**Supported Employment/Workplace Assistance Providers’ Internal Assessment of Readiness to Resume Services**

Due to COVID-19, there are a number of factors that must be considered and addressed prior to reopening Group Supported Employment sites and even reintroducing individuals back into their individual employment sites. These precautions will facilitate the safety of the individuals being supported, as well as staff and coworkers present on site. DBHDS recommends that all providers stay abreast of new developments/guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). In addition, the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry has issued emergency temporary standards for workplaces across the Commonwealth and require adherence to certain precautions. Please see <https://www.doli.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RIS-filed-RTD-Final-ETS-7.24.2020.pdf> for more details.

The following items to consider and practices to implement may be of assistance. These have been divided into *job* *site considerations* and *individual considerations*. Note that links to the related portions of the CDC website have been inserted.

1. **Jobsite Considerations/Assessment**

For the employment site, it is recommended that the supported employment/workplace assistance provider assess the employer’s practices and waiver service provider’s ability to assist the individual in complying with the following COVID-19 mitigation practices:

* + - **Cleaning protocols**, particularly for high touch surfaces (i.e., tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, writing implements, remote controls, keyboards/computers, phones, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.). Pay special attention to shared spaces such as kitchens and restrooms. The CDC recommends:
    - wearing reusable or disposable gloves for routine cleaning and disinfection.
    - cleaning surfaces using soap and water, then using disinfectant.
      * cleaning with soap and water **reduces the number of germs**, **dirt and impurities** on surfaces, while **disinfecting kills germs** on surfaces.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html>

* **Use of Face Coverings** by both individuals and supported employment staff. Governor Northam’s Executive Order 63 requires, “Virginians to wear face coverings in public indoor settings to help contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.” This is applicable to a variety of public settings including, “any indoor space shared by groups of people who may congregate within six feet of one another or who are in close proximity to each other for more than ten minutes.” Therefore, this likely includes many jobsites. There are some exceptions; see the information at the following link.

<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/all-releases/2020/may/headline-857020-en.html#:~:text=Under%20the%20Governor's%20executive%20order,Personal%20care%20and%20grooming%20businesses>

Further, the CDC recommends wearing a [cloth face covering](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html) as feasible. Face coverings are **most** essential in times when social distancing is difficult.

* **Maintaining clean hands.**
* Handwashing is one of the best ways to protect the individuals being supported and staff from getting sick.
* The CDC recommends thoroughly washing hands:
* **Before, during,** and **after** preparing food
* **Before** eating food
* **Before** and **after** caring for someone who is sick with vomiting or diarrhea
* **Before** and **after** treating a cut or wound
* **After** blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
* **After** touching garbage
* **After** using the toilet
* **After** you have been in a public place and touched an item or surface that may be frequently touched by other people, such as door handles, tables, gas pumps, shopping carts, or electronic cashier registers/screens, etc.
* Five steps for proper handwashing:
* **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
* **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
* **Scrub** your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice.
* **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
* **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.
* If soap and water are not readily available, the CDC recommends that those who can safely use hand sanitizer use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and rub hands together until dry.

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html>

* **Ability of both staff and individuals to maintain safe distances** from one another (the CDC recommends staying at least 6 feet away – approximately two arms lengths – from people you don’t live with i.e., “social distancing”). This may also include considerations for:
  + the number of people permitted to access restrooms at one time
  + the employee’s ability to practice social distancing from co-workers and other persons
  + the length of time the individual/staff will be in the work environment
  + the frequency of contact with the public or co-workers.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

* + **Ability to operate with smaller groups for Group Supported Employment.** Consideration should be given to operating GSE with groups of no more than 4 persons, so that fewer individuals are grouped together at the same time.
  + **Maintaining safe, clean places for meals to be eaten**. Masks may be removed while eating, but should be replaced immediately after.
  + **Training offered to job coaches/workplace assistants *and individuals* on safety procedures** relevant to the jobsite. For example,
    - practicing proper [respiratory etiquette](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm) (e.g., sneezing into an upper sleeve or the crook of one’s arm vs. hand)
    - washing hands often with soap and water per the above guidelines
    - avoiding touching one’s eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
    - knowing how COVID-19 spreads (so as to prevent its spread)
    - [social distancing](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html) from co-workers
    - the need to [quarantine](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html) if exposed to COVID-19.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>

NOTE: There are some easy to understand videos at the CDC website links cited here, which may be helpful in educating both staff and the individuals you support.

In addition, please review the “COVID-19 Infection Control” Power Point under “Educational Resources” at the following link:

[http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/office-of-integrated-health#](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/office-of-integrated-health)

* + **Transportation considerations**: because traveling in vans or on public transportation with a number of other individuals for any length of time can involve sitting within 6 feet of others, the following suggestions are made:
    - Encourage, as much as possible, individuals to travel with people with whom they live
    - Encourage individuals to wash their hands before boarding vans/buses/subways or use hand sanitizer immediately prior to boarding
    - Encourage individuals to wear masks or face coverings and to not touch their faces while on vans/buses/subways
    - Encourage individuals to wash/sanitize their hands upon arriving at the jobsite
    - If the group supported employment provider is operating the vehicle, instruct staff to wipe down the interior surfaces after individuals exit
    - If the group supported employment provider is operating the vehicle, consider transporting fewer individuals at a time so that they are better able to socially distance in the vehicle.

For CDC travel guidance, see “If You Travel” at the following link:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-in-the-us.html>

* + **Ventilation**: work that takes place outdoors may pose a lower risk of transmission. Recirculated air (as with air conditioning) may recirculate aerosol droplets and pose additional risk of transmission. While you, as the supported employment provider, may not be able to affect the jobsite’s HVAC system, the information in the “Take steps to improve ventilation in the building” section at the following link is provided in order to increase your awareness.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html>

* + **Establish policies/practices for when staff and individuals may return to the jobsite** after becoming infected with COVID-19 or quarantining for potential exposure to COVID-19. Policies should include maintaining confidentiality related to record keeping regarding staff or individuals who experience COVID-19.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html>

* + **Establish policies/practices** to be implemented in the event an individual, DSP in the individual’s home, or one of the individual’s household members becomes ill with COVID-19 or requires quarantine (e.g., travel out of state, contacted by a contact tracer).
  + **Following the Virginia Department of Health guidance** contained in”Interim Guidance for Daily COVID-19 Screening of Employees” and “Interim Guidance for Daily COVID-19 Screening of Patrons” upon arrival for both staff and individuals in Group Supported Employment. Individual Supported Employment and Workplace Assistance providers should be aware of the related policy of the employment site.

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2020/06/Employee-Screening.pdf>

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2020/06/Visitor-Screening.pdf>

Another resource is “Should we be screening employees for COVID-19 symptoms (such as temperature checks)? What is the best way to do that?” at the following link:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/general-business-faq.html#Reducing-the-Spread-of-COVID-19-in-Workplaces>

* **Training for job coaches/workplace assistants to recognize symptoms** in themselves and the individuals being supported, *since not all people with COVID-19 will present with a temperature*.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

* **Establish procedures for staff and supported individuals in response to outbreaks** or positive COVID-19 cases at the jobsite.

1. **Individual Considerations/Assessment**

For each individual to be supported, the supported employment provider is encouraged to consider and document the following prior to the individual’s return.

**Has the employer has committed to holding an individual’s job, willingness to hold job longer than re-opening of business if needed?**

**What is the individual’s and family members’, as appropriate, level of interest and concerns with restarting employment in the community?**

This may be assessed by asking the individual/family member, as appropriate:

* their thoughts about returning to work;
* what (if anything) they are worried about and addressing concerns to the extent possible;
* what they are looking forward to.

This information may be used to determine the timing of the individual’s return and the feasibility of providing him/her with the desired/appropriate level of supports.

**What is the risk to the individual? [There is value in also considering risk factors related to age and medical conditions regarding job coaches/workplace assistants in addition to considering if any of those staff work in other locations where risk of coronavirus is high.]**

**Older adults and people who have severe underlying medical conditions,** like heart or lung disease or diabetes, seem to be at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 illness.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fneed-extra-precautions%2Fgroups-at-higher-risk.html>

While maintaining confidentiality, supported employment providers and/or Support Coordinators are encouraged to note any underlying medical conditions and determine if the individual is:

High-Risk Health Status;

Not High-Risk Health Status.

Those who are **high risk** may not be good candidates for immediate return to employment situations.

Other factors to consider/document for those who are not at a higher risk for serious illness are

* the impact on the individual’s mental health of working/not working
* the individual’s risk of losing his/her job by not returning to work
* the individual’s dependence on the income
* the impact of working/not working on benefits (including unemployment benefits).

**What is the individual’s ability to follow safety precautions?**

Providers are encouraged to discuss with individuals and their family members, as appropriate, the individual’s likelihood of complying with CDC guidance regarding:

* Wearing face coverings properly: how (covering both nose and mouth) and when to wear, as well as the safe way to put on and take off (avoiding touching the outside of the face covering)
* Handwashing
* Physical distancing (to include avoiding direct physical contact)
* Wearing gloves (if needed)
* Limiting touching surfaces

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-disabilities.html>

Those who will have difficulties complying with CDC guidelines may not be good candidates for immediate return to employment.

In addition, assess the individual’s **understanding of and ability to follow new employer safety requirements** related to COVID-19 in the specific business.

**Will an individual’s return to the jobsite potentially compromise a high risk individual in that person’s home? [There is value in also considering risk to household members regarding job coaches and/or workplace assistants as well.]**

See the following link for considerations regarding individuals’ family members or roommates who are not participating in day support activities.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fneed-extra-precautions%2Fgroups-at-higher-risk.html>

It may be wise for the provider and/or Support Coordinator to discuss and document the individual’s, family members’, or roommates’ (and *their* family members’/guardians’, as applicable) understanding of the risks involved with the individual returning to work.

Finally, it may be advantageous for providers and/or Support Coordinators to reach out to individuals’ families or residential providers to discuss measures individuals should take upon returning home after work in order to decrease the risk of exposure to other members of the household (e.g., washing hands, washing face coverings, changing clothes, showering).

Much more information is available through the CDC’s overarching COVID-19 website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/index.html>