COVID-19 - Taking Care of Your Business and Employees

Dear Valued Client,

As guidance from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and WHO (World Health Organization) regarding the COVID-19 virus continues to evolve, EmPower HR understands you are faced with challenges of how to best take care of your business and employees. Some best practices for communication include:

- Be transparent
- Balance emotion with logic in your message
- Communicate business continuity plans

EmPower HR recommends a review of all current policies and if needed a creation of new policies around the following topics:

- **PTO**: Consider allowing employees to go in the negative for a period of time; Not requiring employees to use PTO when they are sick to encourage them not to come into work if they are sick; Provide paid sick leave for those directly impacted by the virus.

- **Work from home policies**: Consider implementing one in the event employees are not able to come into the office.
- Have a contingency plan for the work done by employee who are not able to work from home.
- Ensure you have necessary technology resources available in the event employees need to work from home, i.e. VPN, phone systems, printers, etc.
- **Leave policies**: Revisit leave policies to ensure proper coverage, in the event of sickness due to the COVID-19 virus.
- Develop an emergency communication plan in the event you would need to communication a work stoppage or office closure.
- Develop a policy around visitors and consider not allowing outside visitors into your business unless there is approval from senior level leadership.
- Require employees to report all personal travel plans to their manager.
- Consider using teleconference and webinars for meetings vs. in person meetings, conferences, events.
- Ask your insurance broker about business interruption insurance to cover unexpected major events and see what qualifies for coverage.
- If you are considering a layoff contact your HR Business Partner to support you through this process.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Can I tell employees if a co-worker has tested positive for the Coronavirus?** No. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) privacy rules restrict employers from sharing personal health information of an employee. Employers should inform employees that possible exposure has occurred in the workplace without disclosing any identifying information about the individual who tested positive.
2. **What should we do if an employee discloses they have been in close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19?** According to CDC guidance, individuals who have had close contact with

a person diagnosed with COVID-19 should self-quarantine. Employers can require an employee who has been exposed to the virus to stay at home.

3. **Can I require an employee to go home (or stay home) if he or she is sick?** Yes, employees who show signs of respiratory illness can be asked to leave the workplace and stay at home until they are symptom free.

4. **Can I ask an employee if he or she have the Coronavirus?** Employers can ask an employee how he or she is feeling in general but should not inquire about a specific illness as that could rise to the level of a disability related inquiry under the ADA.

For additional information check the CDC website at: https://www.cdc.gov/, or WHO website at: https://www.who.int/.

Kindest Regards,
EmPower HR