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Nurse Organizations Offer Safe Workplace Advice as NC Relaxes COVID-19 Restrictions

For Immediate Release

RALEIGH – North Carolina has managed to avoid some of the worst-case scenarios of the coronavirus pandemic through social distancing and an effective stay-at-home order that helped flatten the curve. As people across the state prepare to return to their workplaces, the North Carolina Nurses Association (NCNA) and the North Carolina Association of Occupational Health Nurses (NCAOHN) urge employers and workers alike to continue taking measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The Occupational Health Nurse (OHN), who works within various industry workplaces, is often a valuable resource for creating infection control practices and identifying health and safety issues for industries and their workers. The OHN is often the most qualified resource on a worksite to:

- maintain confidentiality and protect health information related to COVID-19 situations involving workers;
- monitor cases to determine eligibility for safe return to work, such as symptom screening results, receiving and reviewing test results, or tracing contacts at work and at home;
- coordinate with industry management COVID-19 policies specific to determining work relatedness (workers' compensation eligibility/OSHA recordability);
- coordinate with public health officials (DHHS) regarding testing, contact tracing, and management of a possible or confirmed company COVID-19 outbreak.

“Employers already value their workers, but they are also required by law to provide a safe and healthy workplace,” said NCNA member and NCAOHN President Karen Smith, BSN, RN, COHN-S. “In response to this pandemic, new cleaning procedures are being instituted throughout North Carolina, and work processes are being changed to protect against the spread of the COVID-19 virus in the workplace. Nurses can and should be an integral part of this planning process.”

COVID-19 is spread through the air during breathing and by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus. To combat being exposed and infected, there are four main ways to protect workers:

1. Keep social distancing of at least six feet apart to diminish the opportunity for the virus being transmitted from one worker to another. When this is not possible, physical barriers may be seen in some workplaces.
2. Wear a mask as a barrier to reduce the respiratory transmission of the virus to others.
3. Keep hands away from the face so as not to spread the virus by touching surfaces. If gloves are worn, the virus can be transmitted from the gloves to the eyes, nose or mouth.
4. Frequently wash hands with soap and water to constantly remove any virus and stop its transmission to and from hard surfaces. Wash hands after removing gloves as well. If hand washing is not possible, hand sanitizer can be an effective substitute.

According to the CDC, there are COVID-19 symptoms that should be reported to the Occupational



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Health Nurse before going to work. They include, fever of 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit, headache, cough, repeated shaking with chills, new loss of taste or smell, muscle ache, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting.

“As the public is allowed more mobility and admission to workplaces, we must remain aware that the virus is still here, strong, and transmissible,” said NCNA President Dennis Taylor, M.Ed., MBA, DNP, PhD, ACNP-BC, FCCM.

Some employers may require temperature checks and symptom screening questions before workers report to work. This is all in the interest of keeping the workplace safe and both NCNA and NCAOHN support these efforts. North Carolina is best served if all workplaces adhere to safe and healthy work practices and remain alert for any COVID-19 symptoms to report promptly.

More resources for employers regarding safe return to work strategies can be found at <http://aaohn.org/page/covid-19-resources-for-ohns>.

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ABOUT NCNA

As the leading professional organization for North Carolina’s registered nurses, we equip nurses at all stages to thrive in an ever-changing healthcare environment. NCNA helps keep North Carolina nurses on the cutting edge of nursing practice, policy, education, and more. Join us as we work to advance nursing and ensure high-quality healthcare for everyone.

Established in 1902, NCNA provides continuing education, networking and legislative advocacy for registered nurses throughout North Carolina. For more information, please visit www.ncnurses.org.

NCNA MISSION STATEMENT

The North Carolina Nurses Association serves the changing needs of its members, addresses nursing issues, and advocates for the health and well-being of all people.

About NCAOHN

The North Carolina Association of Occupational Health Nurses (NCAOHN) is the state’s professional organization of licensed nurses who promote the health and safety of workplaces, their employees and their families. For more information, please visit www.ncaohn.org.