Laboratory Operation Requirements

Covered laboratory operations must have a biosafety plan and a qualified biosafety officer. Additionally, employers with laboratory operations in which employees have direct contact with cases or suspected cases must comply with all other applicable parts of the ATD Standard.

Laboratories handling COVID-19-causing pathogens or suspect pathogens must follow the CDC Interim Laboratory Biosafety Guidelines for Handling and Processing Specimens Associated with 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

Protecting and improving the safety and health of working men and women in California

The California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, also known as Cal/OSHA, is the state agency that enforces workplace safety and health standards.

Cal/OSHA investigates workplace accidents and complaints of unsafe or unhealthy working conditions.

Resources

Cal/OSHA

Aerosol Transmissible Diseases Standard (title 8 section 5199):
www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5199.html

Cal/OSHA Guidance on Requirements to Protect Workers from Coronavirus:
www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/coronavirus/Health-Care-General-Industry.html

California Department of Public Health

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19):
www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/nCOV2019.aspx

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19):

March 2020
Cal/OSHA’s regulations require protection for workers exposed to airborne or droplet transmissible diseases, such as the 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019.

Common signs and symptoms of this illness include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, with severity ranging from mild symptoms to death. The time from exposure to symptom onset ranges from 2 to 14 days. The virus can be spread from person-to-person by inhalation or by touching a contaminated surface, then touching the eyes, nose, or mouth. Risk for infection is higher in health care settings such as hospitals and clinical laboratories.

Employers and employees should review their own health and safety procedures as well as the recommendations and standards detailed below to ensure workers are protected.

Cal/OSHA Requirements

The Aerosol Transmissible Diseases (ATD) standard (California Code of Regulations, title 8, section 5199), contains requirements for protecting employees from diseases and pathogens transmitted by aerosols. As a novel pathogen, COVID-19 is considered an airborne infectious disease under the ATD standard.

The ATD standard applies to:

- Hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, clinics, medical offices, outpatient medical facilities, home health care, long-term health care facilities, hospices, medical outreach services, medical transport, and emergency medical services.
- Certain laboratories and public health services.
- Any other locations when Cal/OSHA informs employers in writing that they must comply with the ATD standard.

The ATD standard requires covered employers to implement a written ATD exposure control plan, including training, engineering and work practice controls, personal protective equipment, medical services, and laboratory operation requirements.

Written ATD Exposure Control Plan

A few key requirements in a written ATD exposure control plan include:

- **Source control measures** to minimize the spread of airborne particles from a possible infected individual, such as providing and having patients use surgical masks, tissues, and hand hygiene materials.
- Procedures to identify, temporarily isolate, and move suspected cases to **airborne infection isolation rooms or areas**, including limiting employee exposure to suspected cases who are not in an airborne infection isolation room or area.
- Procedures to **communicate** with employees and other employers regarding the suspected or confirmed infectious disease status of patients.
- Procedures the employer will use to ensure an **adequate supply of personal protective equipment and other equipment** necessary to minimize employee exposure to airborne infectious diseases.
- Procedures and appropriate personal protective equipment for surge events (only employers with employees who provide services in surge conditions). A surge is a large and rapid increase in the number of cases.
- Procedures for exposure incidents, including evaluating the incident, determining the cause, and providing **medical** follow-up for employees who had significant exposure.
- Medical services in accordance with applicable public health guidelines (CDC or CDPH).
- **Training** employees at their initial placement and at least annually, including on updates to the ATD exposure control plan that apply to COVID-19.

Engineering and Work Practice Controls

Employers must use feasible engineering and work practice controls. Examples of engineering controls include airborne infection isolation rooms and exhaust ventilation. Work practice controls include handwashing, personal protective equipment (PPE) donning and doffing procedures, and cleaning and disinfecting contaminated surfaces, PPE, and linens.

Personal Protective Equipment

Personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers providing care to suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases includes gloves, gowns or coveralls, eye protection, and respiratory protection. Respirators must be labeled as certified by NIOSH and must have filters that remove at least 95 percent of airborne particles (N95) or more.

**WARNING:** Surgical and other non-respirator face masks do not protect persons from airborne infectious disease.

With some exceptions, employers must provide a powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR) with high-efficiency particulate air filters to employees who perform high-hazard procedures on COVID-19 cases or suspected cases.

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