6 Steps To Take If an Employee Tests Positive for COVID-19

1. Offer Support

We're all moving fast in this new world and it can feel like we're flying blind, so this is just a reminder of what you already know: if an employee lets you know they've tested positive for COVID-19, take a moment to be there for them. As a leader of your company, there are of course professional limitations of what "being there" means—you won't be able to offer health advice, that's for sure—but still, HR is often on the frontlines of tough conversations, and you know from experience to lead with emotional intelligence.

2. Explain Your Company's Policy

See COVID-19 Positive Test Policy - 2020

1) Employees who have tested positive will be instructed to quarantine for at least 14 days.
2) Co-workers who have been in close proximity for an extended period of time will also be instructed to self-quarantine and contact your health care provider.
3) Employees who have tested positive are instructed to follow the CDC Guidelines before ending home isolation. (See COVID-19 Positive Test Policy – 2020)

3. Assess Risk

Ask the employee about their activity in the 14 days prior to testing positive. Identify the areas of the workplace (or workplaces) the employee spent most of their time and with what colleagues they had **close contact—the CDC defines this as being within 6 feet for a prolonged period.**

You should also establish what clients, vendors or third-parties the employee was in close contact with in the 14 days prior to testing positive. These individuals should be contacted. This shouldn't be the end of your communication with the sick employees. If possible, you and other senior leaders should call regularly to offer support.

4. Take Action

At this point, leadership will have some decisions to make. Unless your whole team works remotely (and has for at least 14 days), here's what you must do:

1. Deep clean any area of the workplace in which the employee spent time
2. Instruct those who were in close contact with the employee to self-isolate for 14 days
3. Inform the rest of your organization (or at least those based in the same workplace.

5. Inform At-Risk Employees

Inform employees who were in close contact with the employee that you have reason to believe that they were in contact with someone who has since tested positive for COVID-19, without mentioning the affected employee's name or any easily-identifiable information (such as their job title).

Instruct the at-risk employee to self-isolate for 14 days, tell them to watch out for symptoms and suggest they contact their healthcare provider. If the period self-isolation means they will not be able to work, they should be placed on sick-leave, either under company policy or using the new emergency sick leave package offered by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

Most of all, you should offer your full support and sympathy. If they are currently at work, instruct them to go home as soon as possible.

6. Inform All Employees

Rumors may spread, so it's important that the rest of the company (or relevant division/workplace) learn the news from you. Again, **do not name the employee who tested positive.**

Instead, let employees know what action will be taken and reassure them all that you and the company are doing everything possible to ensure their safety. Encourage everyone to inform HR of any question or concerns they may have.

While a (virtual) all-hands meeting is a good venue for this conversation, it's also important to follow up with an email laying out clearly the steps your company will take.