

## **Handling Your Employees During COVID-19**

COVID-19 is presenting unique challenges to employers who are attempting to balance employee safety while also maintaining operations. With information rapidly changing day by day, it is vital that employers maintain an open line of communication with their employees. Employers should stress to their employees that their number one goal is to maintain the safety and well-being of each employee. If your company is considered “essential” then it is up to the employer to determine whether they want to continue working in office, or whether to initiate the work from home policy. In order to maintain the health and safety of the workforce, employers can tell employees that have a cough, fever, runny nose or other cold or flu-like symptoms to stay at home. However, employers should, to the extent possible, treat employees equally and apply policies non-discriminatorily, both during the pandemic as well as when the workplace returns to normal. If an employee refuses to come to work during COVID-19 - even though they are not ill and have not been exposed - employers CANNOT terminate employees for taking job-protected leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). If employers have the ability to allow employees to work remotely from home, employers should allow employees to do so. New federal legislation provides ten (10) days of paid leave for eligible employees of covered employers to take for certain COVID-19 related reasons. Employees of covered employers who are taking leave due to child’s school closing or lack of childcare are also entitled to partially paid leave for up to ten (10) weeks. As an employer it is important to remember to be passionate and considerate to your employees. This pandemic will not last forever and when the world begins to normalize again, employers will need dedicated employees to help rebuild.