



COVID-19 AWARENESS AT WORK

As the global COVID-19 pandemic continues to threaten more lives, many states have instituted official orders to close all schools, public venues, and businesses outside of those operations which are deemed “essential” to sustain life and infrastructure. Undoubtedly, the debate over whether or not a business is truly essential will continue as local and national authorities attempt to find ways to slow the spread of this deadly virus. Moreover, the content and regulations in these orders can vary considerably from state to state.

While some employers represented by IUE-CWA have opted to cease operations on a temporary basis, the vast majority of our members are still reporting to work on a regular schedule. During this difficult time, it's more important than ever for Union members to stay informed, stay safe, and stay actively engaged with their Local Union leadership. Here are some ways you can keep yourself and your fellow workers safe during this crisis.

Your Employer May or May Not be Truly “Essential”

While there's certainly some operations which are necessary to sustain life—particularly in the fields of healthcare, emergency services, and many jobs in the public sector—the question over whether your employer has the right to stay open will likely remain a point of debate. Generally, most of the states' “Stay at Home” orders allow businesses in a very broad sense to remain open at this time. This includes manufacturing operations deemed necessary for infrastructure, transportation, food production, and many more. Some states require companies to apply for a waiver to stay in operation, but many allow the employer to decide if they're an essential business or not. Some states have yet to implement any stay-at-home order at all.

While the IUE-CWA recognizes the importance of truly critical businesses, there is widespread concern many of these employers are deeming themselves critical purely in the pursuit of the mighty dollar. Please know this Union will

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pursue every legal and contractual avenue available to protect the lives and livelihoods of our members. If you have questions or concerns about the validity of your employer's essential status, please contact your local steward or officer so they may address these concerns with their staff representative and the headquarters office. No one wants to see any of our employers shutdown and members laid off, but we are in a critical time where the safety of workers must be a top priority, as well. The IUE-CWA will continue to push for legislation to address matters of pay, safety, and securing benefits through this crisis.

Six Feet of Distance is the New Normal

As you've no doubt heard, beyond the absolute necessity of constant hand washing, directing a cough into the bend of your arm, and using tissues for sneezes, it is vitally important to keep a distance of at least six feet between yourself and others. These steps—along with generally staying away from crowded locations—are the tools at our disposal to stop the spread of this virus. If you're not working, it's best to stay home outside of necessary trips into the public.

But if you're at work, it's still incredibly important to maintain a distance of at least six feet from your coworkers and anyone else. Most state orders make it a requirement for even essential businesses to maintain proper distancing between employees. Again, if your employer is disregarding this extremely important safety precaution, please immediately contact your local union steward as soon as possible.

The Local Union Should Mobilize for Safety Policies

Clearly, everyone in the country—and in fact around the globe—should be practicing safe distancing, hand washing, checking for symptoms, and staying home as much as possible. But at the workplace, there are even further safeguards which can protect the health and lives of workers. Be sure to check with your Local to go over any established safety policies already in place and

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make sure to follow those policies closely. Moreover, it is possible to attain new safety policies with your employer at this time, but doing so may require the company to agree to bargaining over these new standards. Here are some general starting points for those discussions. Keep in mind, in some locations—like Ohio, for example—some of these standards may already be legally required.

● **HAND SANITIZER AND DISINFECTING WIPES AT JOB STATIONS**

Vitally important to stop the spread of the virus. Job stations, surfaces, tools, etc should be wiped down between uses.

● **TEMPERATURE AND SYMPTOM CHECKS FOR ALL EMPLOYEES**

Ideally, your employer should have a system in place where everyone—hourly, salary, visitors—should have their temperature checked before entering the place of business. Moreover, if anyone in the facility is showing COVID-19 related symptoms including prolonged coughing, difficulty breathing, or a fever, they should be removed from the facility immediately and not return until symptoms have subsided for at least 72 hours.

● **ATTENDANCE FORGIVENESS AND SICK PAY FOR ILL EMPLOYEES**

Your local Collective Bargaining Agreement may already have provisions for sick pay or sick leave. Try to ensure this will be extended to employees who are forced to remain home due to COVID-19 symptoms or self-quarantine. There should be no attendance points or discipline for a sick person remaining at home. Making it easier for sick employees to stay at home ensures the well-being of the business. Otherwise, sick people may enter the facility under fear of discipline or loss of income.

● **IMMUNOCOMPROMISED AND AT-RISK EMPLOYEES STAY HOME**

We should ensure older workers, those with weak immune systems, or those suffering from underlying conditions have the ability to stay home. Granted, this should be done voluntarily, but these workers are particularly susceptible to the disease and should consider doing so.

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◎ **DOCTORS NOTES NOT REQUIRED**

Employees who are self-quarantined or feeling ill should not be required to present a doctor's note to validate absence. Doctors offices, hospitals, and urgent care centers need to remain clear for life-saving services and fighting the COVID-19 virus. An influx of people seeking notes would only hamper these vital services.

These are only a handful of ideas Union locals and members can request through bargaining with employers. Think about the situations that apply to your particular job and location—dealing with customers, vendors, distance between job stations, access to hand washing stations—and act accordingly. Keep in mind you have the right under OSHA and other legal standards to refuse to perform unsafe work, but enforcement—particularly at this time—can be unreliable. Make smart decisions and think about the well-being of yourself, your family, and your fellow workers. If you have a question about safety, contact your steward or local safety representative, if applicable.

Do NOT Buy Into Rumors or Supposed “Cures”

The internet and social media are full of misinformation. Do not attempt to self medicate or “vaccinate” yourself with bizarre remedies posted online. Some Americans have already died as a result of these very actions. Stay informed with official media and follow the advice and direction of local and national health departments and agencies.

Helpful Resources

CDC: WWW.CDC.GOV/CORONAVIRUS

OSHA: WWW.OSHA.GOV/SLTC/COVID-19

IUE-CWA FACEBOOK: WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/IUECWA

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