PEF OSH Fact Sheet
Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)
Information for Non-Healthcare Workers

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) coronavirus first identified in the city of Wuhan, China in December 2019. The disease rapidly spread throughout the city and additional areas of China and eventually to other countries. As of March 3, 2020, COVID-19 has sickened tens of thousands of individuals (the vast majority in China) and has resulted in several thousand deaths (again mostly in China).

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)".

- SARS-CoV-2 is the name of the virus that is spreading.
- COVID-19 is the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2.

The spread of COVID-19 has garnered significant media attention and has many people concerned about how the disease is transmitted, its symptoms, and steps to take to prevent infection

How Does COVID-19 Spread?
The disease spreads from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or exhales. People can be infected with SARS-CoV-2 if they breathe in droplets or droplets land in their eyes, mouth or nose. This is why it is important to stay more than 6 feet away from a person who is sick. Droplets also land on objects and surfaces and a person can become infected by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Symptoms of COVID-19
According to CDC, people with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of:
• Fever
• Cough
• Shortness of breath

CDC believes that symptoms of COVID-19 may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 after exposure. Most people who develop COVID-19 have mild symptoms and do not require hospitalization.

Preventing COVID-19

What can employees do to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace?
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Stay home and notify your supervisor if caring for a family who has or is suspected to have COVID-19.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it, and wash your hands. If tissue is not available, cough into your elbow.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based (61% or more alcohol) hand cleaners can be used if soap and water are not available.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.

How can employers protect employees?
- Encourage sick staff to stay home and away from the workplace.
- CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. [Please note: <u>PEF is working with the State on how directed quarantine or work at home periods will be administered</u>]
- Encourage employees to stay home to care for a family member with COVID-19.
- Display posters that address and remind staff about proper handwashing and cough etiquette.
- Provide alcohol-based (at least 62%) hand sanitizers (or wipes) in common workplace areas such as lobbies, corridors, and restrooms.
- Disseminating the most appropriate up-to-date information on COVID-19.
- Provide tissues, disinfectants, and disposable towels for employees to clean their work surfaces, as well as appropriate disposal receptacles for use by employees.
- Coronaviruses can survive on environmental surfaces and can infect a person for up to 9 days. To reduce the chance of spread of the COVID-19, disinfect commonly touched hard surfaces in the workplace, such as work stations, counter tops, door knobs, and bathroom surfaces by wiping them down with an EPA registered disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

Resources:

WHO
https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019
CDC
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html
NYS DOH
https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/
OSHA
https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/
AFT
https://www.aft.org/coronavirus
AFL-CIO
https://aflcio.org/covid-19
CALOSHA
https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/Coronavirus-info.html
NYS Nurses Association (NYSNA)
https://www.nysna.org/blog/2020/01/28/health-and-safety-alert-covid-19#.Xl7GlNFYbct

The PEF Health & Safety Department will send out periodic updates on COVID-19.