



Mass**COSH**

# COVID-19 TOOLKIT FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Health and Safety Protections  
and How to Make Them Happen

*This guide was compiled by the MassCOSH Health Tech Committee, a committee of occupational health and safety experts, and is updated regularly to reflect the most recent information available in the field.*

*Last updated on: 4/8/20*

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Se va a traducir este documento al español pronto. Por favor contacte a [ben.w@masscosh.org](mailto:ben.w@masscosh.org) para preguntas en español. This document will be translated into Spanish shortly. Please reach out to [ben.w@masscosh.org](mailto:ben.w@masscosh.org) for Spanish-language questions.

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# INTRODUCTION

**This is a living document - it will be updated daily as information about the pandemic continues to change. If you have feedback or would like additional information to be included, please [contact MassCOSH](#).**

Every day, workers on the front line, from health care workers and first responders, to those working in grocery stores, pharmacies, transportation and delivery – are risking their lives to provide us with essential services. In Massachusetts, we have already seen the impact. Record numbers of healthcare workers are being infected. As of April 7, according to hospital spokespeople around the state, [more than 1000 healthcare workers had a positive test](#). As of April 7, 35 MBTA workers are battling COVID-19 symptoms, and one MBTA driver has already died from the disease. Last week, 3 UPS workers tested positive for COVID-19, and two dozen others are under doctor-ordered quarantine, and yet the company is dragging its feet in providing the proper health and safety gear.

Existing racial and economic injustices in healthcare are exacerbated by the pandemic, putting temp workers, low wage workers, workers of color and immigrant workers at particular risk. And workers that are raising their voices to demand protections are being retaliated against and fired.

We are in the midst of an unprecedented worker health and safety crisis: employers are failing to provide needed protection, and the agency that should play a major role in ensuring that protection and slowing the disease, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), is mostly missing in action. Workers are left to fend for themselves. In response, MassCOSH has mobilized its Health Tech Committee of occupational health and safety experts to create this tool kit to help workers know their rights, understand what health and safety protections they should be provided, and to give workers tools to take collective action. The last section also has links to current campaigns being led by our allies and partners for more PPE, to shut down non-essential worksites, to expand benefits to those laid off, and more.

**We cannot afford to wait for employers, OSHA, and other regulatory agencies to do what is necessary. Workers must band together to take action now to protect themselves and us all.**

Thank you to the leaders of the MassCOSH Health Tech Committee that have contributed to this Tool Kit:

- Tolle Graham, MassCOSH (retired),  
USW 9358
- Nancy Lessin, United Steelworker -  
Tony Mazzocchi Center (retired)
- Katelyn Parady, Health Tech  
Committee Co-Chair
- Elise Pechter, IH, Health Tech  
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- Craig Slatin, PhD
- Letitia Davis, ScD, EdM

# CRITICAL INFORMATION FOR ALL WORKERS

## How COVID-19 Spreads:

- COVID-19 is mostly transmitted by droplets in the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People can transmit the virus even if they are not showing any symptoms.
- The CDC recommends you keep a distance of 6 feet from other people to avoid being sneezed, coughed, or breathed on by someone who is infectious.
- Some transmission may be from the virus on surfaces. It can be transferred when people touch contaminated surfaces and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes.

## Is My Employer Legally Required to Protect Me from COVID-19?

### Legal Requirements Under OSHA (Private Sector) and DLS (Public Sector in MA)

**Employers must follow all existing Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards to protect workers.** All OSHA regulations apply to the public sector, but are enforced by the Massachusetts Department of Labor Standards (DLS). While there are no specific OSHA standards covering COVID-19 exposure, some OSHA requirements may apply to preventing exposure at work:

- **The General Duty Clause, Section 5(a)(1)** of the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act of 1970, 29 USC 654(a)(1), which requires employers to furnish to each worker “employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm.”
- **OSHA’s Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) standards** (in general industry, 29 CFR 1910 Subpart I) require using gloves, eye and face protection, and respiratory protection where needed. [Click here to read the full text](#) of the standards.
- **When respirators are necessary** to protect workers or where employers require respirator use, employers must implement a comprehensive respiratory protection program in accordance with the [Respiratory Protection standard \(29 CFR 1910.134\)](#).
- **OSHA’s Bloodborne Pathogens standard** (29 CFR 1910.1030) applies to occupational exposure to human blood and other potentially infectious materials that typically do not include respiratory secretions that may transmit SARS-CoV-2. However, the provisions of the standard offer a framework that may help control some sources of the virus, including exposures to body fluids (e.g., respiratory secretions) not covered by the standard. See: [www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.1030](http://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.1030).
- **OSHA’s Sanitation standard** (29 CFR 1910.141 for general industry, and 1926.51 for construction) requires workplaces to have sufficient, sanitary bathrooms that are

accessible and available to workers whenever necessary. An employer cannot forbid you from using the bathroom and cannot assign you so much work that you do not have time to use the bathroom. See: [https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/restrooms\\_sanitation/](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/restrooms_sanitation/)

- **Right to Report and Right to Refuse**

You have a right to report if your workplace is unsafe during the COVID-19 pandemic (and always). **You also have the right to refuse dangerous work that puts you at risk of death or serious physical harm. An employer cannot take an adverse action against employees for engaging in activities protected by OSHA's whistleblower law**, such as: firing or laying off, demoting, denying overtime or promotion, or reducing pay or hours. **You have the right to [file a whistleblower complaint with OSHA](#) if you believe your employer retaliated against you for exercising your rights to a healthy and safe workplace** under the whistleblower protection law enforced by OSHA.

## **OSHA's Guidance on Preparing Workers for COVID-19**

[The COVID-19 OSHA guidance](#) is not a standard or regulation, so it creates no new legal requirement for your employer. However, it contains recommendations as well as descriptions of mandatory safety and health standards. It recommends and provides guidance for employers to:

- Develop an Infectious Disease and Response Plan
- Implement Basic Infection Control Measures
- Develop Policies and Procedures for Prompt Identification and Isolation of Sick People, if Appropriate
- Develop, Implement, and Communicate about Workplace Flexibilities and Protections
- Implement Workplace Controls

**If you believe your employer is violating any OSHA regulation or endangering workers' lives, you can report it to OSHA confidentially, without your employer knowing it was you. Visit the [Massachusetts OSHA Offices website](#).**

- Boston North Area Office - Andover: (978) 837-4460
- Boston South Area Office - Braintree: (617) 565-6924
- Springfield Area Office: (413) 785-0123

## **WANT TO MAKE AN OSHA COMPLAINT?**

Before submitting your complaint, take notes and photos of the unsafe working condition. While you can always call OSHA on your own, MassCOSH can help you create and submit a successful complaint to OSHA. Contact Ben Weilerstein at [ben.w@masscosh.org](mailto:ben.w@masscosh.org) for help.

### **Other Public Health Resources**

- [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#)
- [MA Department of Public Health](#)
- [Boston Public Health Commission](#)

# WHAT EVERY WORKER SHOULD DEMAND FROM THEIR EMPLOYER

## Make a COVID-19 Response Plan with Worker Input

Follow OSHA guidance to conduct a Hazard Assessment and develop an Infectious Disease and Response Plan, with input from workers. The Assessment and Plan must also be communicated clearly to workers, in their preferred languages, with opportunities for them to give feedback.

- First, assess coronavirus risk:
  - How can workers be exposed to the coronavirus while at work?
    - From person-to-person transmission
    - From contact with virus on objects or surfaces
  - Which employees are at high risk of getting very sick or dying from COVID-19?
    - Workers over 60 years old
    - Workers with certain health issues like heart disease, lung disease, diabetes or a weakened immune system. Employers should ask workers to self-report, but *cannot* require a worker to reveal a health problem
- With worker input, create a Response Plan that defines clear workplace controls to eliminate, prevent, or reduce coronavirus exposure:
  - Engineering controls
    - Ventilation (eg, increasing ventilation rates, installing high-efficiency air filters, negative pressure ventilation in certain settings)
    - Installing physical barriers (eg, clear plastic sneeze guards)
  - Administrative controls:
    - Allow employees that can work from home to do so
    - Encourage sick workers to stay home, and pay them
    - Minimize face-to-face contact
    - Discontinue non-essential travel
    - Provide frequent, up-to-date education and training
    - If these health and safety protections lead to lower productivity, workers should not be laid off or have hours cut. Instead, work hours could be lengthened or workers could be given other work (such as cleaning and sanitation work, with proper training).
  - Personal protective equipment (PPE) and training for workers, in their preferred languages, on how to safely put on, use, and remove the equipment.
- Communicate the plan to all workers. Continually meet and discuss with workers any other actions to ensure their safety.

- Post information in workers' preferred languages in all areas where workers congregate or enter the workplace.

### **Make Sure No One Has to Work While Sick**

- Immediately provide all workers with **paid sick leave** so that if someone is possibly sick with COVID-19, that person can stay home and not infect other workers. New federal laws in place allow some workers to take paid sick leave and family leave to care for children while schools are closed due to COVID-19. See the Section 5 for links to information on these programs.
- **Eliminate barriers to taking sick leave:** Employers should not require workers to find a replacement for missed shifts, nor may employers retaliate in any manner against workers who take emergency paid sick leave.

### **KNOW YOUR RIGHT TO PAID SICK TIME**

Most workers in Massachusetts earn a minimum of 40 hours of paid sick time (earned at the rate of 1 hour for every 30 hours of work). Employees can use 3 days (24 hours) in a row of paid sick time before being required to show a doctor's note. [Click here for more information](#) from the MA Attorney General.

Employees of companies with fewer than 500 employees can access paid sick leave or family leave if they are unable to work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. [Click here for more information from the US Department of Labor.](#)

### **Keep Six Feet or More Between Workers**

The company should adopt new approaches in workplaces that facilitate as much physical distancing for workers as possible.

- Immediately increase the distance between workers to at least 6 feet. Move workstations to allow for 6 ft distance where possible.
- Arrange for staggered shifts or longer break times so workers can maintain a distance of six feet during all breaks, including for lunch.
- If these measures lead to lower production/productivity, workers should not be laid off or have hours cut. Instead, work hours could be lengthened while retaining workers or workers could be given other work (such as cleaning and sanitation work, with proper training).

## Provide Enough Sanitation Supplies and a Clean Working Environment

Oftentimes workers work with surfaces where the virus can live for long periods of time. They need access to proper supplies at all times and consistently cleaned work surfaces.

- Consistently provide soap, paper towels, gloves, and sanitizers. See the [cleaning worker section](#) for information on how to stay safe when cleaning if you are assigned to clean.
- Ensure that all work surfaces are kept clean and sanitized as often as needed. Employ enough cleaning workers and give them enough time to clean and sanitize thoroughly.
- Make sure that chemical fumes don't endanger workers. Create ventilation in indoor spaces and/or provide respiratory PPE.

## Allow Easy and Frequent Access to Bathrooms or Handwashing Stations

All workers have the right to use a bathroom and wash hands whenever necessary.

- Provide workers with **regular breaks** to wash hands. Break times must be long enough for everyone to be able to wash hands adequately while maintaining a distance of 6 feet from other workers. This may include adding wash stations.
- Allow workers to wash hands **upon arriving** to work/entering the workplace.
- Provide moisturizing **lotion in bathrooms** to prevent dry or cracked skin as a result of increased hand washing.

*Recommendations for health and safety protections for specific occupations and sectors can be found in the [next section](#) of this toolkit.*

## Is My Work Actually Essential – Who Decides?

If you and your members/co-workers believe that your workplace is *not* essential, but remains open, **consider a campaign to shut it down!**

In many states across the country, states, cities and towns have moved to close down “non-essential” businesses or services in the move to “flatten the curve” and reduce the numbers of people contracting COVID-19. But what’s an “essential” business or service – and what’s “non-essential” – and who gets to decide?

**Workers get to decide!** If you and your co-workers feel that going to work puts you in grave danger, you can organize together and fight for your workplace to be closed. Below are examples of worker efforts to shut down their workplace, and [linked here](#) is more info about your protected right to refuse dangerous work.

- In one state, a business making high-end mobile homes claimed to be “essential” and was allowed to continue to operate.

- In Philadelphia, unionized library workers initiated a petition signed by workers and community members which won the closure of libraries and paid time off for union and non-union library workers. The library staff union in Boston had a similar effort.
- In Massachusetts a current struggle regarding whether or not construction is “essential” illustrates the battle to determine what is truly “essential” during a pandemic. For more information about construction unions’ efforts to shut down work in order to protect their members' health, [see this timeline](#).
  - On March 30, Boston Globe columnist Joan Vennochi [wrote a column](#) about the back-and-forth regarding whether or not construction work is actually essential: “Why the push to keep construction sites open? It’s about the value of life versus the power of industry. It’s about the value of a person who relies on a workplace porta-potty – versus one who doesn’t.”

### Other Workers Rights Resources

- National Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (National COSH) Webinar on Coronavirus and Workers - slides in [Spanish](#) and [English](#).
- [NationalCOSH Resources by sector](#)
- COVID-19 Worker Rights info from labor unions: [AFL-CIO](#), [CWA](#), and [UE](#) (includes tips for non-union workers).
- [USW Guide for USW Local Unions Still at Work](#)
- NIEHS Worker Training Program [resources and curriculum](#)
- [National Employment Law Project Tool Kit](#) on Worker Safety & Health During COVID-19 Pandemic: Rights & Resources
- Extensive information on COVID-19 safety in many types of jobs from the [Labor Occupational Health Program](#) and the [Berkeley Center for Occupational and Environmental Health](#)

# COVID-19 HEALTH AND SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS BY JOB

## Grocery or Retail Worker

*I work in a grocery store, pharmacy, or other essential retail store. What specific protections should my employer be providing? How do I stay safe?*

- MassCOSH's partner in Western New York created the [following guidance](#) for retail establishments and cashiers.
- On March 31, UFCW announced that it successfully bargained to get [the following measures](#) for all Kroger employees:
  - **Providing Emergency Paid Leave** for associates who are affected by COVID-19 – whether experiencing symptoms and self-isolating, diagnosed or placed in quarantine – so they can recover with the financial support they need.
  - **Additional Cleaning and Sanitizing** protocols which include allowing associates to wash their hands and sanitize their registers every 30 minutes.
  - **Shortened Store Operating Hours** to provide ample time to allow restocking, cleaning, and to provide appropriate rest and relief for associates.
  - **Installing plexiglass partitions** at check-out lanes, pharmacy and Starbucks registers across each store.
  - **Adding floor decals to promote physical distancing** at check lanes and other counters.
  - **\$2 Per Hour Pay Increase** which will be paid to hourly frontline associates in retail stores, manufacturing plants, distribution centers, central fills, pharmacies and contact call centers for the next three weeks at which point UFCW and Kroger will revisit discussions.
- Consider switching to **pick-up only**.
  - Take orders by phone or electronically. Process payment electronically when possible.
  - Deliver groceries to customers outside of stores. Ask customers to load groceries into their own vehicles. Limit person-to-person proximity and physical contact during loading and payment.

## Transit Worker

*I work in the transportation industry as a train conductor, subway or bus driver, ticket/fare collector, etc. What protections should my employer be providing to keep me and riders safe?*

The following health protections for transit workers are based on [demands from the Amalgamated Transit Union](#) to improve the health and safety of its members:

- Provide **gloves, masks, and hand sanitizers**.

- **Set up the bus/train for physical distancing of 6ft or more.** Allow rear door entry only and eliminate transit fares where necessary to allow for physical distancing (ideally of 6ft or more). Buses and trains should be half full to create space between passengers and the driver. Close off or remove every other seat/row of seats. Strategically continue regular service (or even increase it if necessary on certain routes/lines) to avoid overcrowding.
- Paid pandemic leave for anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19, exposed to them, or with family or child care obligations resulting from shutdowns.
- If service is reduced, retain employees and maintain wages and benefits.

More information for transit workers is available on the [ATU's COVID-19 website](#), and from NIOSH:

- [What Transit Station Workers Need to Know About COVID-19](#)
- [What Transit Maintenance Workers Need to Know About COVID-19](#)
- [What Rail Transit Operators Need to Know About COVID-19](#)
- [What Bus Transit Operators Need to Know About COVID-19](#)

### **Custodian, Janitor, Or Cleaner**

*I work as a custodian, janitor, or cleaner in a healthcare facility, factory, office building, or other essential business that is still open. What protections should my employer be providing? What cleaning supplies are effective and safe for me?*

**Your employer must provide you with the necessary PPE** (personal protective equipment) and ensure that the **area where you are cleaning is well-ventilated**. Your employer should train you in putting on and taking off any PPE, including fit-testing a respirator to ensure there is a proper seal. The training should also cover how to safely remove gloves and dispose of gloves and other materials so that the potentially infectious objects are not touching your skin or other surfaces.

**You have the right to know what chemicals you are using** and any health impacts they may have. Your employer must make each chemical's Safety Data Sheet (SDS) available to you and provide training about the chemicals and their health effects.

- [Cleaning Safely for COVID-19 fact sheet](#) from University of Washington, and [Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection](#) from the State of NY.
- If cleaning in a hospital, nursing home, or other healthcare facility or location where someone is/was confirmed to have COVID-19, extra precautions may be necessary:
  - more PPE such as an N-95 respirator, disposable isolation gowns, shoe covers, multiple layers of gloves.
  - more frequent cleaning.

- [Cleaning for Coronavirus \(Private Sector\)](#) fact sheet and [Cleaning for Coronavirus \(Public Sector\)](#) - the public sector fact sheet is specifically written with school custodians in mind, but can apply to any public sector custodians/cleaning workers.
- [Responsible Purchasing Network's List of Safer Disinfectants](#) that kill coronavirus.
- [List of Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#) (SARS-CoV-2 is the scientific name for the coronavirus)

## Airport Worker

*I work as a cabin cleaner, wheelchair attendant, or baggage handler at the airport (restaurant workers - check out the restaurant worker section further down). What protections should my employer be providing?*

- **All workers:** wear gloves and change them between tasks. Your employer should train you to safely remove and dispose of the gloves.
- **Cabin Cleaners:**
  - Wait until passengers have fully exited the plane before beginning to clean. Cleaners should work six feet apart from each other.
  - Airlines/cleaning companies should have enough staff/give staff enough time to clean and sanitize surfaces thoroughly according to CDC recommendations.
  - You should be provided with nitrile gloves so that you don't have to touch any surfaces directly, and your employer should train you how to remove and dispose of the gloves.
  - Don't touch your face while cleaning. Wash your hands after cleaning.
  - While cleaning and disinfecting surfaces is a good practice to prevent the spread of the virus, intense chemical use can also be a health hazard, especially if there is not good ventilation. See the section about cleaning (above) for more information.
- **Wheelchair attendants:** your company should provide you with surgical masks to offer to passengers who are coughing or sneezing, so they aren't sneezing/coughing on you, the wheelchair, or surfaces. The CDC recommends that flight attendants do this - wheelchair attendants could do the same thing.
- **Baggage handlers:** when loading/removing baggage, stay 6 ft or more from other workers as much as possible. When interacting with passengers, require that they keep a distance of 6 ft from you. You should be provided with nitrile gloves so that you don't have to touch any bags directly, and your employer should train you how to remove the gloves and dispose of them safely. Don't touch your face while working. Your employer should give you sufficient time to wash your hands between flights.

For more information, see the following resources from NIOSH:

- [Airline Catering Truck Drivers and Helpers](#)
- [Aircraft Maintenance Workers](#)
- [Airline Customer Service and Gate Agents](#)

- [What Airport Custodial Staff Need to Know About COVID-19](#)

## Childcare Provider - COMING SOON

*What protections should my employer be providing? How should my employer keep me, children, and their families safe?*

Contact MassCOSH with any immediate questions: [ben.w@masscosh.org](mailto:ben.w@masscosh.org).

## Delivery Driver - COMING SOON

*I work as a delivery driver for a business or a delivery company like UPS, Amazon, GrubHub, DoorDash, etc. What specific protections should my employer be providing?*

Contact MassCOSH with any immediate questions: [ben.w@masscosh.org](mailto:ben.w@masscosh.org).

## Restaurant Worker

*What protections should my employer be providing?*

In San Francisco, **every restaurant and grocery store must fill out and display [this document](#) to demonstrate that they have taken measures to protect employee health**, prevent crowds from gathering, keep people six feet apart and to prevent unnecessary contact, and increased cleaning and sanitizing measures. **Recommended protection measures are listed in the document.**

## Trash/Recycling Collector

*What protections should my employer be providing?*

- Sanitation workers who load trash into the truck and clean behind the compressor blade need protection from splashing trash that may be contaminated by coronavirus. This PPE would include: properly-fitted face shields, puncture proof gloves, and rubber nitrile gloves.
- Keep as much distance as you can between you and the barrel or trash bag.
- When there is bulk trash, use mechanical equipment to lift it rather than manual lifting.
- If workers will be sitting in the cab together, they will need to wear N95 respirators which have been properly fit-tested.
- In many cases, runs are being reduced, increasing the amount of work in each run. Workers will become more tired and riding the steps will present increased risk of falling and getting run over. In no case, when riders are on the steps, should drivers exceed a speed of 10 mph and travel more than two tenths of a mile.
- The trucks need to be supplied with sufficient quantities of hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes which should be used regularly throughout the run. Physical distancing protocols need to be set and followed for the crew to stay safe, both on the ground and in the cab. Drivers need to regularly disinfect the inside of the cab and the steering wheel, door knobs, and window controls.

- When trucks are cleaned and sanitized at the end of each day, when possible, power wash the inside from as much distance as possible in order to optimize prevention of contact with spray. Wear a Tyvek suit, a properly-fitted face shield, nitrile gloves, and use an N95 respirator.
- Municipalities should declare that during the pandemic emergency, home-owners should not put spring-cleaning trash out for regular collection. This presents an unnecessary set of additional hazards and risks to sanitation crews.
- Throughout the day, wash hands as regularly as possible. Trucks and facilities need to be equipped with hand cream to prevent skin from drying after repeated washing. When you get home, protect your family. If you are unable to wash and change clothes before you get home, put your clothes in the washing machine and shower before you greet family members with a kiss and hug.

This [industry website](#) has more information. Particularly useful will be the role-specific suggestions. However, note that the website has the profits of employers and owners in mind, not necessarily trash & recycling collectors' health and safety as its top priority.

[Click here for stories](#) from waste & recycling workers on the frontlines, from the Teamsters.

### **Factory/Processing Plant Worker**

*What protections should my employer be providing?*

The following protections are based on [recommendations from the United Food & Commercial Workers union \(UFCW\)](#) for meatpacking, poultry, and other food processing workers. All factory or processing plant workers should also review guidance in the section above regarding [critical information for all workers](#).

### **Increase Distance Among Workers**

- Increase transport options so that workers are not packed into vans or buses to get to and from work.
- Reduce staffing levels on lines so workers can be spaced more safely. This may require reduced line speeds. Redesign work spaces, tables, processing tables and break rooms to increase distance between workers to 6 ft if possible.
- Stagger lunch and break times; make training rooms or additional areas available for lunches and breaks so workers can keep safe distances;
- Reduce meeting sizes, including orientation.
- Identify places workers tend to congregate such as by the time clock or in cafeteria lines
  - Consult with workers for ways to maintain distance between workers in these places.

## Clean and Sanitize the Plant

Every meatpacking, poultry and food processing company has qualified staff who develop sanitation protocols for food safety. They should make the cleaning and disinfecting plans for shared spaces like break areas, bathrooms, lunchrooms and training rooms. They should also address high-touch surfaces like vending machines, railings, doors, and microwaves.

- Do NOT rely on protocols developed by local management unless they are qualified. Ask what their qualifications are. One meatpacking employer developed a cleaning protocol based on anti-bacterial cleaners, which didn't work because COVID-19 is not caused by bacteria, it's caused by a virus. Request a copy of the written protocol. It should specify [EPA-registered disinfectants](#), and should include separate cleaning and disinfecting steps.
- If PSSI or QSI are contracted to do the cleaning and sanitation of common spaces and frequently touched surfaces, ask to see the protocol.
- Be sure they are provided enough time to fulfill all the additional sanitizing tasks. There should be enough cleaning staff to meet all new assignments.
- Find out if they will be in the plant to clean lunchrooms, break areas, training rooms and bathrooms at appropriate frequencies. Note: once per day is not adequate. Lunchrooms and break rooms should be cleaned and disinfected between groups.
- Provide plenty of gloves so they can be replaced as needed: at least before each break and at the end of shift, after using the restroom, before eating, and if they tear. Workers should be trained to put on, wear, and remove gloves safely.

## Personal Protective Equipment in Food Processing - COMING SOON

### PCA, Home Health Aid or Community Health Worker

*I regularly go to my client's/patients' homes. How do I stay safe and keep my clients/patients safe?*

[Click here to see the full guide](#) for Massachusetts PCAs to help you decide whether or not to continue providing care to a client, and ways to reduce the spread of the virus. **Note that this guide is somewhat outdated: where it mentions international travel to areas with many COVID-19 cases, that is no longer relevant since most new cases in MA did not involve international travel.**

- If you know or suspect that you are sick or have been exposed to COVID-19, do not go into work. You will likely be eligible for unemployment benefits.
- If you know or suspect that your client is sick or has been exposed to COVID-19, the client should first speak to their healthcare provider before seeing you.

- If you are at high-risk of COVID-19 (over 60 years old, or have an autoimmune disease or respiratory health issue), live with someone who is at high risk, or are otherwise concerned about getting infected, do not provide care to your client. If you are documented, you will likely be eligible for unemployment benefits. Unfortunately, undocumented workers are not eligible and should not apply.
- If you do continue to provide care to that client:
  - they should wear a mask.
  - you should wear gloves, an N95 respirator, and potentially an isolation gown, shoe covers, and a plastic sneeze guard (when you are very close to the client. Your employer (or the MA PCA/SEIU 1199 training program) should train you in how to use and safely remove all of these elements of PPE. The equipment should be provided for you, you should not have to purchase your own equipment.
  - keep a distance of 6 feet or more when possible.
  - when returning to your vehicle/home, remove any outer layers of clothing (if you were not wearing an isolation gown, etc.)
- [View this resource](#) for more information about masks and other safety practices in homecare. For more information about homemade masks, see the home made mask section below.
- If you are caring for a client who has COVID-19, you should not care for other clients as that may spread the virus.

### Healthcare Worker

*Nurses, doctors, CNAs, other clinicians, techs, physical therapist, case worker, receptionist or other staff in a healthcare facility. I work directly with (or am close to) patients who have or are likely to have COVID-19. What protections should my employer be providing? How do I stay safe while treating patients?*

- View this [comprehensive guide for selecting Personal Protective Equipment](#) when treating patients with COVID-19, from National Nurses United.
- Healthcare and other point-of-service workers need properly fitted respirators that filter out sub-micron particles. For an overview of the appropriate PPE needed for healthcare workers given the current shortages, see this fact sheet: [Action to Address the Shortage of Respirators and Facemasks in Healthcare for COVID-19](#).

**For more about homemade masks vs. proper respirator usage, see the following section.**

### Do homemade masks provide protection from COVID-19?

Networks of volunteers are generously making homemade masks to help make up for the shortage of respiratory protection available to the public and workers, especially healthcare workers, during the COVID-19 pandemic. **If you are a worker with risk of being exposed to the coronavirus and you have not been given a proper respirator, you may be wondering if a homemade mask will provide you with proper protection.**

**A homemade mask cannot prevent a worker from breathing in the coronavirus.** If you are working in conditions that put you at risk of exposure to the coronavirus in the air you are breathing, you need to wear a respirator designed for this purpose. Some experts say a homemade mask is better than wearing no breathing protection. That may be so, but no homemade mask can truly protect you from breathing in the coronavirus.

## **Respirators and Masks**

There are two basic types of respirators.

1. Air-purifying: uses a filter to remove contaminants from the air you breathe (e.g. N95 respirators).
2. Atmosphere-supplying: provides clean, breathable air from an uncontaminated source.

Air-purifying respirators are usually tight-fitting so that no contamination is in the air you breathe. Sometimes an air-purifying respirator will have a motor that pushes the air through the respirator causing pressure that keeps contaminated air out of the face-piece. This is called a Powered Air-Purifying Respirator (PAPR) and should be used in areas of increased exposure.

Any tight-fitting air purifying respirator given to a worker must be fitted to their face to **ensure a tight seal** so that contaminated air doesn't leak into the respirator. The procedure for doing that is called a **fit-test**. [Here is an explanation](#) from OSHA about what a fit-test looks like. The fit-test should be done by a trained person.

**Surgical masks are not respirators.** They do not completely prevent your exposure to contaminated air. They cannot make a tight seal on your face. They capture infectious agents that may be in your breath so you don't expose others around you.

An N95 respirator can be fitted to your face to make a relatively tight seal. An N95 respirator is made with a special material 'melt blown fabric' which can filter out microscopic particles that can carry a virus. These devices are designed for single use. Therefore, it becomes harder to keep the tight fit with repeated use. **N95s should not be used more than 5 times**, and the number of times for safe reuse depends on how long each use lasts and how much the straps and mask material has been stretched, soiled, or crushed/bent. If an N95 respirator will be reused, it needs to be decontaminated and properly stored between uses. The tight fit to your face should be tested with each reuse.

Homemade masks are made of some kind of cloth fabric, such as cotton or a cotton/synthetic blend. It is not a melt blown fabric designed to filter out microscopic particles. They lack a metal band to shape the mask over your nose, and lack rigid edges that can be shaped to your face. They cannot create a tight fit on your face. They cannot keep you from breathing in air that carries the coronavirus.

Healthcare and other point-of-service workers need properly fitted respirators that filter out sub-micron particles. The coronavirus (SARS CoV-2) is transmitted through close range aerosols which cannot be filtered via surgical and homemade masks. N95 respirators are required, at a

minimum. Homemade masks may be useful for the general public to wear while outside, especially if you may be infectious, as they likely can absorb the bigger droplets (from sneezes and coughs and just from talking), like an unfitted surgical mask would do. The CDC and the Mayor of Boston have recommended wearing homemade masks while out in public for this reason. Surgical masks should be given to infected hospital patients. This could free up the N95s to protect health care workers. A 2015 study published in the British Medical Journal used proper research methods to compare medical masks and cloth masks. The study results caution against using cloth masks, warning of infection risks due to the fabric holding moisture from breath, reuse of contaminated cloth masks, and poor filtration ability.

# HOW TO WIN DEMANDS FOR A HEALTHY AND SAFE WORKPLACE

Use the previous sections of this toolkit to figure out what demands you and your co-workers want to make for your workplace. Once you have a set of demands, the tools below can help you and your co-workers or fellow union members to organize and win those demands.

## Tools To Support Organizing

- [Letter template for inviting your co-workers to take action](#)
- [Letter template to employer if laid off or about to lose work](#)
- [Call to action to co-workers if about to be laid off](#)
- Extensive worker rights info and demands are listed in [this section of the toolkit](#).

**Organizing Tip #1:** Document any unsafe working conditions with notes and photos.

**Organizing Tip #2:** Take action along with your co-workers or fellow union members. When workers act together in their collective interest, that action can be legally protected under federal labor law (protected concerted activity).

Thank you to [Arise Chicago](#), [Raise the Floor Alliance](#), and [National Legal Advocacy Network](#) for these tools and templates.

## GE Workers in Lynn Organize for Health, Safety and Jobs during the COVID-19 Pandemic

IUE-CWA Local 201 members at the General Electric plant in Lynn, MA organize to protect their jobs *and* the public's health during the coronavirus pandemic.

Below is a summary of the organizing steps that IUE-CWA Local 201 is using to protect their workers' health and welfare while applying their manufacturing expertise to produce badly needed medical ventilators during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a snapshot of their well-timed organizing efforts, which parallel State and Federal directives for workplaces and the public to slow the impacts of the pandemic. You can see the Union's updates, list of demands, petition, and other information [on their website](#).

**These “*Organizing for Health and Safety Steps*” can be a guide for other workplaces.**

## The Background

Most of the production at the GE plant in Lynn, Massachusetts, is “essential” defense work. Union members are required to work despite business closings and the “stay-at-home” order by Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker. The sprawling factory is hard to clean. Machinists share equipment and sit at the same workbenches and use the same tools as the previous shift. Assemblers and bench hands and inspectors typically work next to one another. Everyone needs

to access the same tool cribs and bathrooms. Even in this crisis, hand sanitizer runs out immediately, and union representatives have to constantly demand more soap.

Members of Local 201 of the International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers/Communications Workers of America (IUE-CWA) are proud of their work.

As work slowed on the commercial side of aviation, union members wanted to put their skills to work building ventilators. They watched desperate doctors and nurses getting sick and dying, begging for personal protective equipment and ventilators, knowing that the capacity to answer that need is in their own hands and skills. As Local 86004 President Jake Aguanaga in Arkansas City, Kansas, put it, "If GE trusts us to build, maintain, and test engines which go on a variety of aircraft where lives are at stake, why can't they trust us to build ventilators?"

GE Aviation had already announced the layoff of 10% of the division workforce. GE Healthcare already produces ventilators, but rather than give new work to GE shops, the corporation struck a deal with GM and Ford instead. GE unions suspect that the corporation, in typical "disaster capitalism" fashion, will take advantage of the crisis to switch more production to non-union locations.

[See full article](#) by Jeff Crosby, former President of Local 201 for almost 20 years.

## Local 201 Organizing Steps and Timeline

### Request to Bargain over workplace conditions: 3/13/20

The union requests information from GE including Pandemic Protocols/Processes and impacts on the bargaining unit workers at each site. In addition, the union submits its position on:

- **Discipline:** The Union's position is that no member should be disciplined for missing work due to issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Paid Sick Leave:** We proposed the Company increase the amount of paid sick leave during this crisis.

### Internal Organizing: 3/16/20 - 3/18/20

- [5S Platform was distributed](#) (Supplies, Sanitization, Six Feet, Sick Time, Service the Public) with a clear health and safety message and readiness to re-engineer the Lynn Plant for the manufacture of ventilators.
- **Bulletins and text messages:** As the union continues to bargain with GE over absences and paid sick time policy, leaders regularly update the membership.
- **Calls flood Human Resources:** The company's policy for evaluating the risk of members was being dealt with on a case by case basis. It was cumbersome and prone to delays and errors in a time that demands swift action. The union directed its members to call HR - and the union - for absences due to a medical condition that put them at greater

risk or need for excused absences; having childcare issues, eldercare issues, or any other change due to the pandemic.

### **Increase Pressure on the Company while continuing to negotiate: 3/28/20 - 3/31/20**

- **“Sick Out” and “Protected Union Activity”** - Workers in Building 74 walked off the job after a co-worker who had close contact with a COVID-19-positive person was sent home. The second shift gathered in the parking lot and chose not to work in “abnormally dangerous conditions for work,” opting to use their sick time. The union stated that this is protected activity (not a strike) under the National Labor Relations Act. The third shift followed suit.

### **Expand Campaign to Allies and the Public (3/30/20)**

- The International IUE-CWA organized a national protest after the workers in Lynn walked off the job and reported “sick”.
- GE workers held a silent vigil showing the appropriate 6ft distancing in front of the plant in Lynn and at GE headquarters in Boston.
- [Local](#) and [national](#) media coverage gets the message out.
- Social media is being used to communicate this campaign with members and the public during a time where people are not allowed to meet together in groups.
- Social media is being used to communicate this campaign with members and the public during a time where people should not meet together in groups.

### **Assess progress and keep organizing: (4/2/10)**

- GE responds that it will implement [enhanced health and safety protocols](#).
- With another positive COVID-19 case in the plant and upon hearing reports from medical professionals that the height of the pandemic in Massachusetts will arrive around April 7th, the Union calls for a [two week shut down](#) to give them the opportunity to fight for their safety demands, protocols, sick time, get adequate PPE, and let the Company implement temperature testing and other changes important to the safety of the membership.
- **Member Survey:** Union launches membership survey to assess member’s access to health and safety protections, hardships such as childcare, health conditions for family and members and support for the Union’s 5S Demands.
- **Group Grievance and Community Petition:** The union started a petition for their members and for public support. [Sign it to support their demands!](#)

## MA Construction Workers & Unions Fight to Put Safety and Health Over Profit

While Governor Baker's stay-at-home order considered all construction to be essential work, construction workers themselves have found it impossible to practice physical distancing of 6ft and take other necessary health precautions while on the job. As a result, an increasing number of construction unions are calling for a shut down for all but the truly essential work (e.g. construction of emergency hospitals).

- On March 17, 2020 Boston Mayor Marty Walsh ordered construction sites in Boston to shut down effective at close-of-business on March 23, 2020, with the exception of emergency work including work at public health facilities, healthcare facilities, shelters and temporary shelters. Understanding that workers on construction sites cannot always social distance, lack proper handwashing facilities, etc. he stated, "I'm going to put the life of the construction worker ahead of anything else."
- Effective March 24, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker ordered the closing of "all businesses and organizations that do not provide 'COVID-19 Essential Services' in Massachusetts". His emergency order deemed construction an essential service. He maintained that the list of essential businesses "is based on federal guidance and amended to reflect the needs of Massachusetts' unique economy."
- In March, construction sites in Cambridge, Somerville, Watertown; and Easthampton public construction sites were closed by order of these municipalities.
- In a March 25<sup>th</sup> letter to all municipalities in Massachusetts, Governor Baker's chief legal council reminded cities and towns that the Governor had deemed construction an "essential service" and construction workers part of Massachusetts "essential workforce." The letter also stated that the Governor's order "makes inoperative any order or rule issued by a municipality that will or might in any way impede or interfere" with the Governor's order.
- Boston Mayor Marty Walsh pushed back, and extended his halt of Boston construction sites "indefinitely."
- Following that, Governor Baker declared that it would be up to local officials to decide when to reopen their construction sites.
- On March 31, the [Massachusetts Building Trades Council called on Governor Baker](#) to suspend all regular activity on Massachusetts construction sites beginning April 3, 2020, allowing only emergency work to continue, including work at healthcare facilities and shelters. Their press release stated, "The only way to protect the health and safety of our members, their families and of the general public is to keep people apart. It is impractical and, in many cases impossible to safely work on a construction project right now given the current state of affairs." Thus far, there has been no such action on the part of the Governor.
- On April 2, the North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters [sent a letter](#) to their Construction Industry Partners stating that "...it has become apparent that working on construction sites in Massachusetts is abnormally dangerous, and that continuing to work on construction sites poses an immediate threat of harm to the health and safety of ...members and the public." Effective Monday, April 6, 2020, the letter directed members to cease working on Massachusetts construction sites "until it is safe to do so." The directive exempts health facilities being built to address the COVID-19 crisis.

- The International Union of Painters and Allied Trades Council 35 in Massachusetts [issued a similar letter](#) stating “Effective at the close of business on April 6, 2020, I am directing all District Council 35 construction members to stop working until it is safe to resume. This directive does not apply to our construction members working on critical infrastructure projects or to any work being done on structures being built to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.” The letter further stated, “I am proud to report that the members I have spoken with are most concerned with their health, the health of their loved ones and not being a negative factor in the spread of the COVID-19 virus. These stories from our members has filled me with a great sense of pride and I can tell you I have never been more honored to lead this great organization.”

## **PAID SICK TIME, UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE AND OTHER BENEFITS**

MA Attorney General's Office - Fair Labor Division FAQ:

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/frequently-asked-questions-about-covid-19-employee-rights-and-employer-obligations>

Greater Boston Legal Resources on Housing and Unemployment Insurance:

<https://www.gbls.org/covid-19-information>

[FAQ: Leave and Benefit Rights in MA](#)

[Greater Boston Labor Council COVID-19 Crisis Resource Guide for Union Members](#)

Financial resources for undocumented workers/families(who cannot access state and federal benefits): [www.massundocufund.org](http://www.massundocufund.org)

Watch the [Virtual Town Hall](#) on Worker Safety and Your Rights (held by Mass Jobs with Justice, MassCOSH, and the Attorney General's Fair Labor Division office on 3/19/2020)