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5 Tips for California Employers Facing COVID-19 Concerns, *SHRM*

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Many employers are confused about how to answer coronavirus-related questions from employees—particularly after Gov. Gavin Newsom issued a "shelter-in-place" order requiring residents to stay at home unless they are conducting essential business. The order follows several similar ordinances at the county level and is meant to curb the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus.

Whether you are an "essential business" exempted from these orders and trying to hire and retain workers to maintain operations, or unfortunately, having to lay off employees due to lack of customers, here are some key issues to keep in mind when navigating COVID-19's impact on the workplace.

1. Promote Safe and Healthy Work Environments

If you operate an essential business that is exempted from the shelter-in-place order, you should continue to implement health and safety protocols suggested by the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (known as Cal/OSHA). Suggested practices aimed at protecting against bacteria and viruses include:

- **Encouraging sick employees to stay home.**
- **Sending employees with acute respiratory illness symptoms home immediately.**
  Providing information and training to employees on cough and sneeze etiquette, hand hygiene, and the like.

To the greatest extent feasible, essential businesses must comply with "social-distancing" requirements, particularly when customers are standing in line. Some Trader Joe's stores, for example, are allowing customers in only when others exit.

The shelter-in-place orders require social distancing of at least six feet from other individuals, no gatherings of more than 10 people at any time, washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as frequently as possible or using hand sanitizer, covering coughs or sneezes (into the sleeve or elbow, not hands), regularly cleaning high-touch surfaces, and not shaking hands. These rules are practically and medically grounded to prevent the spread of the virus.

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