



News Notes

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COVID-19 Update for Employers: Understanding the Epidemic and Practical Recommendations (April 20, 2020)

COVID-19 Update for Employers with Dr. Ray Fabius
Understanding the Epidemic & Practical Recommendations
Monday, April 20, 2020

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Viral Epidemic Expert Provides Employers a Roadmap to Reopening

Viral epidemic expert Ray Fabius, MD, provided LVBCH employers practical guidance regarding what they should do both now, and before re-opening, when stay-at-home restrictions imposed to slow the spread of COVID-19 are lifted. More than 100 employers attended the webinar featuring Dr. Fabius, Consulting Medical Director, Greater Philadelphia Business Coalition on Health and author of Population Health: Creating a Culture of Wellness.

When considering when to reopen, Dr. Fabius encouraged employers to coordinate with city or county health departments to determine the appropriate time. Without widespread testing good indications are the number of new cases in your area and the number of deaths. When these are on the decline it may be safe to reopen.

He encouraged employers to over-react early. “If it’s a matter of doing less or doing more, do more,” he said. Both now and on-going, Dr. Fabius’ said his best advice would be to have a medical director or clinical advisor or staff. Even small companies should consider having a physician on retainer.

Although there are discrimination considerations, he encouraged employers to consider bringing younger employees, such as those under age 55, back first. In fact, he hopes the Centers on Disease Control (CDC) will release guidelines related to age. In addition, consider staggering shifts or developing employee work pods of four or five people whose interaction is mostly limited to one another. Also cross-train personnel to perform essential functions.

Continuous communication with employees is crucial, he added. Provide continuous updates to your workforce regarding your company’s response to the pandemic. Keeping employees informed is therapeutic, he said.

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Other suggestions of what employers can do now are:

- Maximize resources for telework where viable
- Eliminate co-pays for tele-medicine visits
- Create an infectious disease outbreak plan
- Create guidance for the screening of all workplace contractors and guests
- Review and adjust as appropriate sick leave or accommodation requests from employees – inform employees of any revisions
- Establish an approach to employees who are not allowed in the office due to exposure or symptoms, communicate whether he or she will be paid, can use sick, vacation, or any other type of paid leave
- Work with employees facing travel restrictions and visa renewal issues
- Determine if additional obligations are imposed on your workplace by HIPAA's Privacy Rule
- Assure that your policies and practices meet pertinent OSHA (and CDC) standards, especially for health care employees when blood-borne pathogens may be present.
- Consider whether there are any issues that need to be addressed with the employees' bargaining representatives and whether provisions in the company's collective bargaining agreements require amendments

Next steps should include:

- Establishing a policy for those who had COVID 19 to return to work
- Determining an on-going payment status of workforce with sensitivity to employee financial health
- Educating leaders, managers and employees about Coronavirus-19 and on the company's planned response. Consider requiring employees to complete a training module

In addition, Fabius' presentation included lessons learned from South Korea, which reported its first case of Covid-19 on the same day as the United States. South Korea reported 10,674 cases and 236 deaths which amounts to a fatality rate of roughly 2%. But unlike the U.S., South Korea conducted early massive testing at a rate 40 times higher than in our country.

Dr. Fabius also discussed the Diamond Princess Cruise liner. The infection rate was roughly 20% with 800 or 3,700 passengers testing positive. Of those infected, 46.5% were asymptomatic when tested and 10 people died from the outbreak, a fatality rate or 1.25%, which is at least four times greater than influenza.

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Each year 24,000-60,000 people die from the seasonal flu, but he expects that deaths related to COVID-19 will exceed a bad flu season. However, perhaps one of the silver linings of COVID-19 is what it will teach people regarding the personal habits which may result in reduced incidence of the flu, Dr Fabius said, and he commended Americans' efforts to reduce the spread of the virus.

"We're doing a pretty terrific job of flattening the curve nationally," he said. "If we hadn't done anything it was estimated that 2.2 million Americans would have died from COVID-19."

ABOUT DR. RAY FABIUS



Dr. Fabius, Consulting Medical Director of the Greater Philadelphia Business Coalition on Health and author of Population Health, recently returned to his start-up, HealthNEXT – a GPBCH affiliate member company dedicated to the development of organizational cultures of health. Dr. Fabius' previous positions include serving as Chief Medical Officer of Truven Health Analytics, President and Chief Medical Officer for I-trax/CHD Meridian, and Global Medical Leader for General Electric, where he was responsible for the health and wellness of more than 330,000 employees worldwide. A pediatrician by training, Dr. Fabius is a faculty member of the American College of Physician Executives, which has recognized him as a Distinguished Fellow, and the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

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