

Coronavirus Prompts Companies to Telework

By Kathy Gurchiek

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Businesses in the U.S. should plan for "social distancing," such as canceling meetings and conferences and arranging for employees to work from home, according to the director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

SHRM RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

Managing Communicable Diseases in the Workplace (www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/Pages/communicable-diseases.aspx)

More than 83,000 people in at least 53 countries have been infected, and more than 2,800 have died. New infections outside China are now outpacing those within the country, the site of the first and by far the largest outbreak. There have been more than two dozen confirmed cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19 virus) in the U.S. as of Friday, including one case for which the origin of the infection is unknown (<https://www.aol.com/article/news/2020/02/27/first-possible-case-of-community-spread-of-coronavirus-reported-in-the-us/23935264/>).

"I'm concerned about the situation. CDC is concerned about the situation," said Dr. Nancy Messonnier in a news briefing Wednesday. "But we are putting our concerns to work preparing. And now is the time for businesses, hospitals, community schools, and everyday people to begin preparing as well."

Practical measures that businesses can take to reduce exposure in community settings (<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/t0225-cdc-telebriefing-covid-19.html>), she suggested, include replacing in-person meetings with video or telephone conferences and allowing employees to telework. Employers around the world are telling their workers to stay home. In China, where the virus was first identified, millions of people are working remotely.

There are technological, process, security and compliance considerations employers must keep in mind to create an infrastructure that supports remote work and collaboration, noted Finn Faldi. He is president of TeamViewer Americas, a Clearwater, Fla.-based provider of solutions for desktop remote access.

"For example, working from home requires accessing key resources and potentially sensitive information on an office network," he said. "Many businesses leverage remote access solutions that allow employees to securely connect to work computers and devices from anywhere, anytime. This enables employees to stay productive by accessing desktop or server files and applications, as if they were sitting in front of their office workstations."

But what about jobs where telework is not an option because of the nature of the work; do you insist that the employee take paid time off for a specified period?

In the absence of any legal situation affecting the enforcement of attendance policies, such as the [Family and Medical Leave Act], leave policies may be enforced.

"Employers need to stay aware of any public health agency directives or local emergency laws that may come into effect that could include protections for employee absences," said David Miller, attorney with Bryant Miller Olive. The law firm is based in the Miami/Ft. Lauderdale area. "Employers also need to understand that they may need to be flexible in what could become an extraordinary situation, both from simple humanity but also from self-interest.

"An employer who insists on enforcing attendance policies to the point of hardship may find itself with a huge morale problem—or even without employees. Pressuring employees to attend work in the middle of a critical health situation could even risk further spread of the disease."

SHRM Online has collected the following articles from its archives and other news sources about working during the coronavirus outbreak.

Coronavirus Outbreak Thrusts China into a Mass Experiment in Remote Work

The spread of a deadly virus in China has put tens of millions of people under lockdown, thrusting the country into a mass experiment in remote work.

For China's technology companies and government leaders, it has offered a chance to showcase the sophistication of the country's digital tools and the power of its high-speed networks.

Some Chinese executives and managers, though, have taken a dim view of their ability to get things done with workers at home. In a country that prizes long hours at the office, companies are keeping close track of how much is getting done by employees far from the gaze of superiors.

(*The Globe and Mail* (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-coronavirus-outbreak-thrusts-china-into-a-mass-experiment-in-remote/>))

1,000 Workers, Go Home: Companies Act to Ward Off Coronavirus

In Europe, corporate emergency plans are forcing employees to work remotely, and other businesses are refining their protocols for when the illness arrives on their doorstep. Soon companies in the United States may have to begin sending workers home or taking other precautions.

(*The New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/26/business/coronavirus-businesses.html>))

[*SHRM members-only toolkit: Managing Through Flu and Other Epidemics in the Workplace* (www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/managingfluandepidemics.aspx?_ga=2.58940142.2119020589.1582475423-1296205769.1578683579)]

Coronavirus and the Etiquette of Working from Home

China's coronavirus-enforced lockdowns make for a fascinating case study of remote working on a massive scale. The good news: Much of the tech that underpins remote working, such as the video-conferencing service Zoom and the chat app Slack, is finally mature and reliable. The bad news: not much of it comes with a proper user's manual. That has left millions to figure out for themselves how to make sure their Slack joke isn't taken seriously (emoji are your friend) or whether it is acceptable to have laundry visible in the background of a video call with colleagues (it's not).

(*Financial Times* (<https://www.ft.com/content/d7e900f6-575e-11ea-abe5-8e03987b7b20>))

CDC Warning Businesses and Schools in U.S. to Start Preparing for Spreading Coronavirus

Federal health officials on Tuesday warned schools and businesses to prepare for a nationwide spread of the novel coronavirus that has killed more than 2,700 people worldwide. The CDC indicated that the national response to a widespread coronavirus outbreak would follow a 2017 plan (<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/rr/rr6601a1.htm>) for a similarly novel flu pandemic, triggering school and business closures, travel restrictions on outbreak regions, and quarantines of infected patients.

(BuzzFeed (<https://www.buzzfeednews.com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www.buzzfeednews.com/amphtml/zahrahirji/cdc-schools-businesses-coronavirus-covid19>))

Zoom Has Added More Videoconferencing Users This Year Than in All of 2019 Thanks to Coronavirus: Bernstein

The usage spike in videoconferencing illustrates how one company is thriving while some others are seeing cracks because of the global outbreak of the COVID-19 virus.

"Zoom is doing everything we can to provide resources and support to those navigating the coronavirus outbreak," Yuan wrote in a blog post (<https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2020/02/26/zoom-commitment-user-support-business-continuity-during-coronavirus-outbreak/>) Wednesday. He grew up in China, the country where the virus was first identified. He noted that the company has removed a 40-minute limit on meetings of more than two people for free users in China.

(CNBC (<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/02/26/zoom-has-added-more-users-so-far-this-year-than-in-2019-bernstein.html>))

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