

# ALASKA VPP NEWSLETTER



## October 2020

### VPP Safety Coordinators

Another three months have passed since my last VPP newsletter was written and still we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, a pandemic that has completely changed the way many of us conduct business, socialize, and live our day-to-day lives. For AKOSH consultants, much of our work is centered around answering COVID-19 related questions. As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to increase, many employers are asking whether they must record cases of COVID-19. I've provided some guidance to two frequently asked questions that may be helpful to you.

### Is COVID-19 Considered an “Illness” under OSHA’s Recordkeeping Rule?

OSHA has stated that only confirmed cases of COVID-19 (testing positive) should be considered an illness under the recordkeeping rule. Therefore, if an employee simply comes to work with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (but not a confirmed diagnosis), this is most likely not recordable.

### When is a COVID-19 Case Considered Recordable?

If an employee has a confirmed case of COVID-19 (meaning they have tested positive) the employer needs to assess if the case was “work-related” under the recordkeeping rule. And if so, whether it meets additional recording criteria (*i.e.*, resulted in a fatality, days away from work, restricted duty, or medical treatment beyond first aid). Since quarantining after a positive COVID-19 case is mandatory in Alaska, this will most likely result in days away from work. The main issue for employers is whether or not a particular case is “work-related.”

If an employee develops COVID-19 *solely* from an exposure outside of the work environment, it would *not* be work-related, and therefore is not recordable.

Employers should consider the work environment itself, the type of work performed, risk of person-to-person transmission given the work environment, and other factors such as community spread.

For example, a healthcare work environment, where job activities are more likely to result in person-to-person exposure, would present a more likely scenario of work-relatedness than non-healthcare settings. Because each work environment is different, employers must conduct an individualized assessment when a confirmed case of COVID-19 is present.

**Below are links to websites that provide guidance to industries that have high COVID-19 exposure:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-seafood-processing.html>

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/construction.html>

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/emergency-response.html>

### Closing Comments:

We are all in this together.

If you have VPP questions, call Christian Hendrickson, at 907-269-4946 or e-mail him at: [christian.hendrickson@alaska.gov](mailto:christian.hendrickson@alaska.gov). Thanks for taking the time to read this newsletter.

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