Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19

With the COVID-19 pandemic and related quarantine and stay-at-home orders ending, many businesses are in the midst of getting back to a full workforce and starting a "new normal" at their facility. While OSHA has not yet promulgated any regulations regarding the safety hazards associated with COVID-19 exposure in the workplace, they have issued guidance (OSHA 3990-03 2020, Guidance for Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19) on how workplaces should respond to the risks of employee exposure.

As with all safety regulations and associated programs and trainings, we at Affinity have been working with our clients to establish procedures and programs to manage this newest workplace safety risk. One of the recommendations is to create an Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan specific to your business.

Before creating a plan for your facility, the risks to your employees needs to be assessed. Is there exposure to the general public at your facility? Are there many visitors to your facility on a daily basis? Do many of your employees travel for their work assignment? Do employees work within close proximity of one another? How many of your employees are in an at-risk population, immunocompromised or have a chronic health condition?

Once your risks have been assessed, then approaches to mitigate those risks must be developed. This may include tele-commuting for office staff, staggered shifts for factory floor workers, social distancing, installed barriers and PPE requirements such as facial coverings.

The Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan for your facility should include:

- Preparation of infection control measures for employees including sanitation of work areas, frequent hand washing, limitations of shared equipment and social distancing.
- Policies and procedures for prompt identification and isolation of sick employees including self-monitoring and notification requirements for employees to report sickness or symptoms of COVID-19.
- Procedure for communication to employees about workplace flexibilities and protections specific to your site.
- Implementation of the safety hierarchy of workplace controls utilizing engineering controls first to reduce the risk (improved ventilation, installing plastic guards between individuals), followed by administrative controls (minimizing contact between individuals by modifying work shifts or work procedures) and lastly PPE requirements.

Additional issues may arise that may need to be addressed in your specific response plan. This may include increased absenteeism due to illness, medical quarantine, need for care of family members, changes in patterns of commerce or interrupted supply/delivery chain. These issues need to be examined and additional risks to employees evaluated.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving situation, companies should stay abreast of changing regulations, orders and recommendations from local, state and federal government. Other OSHA regulated programs, such as PPE and Bloodborne Pathogens, can also be affected by this pandemic. Companies should verify that all of their safety programs are up-to-date with the current climate.

If your organization needs assistance with interpreting guidance and/or requirements or is in need of assistance developing a site-specific Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan, please contact us at info@affinityconsultants.com or 330-854-9066.