

Large employers broaden support for employees during COVID-19 outbreak

Large employers are implementing a series of broad-reaching policies to support employees and their families as the outbreak of COVID-19 spreads throughout the country, according to recent research from the Business Group on Health. The survey of 95 large employers, *The Large Employer Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) Survey, Part II*, found some of the initiatives include ensuring employees are paid during the pandemic, adding more flexibility to their health benefit plans, and expanding flexibility for working from home.

Paid leave. The survey found that for employees who have been exposed to the virus or are exhibiting cold/flu symptoms and cannot work from home:

- Three quarters of employers (75 percent) are providing access to existing paid sick leave or PTO programs.
- In addition to standard leave programs, 34 percent are continuing to pay affected employees unable to work, and another 25 percent are considering doing so if the situation continues to escalate.
- Nearly a quarter (22 percent) are adding emergency paid leave or additional sick leave, while another 27 percent will do so as needed.

For employees who are not typically eligible for paid leave, 23 percent of large employers will continue to pay them if they are quarantined. In addition, the Business Group on Health found that 16 percent will do so for employees who are ineligible for leave and are symptomatic and 14 percent will pay employees who are caring for a symptomatic family member.

Adding health plan flexibility. Employers are adding flexibility to health plans in the U.S. and globally, and easing access to providers, the survey found. On top of waiving or reducing costs for needed testing for COVID-19, employers are actively encouraging employees to use telemedicine (68 percent); and to utilize the company's EAP during the crisis (93 percent).

Sixty-nine percent of large employers either have or will reduce or waive early prescription fill limits to allow patients with chronic conditions to maintain a 30-day supply of medication on hand, if warranted. In addition, 35 percent either have or will reduce or waive out-of-pocket cost for mail order prescription drugs.

Working from home. Employers also are assisting with childcare needs by expanding work at home policies. The survey found that nearly all employers either have or will implement work at home policies for employees with possible exposure to the virus. Slightly fewer (91 percent) respondents have or will adopt work at home policies for employees with a cold or flu-like symptoms.

SOURCE: www.businessgrouponhealth.org