Planning for COVID-19: Should you worry?

Should you be concerned about the coronavirus? Yes. Should you panic? No.

It is a greater concern than the flu – the vaccine for seasonal flu reduces its annual impact, and we have medications to treat it. We don't have a vaccine or specific medications for COVID-19. Because it is so new, people haven't developed immunity to it. It's spreading more rapidly than the flu and to date, the death rate from it has been much higher than from flu.

What effect would it have on your company?
·   More employees out sick, so you may be short-staffed. Having fewer people do more can lead to more injuries.
·   Supply chain interruptions, so you're short on parts
·   Customer demand down

You can lessen the effect on your company by keeping people healthy and by planning for the interruptions

Keep people healthy:
·   Remind and encourage employees to wash their hands frequently, for 20 seconds (long enough to sing the birthday song twice or the alphabet song)
·   Have hand sanitizer available. Provide disposable wipes to encourage employees to wipe down desks, tools, keyboards, or other surfaces they often touch.
·   Line trash containers so custodians do not have to touch the trash.
·   Routinely clean surfaces, especially frequently touched ones (countertops, refrigerator doors, door handles).
·   Actively encourage employees who are sick to stay home.
    o   Do you require a doctor's note for absences? Consider foregoing that for respiratory illnesses. You don't want sick infectious people spreading disease either at work or at the doctor's office.
    o   Sick family members? Encourage those employees to stay home, too.
·   Separate people. No company meetings for now. If you can keep people at least six feet apart, the chance for transmission drops.

Do you need to provide personal protective equipment such as gloves or face masks? No. And providing them will backfire if that makes people forget to wash hands or cover their cough. A surgical-type mask worn by a sick person protects people <u>around</u> that person, by catching potentially infectious respiratory secretions (such as a runny nose) at the source. It doesn't protect the wearer.

Plan for Disruption
This should be an addition to or part of your business continuity plan.
·   How will you fare with absent workers? They might not even be sick, but may need to stay home because their children's schools are closed or because they were near infected people.
    o   Can some people work from home? What do you need to do to make that happen (think about computer access and security)?
    o   Can job tasks be postponed or given to someone else? What cross-training is needed?
·   What are your critical supply chains? How could those be interrupted? Do you have backup plans or alternative suppliers?
·   Can you limit employee contact with the public, customers, or vendors?
    o   Can employees keep their distance?

Engage employees when developing your plan. Be flexible: some of the information is changing frequently. Make sure employees know what your plan is.

If you have questions, please reach out to us.

Posters
The CDC offers a number of posters that can be printed. These cover topics from spreading germs, hand washing, fact sheets and recognizing symptoms.
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html

Minnesota Department of Health also has a large number of posters available for download.
https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html

OSHA recordability
If an employee contracts COVID-19 on the job, it would be an OSHA-recordable illness. That's reasonable if you employ health care workers, emergency responders, or others likely to have direct, close contact with someone who is sick. If you're a manufacturer, COVID-19 may still be considered OSHA-recordable, if the most likely way the employee became sick was from someone else at work (all the more reason to keep sick people at home)

Resources
OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19
https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf

OSHA web page for COVID-19   https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/

CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html

CDC Coronavirus website https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

Minnesota Department of Health Coronavirus Disease 2019 website
https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html