These recommendations may change as the situation evolves.*
- Strong standards and guidance from agencies in charge of protecting different groups of workers that recognize the necessity of airborne protections for front-line workers.
- Adequate supplies of personal protective equipment, especially N95 respirators and those offering a greater level of protection, and respirator fit testing/
- Plans for supply shortages.
- Protocols in case of a workplace or community outbreak, including possible self-quarantine or workplace quarantine.
- Resources and preparation for a surge in demand for health services, including hospital beds and caregivers
- Much greater capacity for coronavirus testing, with a priority for testing workers on the frontlines of this crisis.
- Policies to make it possible for sick workers, quarantined workers, parents of children whose schools have closed and workers caring for loved ones in these situations to stay at home without the loss of pay, seniority or benefits.
- Policies to ensure that workers are not discouraged by cost considerations from seeking preventative treatment, testing, ongoing treatment or, eventually, voluntary vaccination.
- Policies to address the pandemic's impact on the U.S. economy and on specific sectors, with a guarantee that any assistance to corporations also benefits workers.

## MORE INFORMATION

- AFL-CIO: [www.aflcio.org/covid-19](http://www.aflcio.org/covid-19)
- OSHA: <https://www.osha.gov/>
- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- WHO: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS): <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/>
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH): <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/index.htm>

- NEW NIOSH PPE Burn Rate Calculator: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/burn-calculator.html>
- Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy: <http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/infectious-disease-topics/covid-19>
- Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>
- University of Nebraska Medical Center: <https://www.nebraskamed.com/for-providers/covid19>