

Press Release

Hamilton County Health Department



Web: health.hamiltontn.org

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

November 23, 2020

Health Department Guidance to Reduce the Transmission of COVID-19 in the Workplace

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN - The Hamilton County Health Department offers guidance to protect workers and prevent transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace. Based on investigations, a major source of transmission in our community is exposure and infection in the workplace. Employees then take the virus home and infect household members. Household members then take the virus to another workplace or school/sport gathering, creating a rapid transmission cycle.

Employee behaviors contributing to transmission:

- Employees eating lunch too close together. Eating breaks are a vulnerable moment because no one can wear a mask while eating, so physical distancing is the only protection for employees. Break rooms should be limited by the number of employees who can fit in it while separated by at least 6 feet. Rotate eating shifts to prevent more occupancy than can safely fit in the break room.
- Avoid holiday office parties and activities in the workplace that cause employees to congregate, such as food displays, buffets, games, singing, etc. Consider instead virtual lunches, grab-n-go prepackaged snacks, contests by email, or a present exchange table.
- Coworkers are not considered members of your "household unit." People are becoming too lax in the workplace by being too close together or not wearing masks. The Hamilton County Mask Directive applies in the workplace, and only inside the home is it exempted.
- Plexiglass does not replace the need for a mask and distancing.

Basic prevention measures that apply to all workplaces are:

- **Wearing a mask** - as mandated by the Hamilton County Mask Directive. It is crucial that all businesses practice mask wearing, even if they have no public-facing services. Wearing a mask is not a substitute for social distancing.
([http://health.hamiltontn.org/AllServices/Coronavirus\(COVID-19\)/Orders.aspx](http://health.hamiltontn.org/AllServices/Coronavirus(COVID-19)/Orders.aspx))

- **Social distancing** – The key to prevention is not being in close contact (within 6 feet) or in a poorly ventilated, confined space with another person. To the extent possible, businesses should not allow employees to congregate or work in the same place at the same time.
- **Stay home if sick** – Businesses should not allow employees with any COVID-like, flu-like, or respiratory symptoms to come to work or be on the job site. Anyone experiencing these symptoms should not come into work or should leave work immediately and isolate at home until the symptoms resolve.
- **Hand hygiene** – Employees should wash hands frequently throughout their shifts. When washing facilities are unavailable, use hand sanitizer of 60% or more alcohol.
- **Cleaning & disinfecting surfaces** – Frequent touch points such as doorknobs, handrails, telephones, keyboards, etc., should be cleaned and disinfected frequently throughout the day. Cleaning and disinfecting are not the same thing. More detail about this can be found on the CDC’s “[Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility.](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html)” (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>)

While some basic prevention measures apply to every workplace, the Tennessee Pledge offers business and industry-specific guidance on their website. (<https://www.tn.gov/governor/covid-19/economic-recovery/tennessee-pledge.html>)

Admittedly, this holiday season will be challenging. Traditional activities could cause many people to become infected, or for some, cause serious illness or death. With a little creativity around the tenets of “Masks-Space-Hands,” it is possible to have a safe and happy holiday season.

Additional information may be accessed through these Health Department resources:

- Health Department hotline: (423) 209-8383
- Website: <http://health.hamiltontn.org/>
- English Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/HamiltonTNHealthDept/>
- Spanish Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SaludHamiltonTN/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/HamiltonHealth>
- Subscribe to the Mailing List: <https://landing.mailerlite.com/webforms/landing/j6u3e5>

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