

EEOC GUIDANCE ON THE ADA AND COVID-19

The EEOC recently issued guidance on the ADA and potential ADA implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ADA rules continue to apply even during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the ADA rules do not interfere with or prevent employers from following the guidelines and suggestions made by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), or state or local public health authorities. As the EEOC cautions, such guidance from public health authorities is likely to change as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves and employers should follow the most current information on workplace safety.

Here are some key questions and answers provided by the EEOC regarding employers and the COVID-19 pandemic:

How much information may an employer request from an employee who calls in sick, in order to protect the rest of its workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- During a pandemic, ADA-covered employers may ask such employees if they are experiencing symptoms of the pandemic virus. For COVID-19, these include symptoms such as fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat. Employers must maintain all information about employee illness as a confidential medical record in compliance with the ADA.

When may an ADA-covered employer take the body temperature of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Generally, measuring an employee's body temperature is a medical examination. Because the CDC and state/local health authorities have acknowledged community spread of COVID-19 and issued attendant precautions, employers may measure employees' body temperature. However, employers should be aware that some people with COVID-19 do not have a fever.

Does the ADA allow employers to require employees to stay home if they have symptoms of the COVID-19?

- Yes. The CDC states that employees who become ill with symptoms of COVID-19 should leave the workplace. The ADA does not interfere with employers following this advice.

When employees return to work, does the ADA allow employers to require doctors' notes certifying their fitness for duty?

- Yes. Such inquiries are permitted under the ADA either because they would not be disability-related or, if the pandemic influenza were truly severe, they would be justified under the ADA standards for disability-related inquiries of employees. As a practical matter, however, doctors and other health care professionals may be too busy during and immediately after a pandemic outbreak to provide fitness-for-duty documentation. Therefore, new approaches may be necessary, such as reliance on local clinics to provide a form, a stamp, or an e-mail to certify that an individual does not have the pandemic virus.

If an employer is hiring, may it screen applicants for symptoms of COVID-19?

- Yes. An employer may screen job applicants for symptoms of COVID-19 after making a conditional job offer, as long as it does so for all entering employees in the same type of job. This ADA rule applies whether or not the applicant has a disability.

May an employer take an applicant's temperature as part of a post-offer, pre-employment medical exam?

- Yes. Any medical exams are permitted after an employer has made a conditional offer of employment. However, employers should be aware that some people with COVID-19 do not have a fever.

May an employer delay the start date of an applicant who has COVID-19 or symptoms associated with it?

- Yes. According to current CDC guidance, an individual who has COVID-19 or symptoms associated with it should not be in the workplace.

May an employer withdraw a job offer when it needs the applicant to start immediately but the individual has COVID-19 or symptoms of it?

- Based on current CDC guidance, this individual cannot safely enter the workplace, and therefore the employer may withdraw the job offer.

You can find additional information at:

https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/wysk/wysk_ada_rehabilitaion_act_coronavirus.cfm

For More Information

If you have questions or want more information regarding the EEOC Guidance on the ADA and COVID-19, contact your legal counsel. If you do not have regular counsel for such matters, Berkowitz Oliver would welcome the opportunity to work with you to meet your specific business needs. Berkowitz Oliver's employment group regularly counsels employers about their obligations under federal and state laws. For more information, contact Kathleen Nemechek, Tim Millman, Jocelyn Villanueva, Sharon Stallbaumer or Megan Costello (contact information at <http://www.berkowitzoliver.com/our-people/>). Also, please visit our website at www.berkowitzoliver.com

This information is provided as of April 8, 2020. Of course, this is a rapidly evolving situation and new or revised guidance is likely. Please make sure to monitor continuing developments.

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