



March 2, 2020

While much is still being learned about the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and how it spreads; federal, state and City of Alexandria officials are continually assessing and updating information and guidelines. This email is not intended to duplicate their guidance. At the end I will provide the link to the Alexandria Health Department's coronavirus webpage where you can get the latest updates. It's important for you and your employees to refer to up-to-date and valid sources because there is already misinformation and evidence of scams.

The focus of this email is to suggest some things small business owners should consider and do right now so you'll be better prepared if the situation does become serious. These, incidentally, are smart preparations to undertake at any time, so you're not wasting the effort.

TIPS:

- In the event of COVID-19 outbreak, a substantial number (20-60%) of your employees and customers might be forced to stay home, either with the disease, caring for someone, or just afraid of catching it.
- Think now about ways to continue operations if you or a number of your employees become sick or are forced to stay at home.
- Consider ways for employees to communicate with one another from home (does everybody have each other's cell phone numbers, etc.?).
- Enhance your telecommunications capabilities to work remotely (phone and computer).
- Identify essential functions and cross-train employees now so several can perform those tasks. Consider what programs or services could temporarily be shut down.
- Think about potential disruptions in supplies, services and transportation in the likelihood those organizations experience employee absenteeism. Identify alternative vendors / suppliers / etc. and how to reach them.

- Reevaluate your sick leave policies. Under pandemic circumstances employees should be encouraged to stay at home beyond their currently authorized sick leave. Also take the time now to review what additional benefit options might be available to support and continue paying employees beyond usual sick leave periods when they may be infectious or need to stay home to take care of family members. An example would be "borrowing" sick leave from the next year, or providing "administrative leave." Another approach is to establish special provisions just for COVID-19 circumstances.
- The key to successfully managing this potential predicament is to think about its possible impacts on your activities (including ripple effects) and then consider ways to minimize the disruptions or to deliver your services differently.
- Purchase hand sanitizer and encourage employees to start using it or washing hands per health agency guidance. Begin a "no handshaking" protocol NOW so it's ingrained in our daily routine if/when things get worse.
- Frequently communicate with employees and customers with updates.
- Pay attention to the latest official bulletins on risk assessment. You should not determine risk based on race or country of origin. For example, there is no need at this point to avoid Chinese or Italian restaurants!

The Alexandria Health Department / Virginia Department of Health webpage - <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Health> provides the latest information and links to other key sites.

Please contact Alexandria Small Business Development Center if you have questions about the above suggestions, although we refer you to the Health Department site for specific and scientific / medical determinations. We will send this list of suggestions through multiple channels, so you might receive it several times, and we will update the tips as necessary. You're welcome to pass this on to others.

Sincerely,

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