



# FAQ: COVID-19 Outbreaks in Workplaces *(Updated 8/17/21)*

## Q1. What is a COVID-19 outbreak?

A1. The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) defines a COVID-19 outbreak as...

**Two or more COVID-19 cases in 14 days and share an epilink**



**Epilink:** A place or someone that people who test positive for COVID-19 have in common

## Q2. Why does OHA report COVID-19 worksite outbreaks of five or more cases?

A2. While OHA defines outbreaks as at least two cases in separate households, we disclose workplaces with five or more cases because this provides evidence that there is transmission among this group of workers, rather than sporadic community transmission.

## Q3. What is an epidemiological link, aka epilink?

A3. An epilink is a place or person or a group of people who've tested positive for COVID-19 have in common, such as a workplace or family member. It serves as a link or connection between people who are confirmed to have COVID-19.

## Q4. Why are certain worksites being named as the site of an outbreak?

A.4 The OHA names businesses with five or more people who have COVID-19 that are:

1. associated with a single worksite (location) *and*
2. clustered in time (Two or more COVID-19 diagnoses in 14 days)

These people may be employees, close contacts, or members of their families. These individuals didn't necessarily contract COVID-19 at the worksite, but the worksite is the shared *epilink*.

*Close contact* means being within six feet of someone who has COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes cumulatively.

**Q5. Why does the OHA announce outbreaks at all?**

A5. Public reporting of outbreaks can help people better understand how disease transmission is happening in their communities. For example, if there are suddenly many more cases in a smaller county, reporting of a workplace outbreak responsible for many new cases can better illustrate why cases have spiked.

**Q6. Why are you including my employees' family members or close contacts in our case count?**

A6. Because outbreaks are determined by epilinks, every person diagnosed with COVID-19 who is associated with that epilink counts toward the outbreak total.

**Q7. Why don't you announce workplaces with fewer than 30 employees?**

A7. Protecting health information of Oregonians is a top priority and is required by law, so the OHA does not release information for small groups because it might be possible to figure out which individuals have any given illness.

For this reason, OHA also does not report specific case counts if more than 50% of employees test positive. In these situations, outbreaks are reported without case counts.

**Q8. Can someone with COVID-19 be associated with more than one outbreak?**

A8. Yes. Someone who has COVID-19 may be associated with multiple outbreaks. For example, a married couple may both have COVID-19. If each spouse has an outbreak at their respective worksites, they'll each be counted toward both outbreaks.

**Q9. If people are counted in two outbreaks, are they also counted twice in the county/state numbers?**

A9. No. Someone who tests positive is counted once, under only one jurisdiction. Epilinks are added to each case to help us assess transmission patterns, and more than one can be meaningfully applied to a given case.

**Q10. Why doesn't OHA list employees and close contacts?**

A10. We value protecting the identities of individuals. Providing names of those who test positive or may be ill may result in negative outcomes for them and their families.

**Q11. How long are outbreaks considered active or open?**

A11. The OHA keeps outbreaks open for 28 days from the last case's symptom onset to monitor for new cases. This number is based on two incubation periods (14 days) for COVID-19. If there are no new cases within 28 days, we can reasonably believe subsequent cases are not related to the earlier outbreak.

**Q12. How do we know we're out of the 28-day period?**

A12. If the case count at the worksite does not change for 28 days, the outbreak will be considered resolved and will be moved to a different section of the report. However, this does not mean that future outbreaks could not occur.

**Q13. Are the contacts part of the 28-day period?**

A13. Yes, if contacts were included in the original investigation of the outbreak, OHA will consider them during the same 28-day window.

**Q14. Why is OHA reporting resolved outbreaks now?**

A14. The decision to name the locations of large workplaces was announced by OHA Director Pat Allen on May 28th. You can read about that announcement at [healthoregon.org/coronavirus](https://healthoregon.org/coronavirus) and clicking on "COVID-19 news."

**Q15. Why is OHA not reporting the number of employees, the number of close contacts and the number of family members of employees at each workplace outbreak?**

A15. We value protecting the identities of individuals. In some workplaces, disclosing this information could lead to identification of individuals who test positive or may be ill and in addition to that being an unauthorized disclosure of personal medical information, could result in negative outcomes for them and their families.

**Document accessibility:** For individuals with disabilities or individuals who speak a language other than English, OHA can provide information in alternate formats such as translations, large print, or braille. Contact the Health Information Center at 1-971-673-2411, 711 TTY or [COVID19.LanguageAccess@dhsoha.state.or.us](mailto:COVID19.LanguageAccess@dhsoha.state.or.us).