

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Biological Hazards – Basic Principles of Social Distancing

[Reference: Paragraph (5)(a)(1) of OSHA Act of 1970 / Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) Guidelines / OSHA Alerts]

It only stands to reason that if you could totally avoid being around all other people, you would not pass along or contract an infection from another person. However, maintaining total isolation from other human beings for an extended period of time is not practical for most people.

That is where the concept of “social distancing” comes into play. Social distancing is just another way of saying that you need to stay away from others by a distance of at least six feet. That distance is based on the premise that most airborne infectious matter, when expelled by someone sneezing or coughing, will settle to the ground within six feet. While that is not always the case, it is a good rule of thumb recommended by the Centers for Disease Control, or CDC.

Some ways to achieve social distancing during our leisure time are to avoid going to places where there are other people, especially large groups of them. This includes staying away from places such as grocery stores, shops, restaurants, and movie theaters. Instead, try to stay at home and have groceries or food delivered, or watch a movie on TV or the internet instead of going out. Telecommuting from home to do your job, when possible, is another way to avoid other people.

Of course, there are some workplaces and activities where you may not be able to avoid other people. In those cases, you should try to minimize potential exposures to other people to the best extent possible. Some methods to utilize, if possible, include:

- Position work stations at least six feet apart
- Segregate close work stations with a partition
- Stagger times where people have to work in the same area

It is also critical for a person to self-isolate if they display symptoms of an infectious disease that can be spread by direct contact and/or through the air. They should stay in a separate living space at home, such as a spare bed room, and have someone leave their food and other items on a tray at the doorway for them to retrieve after they have moved away. And whatever you do, please do not report to work or any other crowded place where you can potentially expose others if you are infectious. Stay isolated for the time recommended by a healthcare provider or the period of time recommended by public health agencies such as the CDC.

Following social distancing practices, especially when used in conjunction with other safe practices such as using masks or gloves where appropriate, can help minimize the chances of spreading an infection to others who we would normally be around.

Are there any questions about today’s toolbox talk on social distancing? Thank you for your attendance today. Please be sure to sign the training certification form to ensure you get credit for attending today’s toolbox training session.

OSHA Guidance on Social Distancing at Work

OSHA is committed to protecting the health and safety of America's workers and workplaces, and issues this general information designed to keep workers safe.

Social (physical) distancing involves maintaining at least six feet of distance between people, and is an effective way to help reduce the risk of exposure to many infectious agents.

The following steps can help employers implement social distancing in the workplace:

- Workers are encouraged to stay home if they are sick.
- Any worker who begins to exhibit symptoms should isolate until they can either go home or leave to seek medical care.
- Establish flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), if feasible.
- In workplaces where customers are present, mark six-foot distances with floor tape in areas where lines form, use drive-through windows or curbside pickup, and limit the number of customers allowed at one time.
- Stagger breaks and rearrange seating in common break areas to maintain physical distance between workers.
- Move or reposition workstations to create more distance, and install plexiglass partitions.
- Workers are encouraged to bring any safety and health concerns to the employers' attention.

For more information, visit www.osha.gov