



# ACT FAST AGAINST COVID-19

New Strategies to Protect  
Your Workforce

**An Employer Toolkit**

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# THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

1

COVID-19 continues to affect the labor market and remains a threat to employees whose underlying health puts them at a high risk of severe illness—a group that includes 3 in 5 Americans.



2

The announced end of the COVID-19 national emergency may inspire employers to focus on this vulnerable population and empower these workers to access the treatment that is available to them.



3

Treatment is highly effective, but it must be started quickly—within the first 5 days of symptoms.

4

Due to that time urgency, employees should learn their risk for getting very sick now and act quickly if they become ill with COVID-19.



5

Employers can protect employee health by providing the resources that educate workers about their risk and about making a plan for treatment.

# INTRODUCTION

The coming end of the COVID-19 national emergency does not mean the virus is no longer a serious threat.

But it is true that the risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 is not the same for everyone. For those who are at greater risk, treatment is available that studies have shown to be safe and effective. You can help employees understand their risks and how to access treatment to prevent them from getting severely ill.

**The challenge:** Roughly 3 in 5 Americans are vulnerable to getting very sick from COVID-19—but many likely don't realize it.

**The opportunity:** The U.S. government has purchased oral prescription COVID-19 treatments and is making them available to patients at no charge. Treatment must be started within the first 5 days of symptoms, so it is critical to educate employees now so they (or their family members) act as soon as they develop symptoms.

- **Heads up:** The federal government has committed to providing treatment free, while supplies last, even if that comes after the end of the COVID-19 national emergency on May 11, 2023. While the treatment itself is free, employees may face a co-pay or out-of-pocket cost to speak with a healthcare professional who can write the prescription.

The defensive actions your company took against COVID-19 in 2022 are still vital. As the COVID-19 national emergency comes to an end, consider helping your employees go on offense against the virus, too, with an at-home, oral treatment for those who are eligible. It all starts by getting your teams to **know their risk** and **make a plan** to contact a healthcare professional for treatment.

**This toolkit will help you move into action. Inside you'll find:**

- The Business Case for Action
- Communication Tips
- Key Messages
- Answers to Common Questions
- Sample Email for Employees Who Call Out Sick
- Sample Social Media Content
- Additional Resources



The Health Action Alliance is a unique collaboration between leading business, communications and public health organizations to help employers navigate evolving health challenges, improve the health of workers and engage with public health partners to build stronger, healthier communities. Learn more at [healthaction.org](https://healthaction.org).

## THIS TOOLKIT WAS DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH



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Learn more about Ada's COVID-19 Care Journey.



Learn more about COVID-19 at <https://www.covid19knowmore.com/>

## EDITORIAL NOTE

The Health Action Alliance is solely responsible for the content of this toolkit and maintains full editorial control of its resources.

# THE BUSINESS CASE FOR ACTION

Educating your employees about their risk of severe COVID-19 illness and the treatments available to them is foremost about protecting the health of your people. It may also be an effective strategy for limiting absenteeism, reducing costs and ensuring business continuity.



## COVID-19 continues to affect the labor market.

A new [analysis](#) by McKinsey estimates the number of workdays lost to COVID-19 illness in the U.S. at 315 million to 1 billion in 2022 alone—the equivalent of 1.3 million to 4.3 million Americans leaving the workforce.



## Promoting treatment is a new approach to complement your COVID-19 prevention strategies.

When your employees know their risk for getting very sick and the treatment options available to them, they are empowered to take control of their health. An education campaign complements efforts to accelerate vaccination, improve ventilation and encourage masking.



## Treatment can save lives, prevent people from getting very sick and reduce the risk of long COVID.

While medical experts continue to study the prevalence and effects of long COVID, a major [study](#) from the Veterans Administration shows that treatment can also reduce the risk of long COVID symptoms—including those that could limit a person's ability to work—by 25%.



## Employees are counting on you for trustworthy information.

The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer [shows](#) that employers remain the most trusted institution in the country. And people are looking to their employers for reliable information: Those who say business should deliver more trustworthy information outnumber by 5 to 1 those who say business is already overstepping.

# COMMUNICATION TIPS

Prepare your communications rollout in two phases:

## PHASE 1: Broad-Based Education

### Use all available communication channels.

Share key messages through company-wide emails, intranet messages, in-office signage, town hall events and team meetings. Spread out your communications over several days to create a steady drumbeat and ensure the message won't be missed.

### Get managers talking.

Key messages can be included in team updates and regular check-ins.

### Get creative to reach workers without computer access.

There are [links between low wages and the underlying health concerns](#) that put some workers at increased risk for getting very sick from COVID-19. To ensure you're reaching workers without steady access to a computer (including low-wage, hourly, part-time, service workers and others), think beyond email and intranet to include text messaging, prominently displayed QR codes or breakroom "takeovers" that surround employees with key messages.

### Enlist your employee resource groups (ERGs).

The risks of getting very sick with COVID-19 may hit especially close to home for certain ERGs at your company, including those for older employees, workers with disabilities or mental health concerns, and Black or Hispanic workers, who face higher rates of some medical conditions as a result of systemic health inequities. Work with these groups to reiterate the education messaging to their members.

## PHASE 2: Targeted Communication for Sick Employees

### Develop a targeted communication plan for employees who call in sick.

COVID-19 treatment must be taken in the first 5 days of symptoms. To ensure sick employees don't lose valuable time, consider automated messaging to any employee who calls in sick, urging them to contact a healthcare provider immediately if they have COVID-19 symptoms, especially if they have tested positive. (See our [Sample Email for Employees Who Get Sick](#).)

### Consider reimbursing costs for seeking rapid treatment and promoting that support.

If your company can reimburse employees for out-of-pocket telehealth visits, include that in your outreach to remove any hesitation among your employees to take fast action when they get sick.

### Share employee stories.

Personal stories are powerful. If an employee has accessed COVID-19 treatments and is willing to share their experience, include it in your outreach. Your ERGs may be able to help source willing employees.

## A MESSAGE FROM ADA

Ada's [COVID-19 Care Journey](#) was developed to help when - not if - COVID-19 strikes. Share [this brochure](#) with your employees and help them understand their risk for progression to severe COVID-19 and take action when feeling sick by speaking with a [telehealth professional](#).

For more on how to support your employees, [read here](#).

# KEY MESSAGES

Most Americans have a high-risk factor that could make them eligible for oral, at-home treatments if they're diagnosed with COVID-19. But treatment must be started in the first 5 days of symptoms, so acting fast is essential. Encourage workers to **know their risk** of getting very sick and **make a plan** to get treatment. Here are key messages you can share.

## Know your risk.

Know your risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. The more underlying conditions you have, the greater your risk. Common risk factors include:

- Age over 50
- Overweight or Obesity
- Asthma
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Heart Conditions
- Pregnancy
- Smoking (current or past)
- Being unvaccinated or unboosted
- Many other medical conditions

## Monitor yourself for COVID-19 symptoms.

Treatment is only available if you have symptoms AND one or more risk factors AND a medical professional has diagnosed you with COVID-19. A positive test may confirm that you have COVID-19, but you do not need to get tested before contacting a medical professional for treatment. Common symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea



# KEY MESSAGES CONTINUED

## **Act fast for treatment.**

Treatment is available by prescription, and must be started within the first 5 days of symptoms—so don't wait to contact a medical professional to ask about treatment. You don't need to have a primary care doctor—you can make a telehealth call with a medical professional or visit one of the thousands of one-stop [Test-to-Treat locations](#) to find out if you're eligible for treatment.

## **Treatment is convenient and free.**

COVID-19 treatment is available in the form of a pill, currently provided for free by the U.S. government (there may be a cost to speak with a medical professional who can write the prescription).

## **Treatment is highly effective, studies show.**

The antiviral treatment Paxlovid, a medication taken at home, in pill form, was shown to be [89% effective](#) at reducing the risk of hospitalization among people who were unvaccinated for COVID-19 and at high risk of severe illness. In a follow-up [study](#), U.S. adults (both vaccinated and not) who were prescribed Paxlovid after getting COVID-19 were only half as likely as other patients to require hospitalization.

## **Studies show the treatment is safe.**

Available treatments are authorized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Serious side effects are not common. A doctor or pharmacist can make sure treatments won't conflict with any medications you currently take.

## **Prevention is still the best defense.**

Keeping your vaccination up to date with a [booster shot](#) still provides the best defense against COVID-19. But if you get COVID-19 despite being boosted, you may still be eligible for treatment if you have one or more risk factors for getting very sick.

## **Don't wait until you're very sick to act.**

COVID-19 treatments are available to keep a mild illness from getting worse. And they're only available in the first 5 days of symptoms. Know your risk of getting very sick, make a plan to contact a medical professional (call your doctor, make a telehealth appointment or visit a [Test-to-Treat location](#)) and act on your plan right away to ask for treatment.



# ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

These questions and answers are designed to be distributed directly to employees and equip managers and other leaders for conversations about oral antiviral treatments for COVID-19.

## How do I know if I can take an at-home COVID-19 medication?

Treatment is available to people who have COVID-19 symptoms AND one or more risk factors for getting very sick AND a diagnosis of COVID-19 from a medical professional. Your doctor or a pharmacist can make sure the treatment you're prescribed won't conflict with any medications you currently take.

## Do I need to test positive for COVID-19?

A positive test will confirm that you have COVID-19, but you do not need to get tested before contacting a medical professional for treatment.

## When should I take a COVID-19 treatment?

Treatment is only available in the first 5 days you're experiencing symptoms, and only by prescription—so don't wait to contact a doctor to ask if you're eligible.

## Are COVID-19 treatments effective?

Studies have shown the treatments to be effective. The antiviral treatment Paxlovid, a medication taken at home, in pill form, was shown to be 89% effective at reducing the risk of hospitalization among people who were unvaccinated for COVID-19 and at high risk of severe illness. In a follow-up study, U.S. adults (both vaccinated and not) who were prescribed Paxlovid after getting COVID-19 were only half as likely as other patients to require hospitalization.

## Are COVID-19 treatments safe?

Studies have shown the treatment to be safe. Serious side effects are not common. Possible side effects include an altered sense of taste, diarrhea, increased blood pressure and muscle aches.

## Where can I get at-home COVID-19 medication?

COVID-19 treatment is available by contacting your doctor, making a telehealth appointment with a medical professional or visiting one of the thousands of one-stop Test-to-Treat locations. Paxlovid may also be prescribed by your local pharmacist and is available at more than 40,000 locations nationwide.

# ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS CONTINUED

## Is there a cost?

COVID-19 treatments are currently provided at no cost by the U.S. government, while its supplies last. You may be responsible for fees, including a co-pay or out-of-pocket cost for a medical professional to assess whether you are eligible for treatment. At some point soon, treatments will be paid for in the commercial market. Your cost may vary depending on your health insurance coverage.

## Why should I get a booster shot if medications are available?

The new booster shot cuts your risk of getting COVID-19 by about half. Not getting COVID-19 in the first place is the best way to avoid serious illness, exposing others or dealing with the inconvenience of isolation or missing work.

## I am boosted. Should I still be thinking about COVID-19 treatments?

Yes. Keeping your vaccination up to date with a booster shot still provides the best defense against COVID-19. But if you get COVID-19 despite being boosted, you may still be eligible for treatment if you have one or more risk factors for getting very sick. By knowing your risk in advance, you can be ready to talk to your doctor about that risk and ask if treatment is right for you.

## Do I have to tell my employer about medical conditions that put me at risk of getting very sick from COVID-19?

No. You are encouraged to find out if you have any risk factors for getting very sick from COVID-19 only so that you can be prepared to contact a doctor right away if you get COVID-19 and ask about treatment.

## What is “COVID-19 rebound”?

A small percentage of people report a return or “rebound” of COVID-19 symptoms 2 to 8 days after their initial recovery—but this can occur regardless of whether they received treatment. It is not a result of COVID-19 treatment.

## A MESSAGE FROM ADA

### How can I help employees if they call in sick?

By sharing [Ada's simple questionnaire](#), your employees can assess whether they're at risk for progression to severe COVID-19 and can act within 5 days of experiencing symptoms. For a fee starting at \$18, employees can [talk to an independent telehealth provider](#) to determine treatment eligibility within 2 hours and get a prescription for an authorized oral antiviral, if eligible - consider reimbursing employees for this cost.

# SAMPLE EMAIL TO EMPLOYEES WHO CALL OUT SICK

**To:** Employee  
**From:** HR Leader  
**Subject:** Act Fast Against COVID-19

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Dear [employee name],

We are sorry you are not feeling well. We appreciate you taking care of your health and the health of our [Company Name] team by staying home to rest and recover. We want you to feel better—and this note has recommendations that may help you prevent your illness from becoming worse.

**Do you have symptoms of COVID-19?** Common symptoms include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

**Do you have one or more risk factors for getting very sick from COVID-19?** These include:

- Age over 50
- Overweight or Obesity
- Asthma
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Pregnancy
- Smoking (current or past)
- Being unvaccinated or unboosted
- Many other medical conditions

**If you answered YES to BOTH of these questions, we encourage you to contact a medical professional and ask about treatment for COVID-19.**

Treatment is available in the form of pills you take at home, and has been shown in studies to be highly effective at keeping people from getting very sick from COVID-19. It is available only by prescription for people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and have one or more risk factors for severe illness. If you are eligible for treatment, the prescription must be started in the first 5 days of symptoms. That's why you shouldn't wait to contact a medical professional.

**One final note:** If you test positive for COVID-19, let your manager know so we can plan a safe return to work together. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a 5-day isolation period following a positive test and possibly longer depending on your symptoms.

Please feel free to reach out if you need any additional support. We look forward to your healthy return.

Best,

**[Name of HR leader]**

# SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT



Download these graphics and more from [hlthact.org/act-fast-social](https://hlthact.org/act-fast-social)

The risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 is not the same for everyone. Find out your risk so you're ready to act fast if you get the virus. Learn more at [hlthact.org/covidrisk](https://hlthact.org/covidrisk)

3 in 5 Americans are at high risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. If you are one of them, you could be eligible for an at-home oral treatment. [hlthact.org/covidtreatments](https://hlthact.org/covidtreatments)

Go on offense against COVID-19. Find out whether you're eligible for convenient treatment at home to fight the virus if you get sick. [hlthact.org/covidtreatments](https://hlthact.org/covidtreatments)

Take control of your health. If you get sick with COVID-19, you may be eligible for treatment. Learn more and make a plan for treatment today. [hlthact.org/covidtreatments](https://hlthact.org/covidtreatments)

Treatment is now available to many people who get sick with COVID-19. You can find out if you're one of the 200 million Americans at risk of severe illness from the virus and be ready with a plan at [hlthact.org/covidconditions](https://hlthact.org/covidconditions)

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## HEALTH ACTION ALLIANCE'S TOP COVID-19 RESOURCES:

- [COVID-19 Endemic Readiness Tool](#)
- [COVID-19 Booster Toolkit](#)
- [COVID-19 Employer Policy Decision Tool](#)
- [All COVID-19 Employer Resources](#)

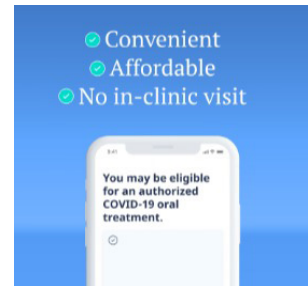
## PUBLIC HEALTH RESOURCES:

- [COVID-19 Treatments and Medications](#), CDC
- [People with Certain Medical Conditions](#), CDC
- [Factors That Affect Your Risk of Getting Very Sick from COVID-19](#), CDC
- [Frequently Asked Questions about Paxlovid](#), FDA
- [Paxlovid Information Sheet](#), U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services
- [Test-to-Treat Locator](#), U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

## A MESSAGE FROM ADA



Check out Ada's  
[COVID-19 Care Journey](#).



## A MESSAGE FROM PFIZER



- [COVID-19 Preparedness Plan](#)
- [Know Plan Go Employer One-Pager](#)
- [COVID-19 Insights for Employers](#)
- [COVID-19 Educational Pamphlet](#)

**DISCLAIMER:** Public health guidance on COVID-19 is evolving. Health Action Alliance is committed to regularly updating our materials once we've engaged public health, business and communications experts about the implications of new guidance from the public health community and effective business strategies that align with public health goals.

This toolkit is not intended to be, and should not be construed as, legal, business, medical, scientific or any other advice for any particular situation. The content included herein is provided for informational purposes only and may not reflect the most current developments as the subject matter is extremely fluid.

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