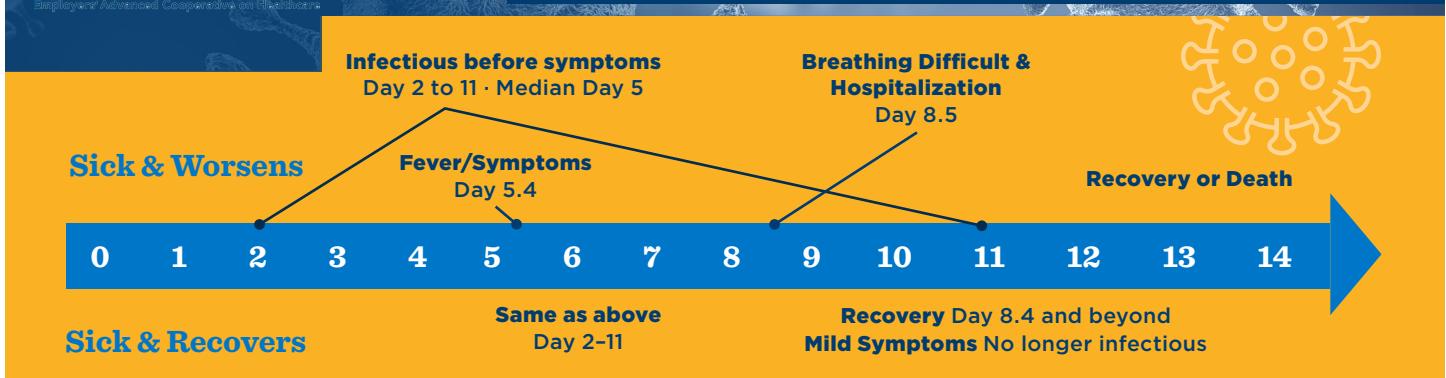


Understanding the Spread of the COVID-19



As corporations are beginning to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, the practical aspects of how to take action are becoming more challenging. To appreciate the implications, let's look at an example if an employee is found to be ill with COVID-19.

How long does it take once infected for symptoms to appear (the incubation period)? Our current understanding is that COVID-19 is spread from person to person, so it's important to notify others should a case occur in a work environment. A recently published study confirms fewer than 2.5% developed symptoms within 2.2 days. The estimated time from being exposed to the development of symptoms is a median of 5.1 days. Estimated time until development of a fever was 5.7 days. Of those who are latest to develop symptoms, 97.5% of those infected had symptoms appear by 11.5 days.

When did the employee begin to shed virus (begin to infect others)? In a soon to be published study researchers found "very high levels of virus emitted from the throat of patients

from the earliest point in their illness — when people are generally still going about their daily routines." So in the first two days they may become infectious.

What do we do with the co-workers (and family members)? By the time COVID-19 was diagnosed, coworkers could have been exposed to active virus shedding to at several days of active shedding of the virus (depending on what day their symptoms started). This is a real problem when an employer is attempting to limit spread.

What now? In the best of all possible worlds all the employees at work will have used social distancing, the worktops and other shared spaces will have been cleaned regularly and thoroughly, and the workers had used hand washing extensively and retrained themselves not to touch their faces. One strategy, temperature checking, could occur prior to entering the premises, but a fever only occurs at 5.4 days, allowing time to pass infecting others.

When can the employee return to work safely? In the same study mentioned above it is concluded: "The scientists could not grow viruses from throat swabs or sputum specimens after day 8 of illness from people who had mild infections." For those with moderate to severe symptoms, the jury is still out on when they can return to work.

Final thoughts Managing the COVID-19 in the workplace is presenting significant challenges. Using shared decision-making to guide the conversation between corporations and their employees, and the employees and their providers provides the context for effective communication. The key is educating, encouraging, engaging and supporting employees' guidelines for social distancing, personal hygiene, sheltering in place, and early identification of risk and/or symptoms.

Visit the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) site for employers to learn more.