COVID-19 hits close to home
July 2, 2020

Learn how to protect yourself from exposures and understand how easily exposures can happen with real-life examples from your fellow employees

We have 175 Cook Children’s employees currently being monitored for COVID-19 exposure, and another 38 are currently positive for COVID-19. In addition, 555 employees have been placed on quarantine during this pandemic from exposures inside the system, and out in the community.

With the increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases among our employees, we must all work together to prevent the spread of this dangerous virus. Whether you directly see patients or not, and regardless of where you are located within the system, it is important that you always:

- Wear a mask or cloth face covering;
- Practice social distancing (maintain 6 feet); and
- Wash your hands frequently.

In the spirit of togetherness, we need to have full transparency with one another. If you have been exposed to COVID-19, we ask that you work with us by identifying everyone you may have been in contact with while you were symptomatic. The contact tracing process helps us stop the spread of COVID-19 by identifying everyone who may have potentially been exposed.

If you have an exposure at work or in the community, we would ask that you be open to sharing your information and activities with your coworkers so they can be informed and be tested and/or quarantined as necessary.

In keeping with our commitment to Zero Harm, we would ask that everyone remember these important behavioral expectations around the Cook Children’s Experience pillar of Quality and Safety:

- Everyone makes a commitment to personal safety.
- Everyone is accountable for clear and complete communication.
- Everyone supports a questioning attitude.
EXPOSURES AT WORK

Below are a few scenarios based on true events with our employees. We adjusted the exact specifics to maintain the privacy of all.

1. After a long night, it’s time for a shift exchange between nurses. The nurses decide they need to confer on a particular patient. They are sitting quietly in the corner of the nurses’ station. They are speaking confidentially, less than 4 feet apart, making it difficult for anyone passing by to hear confidential PHI. Neither nurse is wearing any PPE as they have discarded the PPE in compliance with established Infection Prevention policies.

Q: What did they fail to do?
A: Both should have been wearing surgical masks, selected an area that permitted social distancing and complete confidentiality to ensure patient privacy.

2. Two staff members both wearing masks step on to an elevator. They are the only two people on the elevator. One person has trouble hearing the other. They lower their masks to speak rather than speaking louder through the mask.

Q: What should have happened instead?
A: The two employees should have kept their masks on and waited until they found a more quiet place where they could speak to one another. Since they were in a common area, they should not have removed their masks and made sure the discussion did not include PHI. They should have waited to find a location that was private for the topic so they could speak in a normal tone of voice with their mask in place, while maintaining social distancing.

3. An EVS team member is called to clean a room on the med-surg. floor after a patient is transferred. The EVS team member approaches the nurse assigned that room, and receives guidance on the correct PPE for cleaning the room of a suspected COVID patient. The discussion occurs in the corridor near the room. Neither the nurse nor the EVS team member were wearing any PPE and stood within 2 feet of each other during the initial discussion.

Q: What should have occurred in this scenario?
A: Both should have been wearing surgical masks at the time of the discussion (in a common area) and social distanced to 6 feet apart.

4. Noticing no infectious alerts posted on the door, a medical assistant popped into a patient’s room to ask the nurse a quick question. The nurse nor the medical assistant were wearing a mask or respirator. They speak confidentially in close proximity (less than 2 feet), and the medical assistant leaves the room to complete the task assigned.
Q: What is the correct action(s) that should have occurred prior to entering and while in the patient's room?
A: Both should have been wearing a surgical mask and eyewear as both were patient facing in the room.

5. You’ve been working hard and it’s time for lunch. You ask a coworker to join you. As soon as you get in the car, you both take off of your masks and head to a restaurant.

Q: What should have been the correct actions?
A: Maintain the same level of infection prevention when away from work, as you do during work. Both employees should have continued to wear their masks (cloth or surgical coverings) while in the car and in the restaurant, as they are from different households (moderate to high community transmission and Tarrant County Ordinance in effect). While eating lunch, employees should make sure to maintain social distancing as the mask will be removed. When returning from lunch, they should change into the appropriate face covering depending on job function (surgical mask for patient facing caregivers and N95 depending on care being provided; cloth mask for non-patient facing employees).


EXPOSURES AWAY FROM WORK

Here are a few true examples from our employees that occurred away from Cook Children’s. Again, we modified the exact specifics to maintain the privacy of all.

- “I needed to run to the store to return some clothes I had ordered online and forgot to grab my mask. The return line was kind of slow and I was in the store for longer than I had hoped without a mask. A few days later, my body ached and fatigue prompted me to get tested. The test came back positive for COVID.”
- “My sister and I attended a baby shower for a childhood friend, who was expecting her first baby. A few days later, we got a phone call from the friend’s mom that one of her other daughters has had a fever since the party. Her COVID-19 came back positive; so she wanted us to know that we were exposed. My sister and I have both tested positive too.”
- “My favorite little family-owned restaurant just reopened and I decided to visit. I just wanted a bit of that familiar cozy environment and good food that I’d been missing. My cousin that I went with just told me that she has tested positive, along with her teenage son, who was at dinner with us. Since they both are positive and I spent a couple hours with them, I need to get tested.”

As you can see, an exposure can occur in as little as a few minutes from simple daily activities that we wouldn’t have thought twice about doing four months ago.
These are just a few examples, but as we head into the Fourth of July weekend, and as more areas, including youth sports, open up for attendance and gatherings, we want you to be aware of how your coworkers had exposures to COVID-19, and how this pandemic is impacting all of us.

As community spread continues and numbers rise, **we must ALL be more cautious than ever.**