

# COVID-19 Workplace Outbreak Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

## Workplace Outbreak

### 1. An outbreak has been declared at my business. What does this mean?

Outbreaks are declared by Alberta Health Services (AHS) when multiple cases of COVID-19 are identified in connection to a business, based on outbreak definitions established by the Government of Alberta. A common source of infection, or the identification of transmission between cases, are not necessary for an outbreak to be declared. An AHS COVID-19 Outbreak Team member will contact business owners if an outbreak is opened.

Declaring an outbreak triggers AHS COVID-19 Outbreak Team, AHS Environmental Public Health and Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) to work with business operators to:

- Examine the [public health measures](#) currently in place
- Provide support, feedback and recommendations on public health measures to ensure a healthy workplace

In the event that there are 10 or more cases associated with a business, outbreaks are reported by the Government of Alberta on the [Alberta Outbreaks webpage](#).

### 2. What are the next steps?

Employers are responsible for ensuring all employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 are not at the workplace, as they are legally required to [isolate](#). All symptomatic staff members should be sent home immediately and recommended to go for COVID-19 testing. Employers should advise staff to use the [online COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#) or call Health Link at 811, and reference the outbreak number provided by AHS for testing.

Once an outbreak is declared, AHS will notify the employer of additional positive COVID-19 cases if they worked during their infectious period for the purpose of contact tracing. Employers are responsible to identify close contacts in the workplace and ensure that they are not permitted at the workplace during their [quarantine period](#).

For further information on determining close contacts, visit the [AHS COVID-19 Workplaces & Employers webpage](#). Please recommend close contacts use the [online COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#) or call Health Link at 811, to book a COVID-19 test and reference the provided outbreak number.

AHS will inform the employer if further COVID-19 testing is recommended for additional staff.

### 3. How does AHS determine if transmission happened at the workplace?

AHS investigates cases to determine if transmission likely occurred at the workplace. This involves reviewing possible routes of transmission in the workplace, close contact exposures, timeframe of the cases, and other reasons to believe that transmission has occurred on site. Cases with exposures outside of the workplace would not be counted as workplace acquired.

### 4. Why am I required to provide a list of staff and their contact information? That is private information.

As required under the *Public Health Act*, AHS Public Health must ensure all potentially exposed individuals (close contacts of a case) have been identified and are quarantining appropriately. This is critical to limiting the spread of COVID-19 and an important step in outbreak management. The authority to require this information is stated under Sections 19 and/or 29 of the [Public Health Act, Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000, Chapter P-37](#). Information is collected under section 22(2) of [Alberta's Health Information Act](#) and is kept confidential.

### 5. Can staff still work if an outbreak has been declared?

If a workplace is on outbreak, staff can continue to work as long as the workplace is not closed, and the staff:

- have not been identified as a close contact of a confirmed case, and
- are not symptomatic

If staff have no symptoms and are being tested, they can work while awaiting results as long as they are not a close contact of a case.

### 6. Are staff required to have a negative COVID-19 test and/or a medical note to return to work?

No, a negative COVID-19 test and/or a medical note is not required for staff to return to work once their isolation period is complete. This guidance is on the [Alberta Health website](#).

7. If a staff member has tested positive for COVID-19 and recovered, do they need to get re-tested?

People who test positive for COVID-19 are required to isolate. They should not be tested again during their isolation period. Testing negative does not mean a person can end isolation early.

Based on current evidence, re-testing within 90 days of a positive test result is not recommended as long as they do not have symptoms. Some people continue to test positive for up to 90 days after their infection. This does not mean they are still infectious.

If a person has new COVID-19 symptoms within 90 days of completing their required isolation period, it is recommended they speak with their healthcare provider to discuss the need for re-testing. Speak with a healthcare provider or call Health Link at 811, with any additional questions.

8. As a business owner, I can't control what my staff do or where they go – why is the business being penalized?

Businesses are responsible for keeping employees and customers safe. Regardless of how COVID-19 is introduced to the workplace, there is risk of further spread if a case attended work while infectious. Public health measures are not meant to be punitive. They are intended to support the health and safety of all employees and customers.

Declaring an outbreak does not necessarily mean there is something wrong with the way a business is operating, or with the measures the business has taken to help prevent and stop the spread of COVID-19. COVID-19 spreads in workplaces and within communities and households. Implementing public health control measures in all of these settings helps to limit spread.

9. When is an outbreak closed/declared over?

An outbreak status will remain in place for a minimum of 28 days following the most recent symptom onset of a COVID-19 case associated with the workplace.

### Additional Resources

- Visit [AHS COVID-19 Workplaces & Employers](#) for more information on how to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 with details on the role of AHS, the role of the employee who tests positive, and the role of the employer (with a helpful quarantine decision tool).
- [Translated posters and signage](#)

- [Alberta Biz Connect](#): Workplace guidance and supports to help businesses and non-profits affected by COVID-19 operate safely and support their recovery.
- See [Alberta Health Guidance Documents](#) for site specific guidance published by the Government of Alberta.