



OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSES *in a pandemic*

The role of occupational health nurses (OHN) is to care and educate workers and their families about public health considerations such as the prevention of communicable disease, disease management, regulatory compliance, health education and promotion, emergency preparedness, program development and management, and much more. The OHN is versatile and part of the role is to prepare, assess, plan, implement, educate, and reevaluate as necessary.

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded in 2020, OHNs had the skillset to face the evolving impacts of the virus. The role of the OHN transforms into not only taking care of the normal occupational and non-occupational duties but expands to include developing policies to combat the spread of the virus to ensure our worker population remains safe and healthy. The OHN is working with other business teams such as IT, management, leadership, and professional specialty medical more than ever before.

The role of the OHN in the pandemic includes:

- development of new policies and procedures on the prevention and mitigation of transmission of the virus;
- educating the workforce with any new information on the virus, healthcare, prevention, resources, and treatment, by providing a platform with updated information and how it may affect the company and the employees;
- providing care for employees safely, implementing new procedures;
- implementation of disinfecting procedures throughout the workplace;
- implementation of screening tools and testing for individuals symptomatic to make sure the workforce is clear to report to work;
- specific measures will need to be taken to manage those who have COVID-related symptoms, such as issuing guidance on self-isolation, conducting medical risk-assessments and starting contact tracing to guide return-to-work decision making;
- implementation of a tracking system for employees in isolation or quarantine;
- implementation of new practices throughout the facility;
- communication with management and staff to ensure that the policies and procedures being developed and distributed have been implemented and are enforced;
- changing the layout of workstations and work areas to ensure physical distancing;
- making recommendations for providing appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to all employees, visitors, contractors, customers, and vendors.

As COVID vaccinations increase and newly circulating variants emerge, the OHN will continue to serve as a trusted expert, advisor, and advocate. The OHN's collaborative and leadership abilities will be central to supporting the overall vaccine deployment effort, ensuring vaccines are administered in a fair and equitable manner with the most vulnerable workers and members of the population prioritized. OHNs have demonstrated their value in caring for communities, workers, and businesses, and ensuring their optimal health and safety in a pandemic and every day.

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