

COVID-19 Legal Update

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WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND COVID-19

By Jon Vegosen

Regrettably, workplace violence has reared its ugly head with respect to COVID-19. Consistent with state laws and guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”), as well as the Occupational Safety and Health Act, businesses have wisely put in place COVID-19 prevention policies and practices. These include mandatory use of masks, social distancing, and limitations on the number of customers allowed at a place of business. Unfortunately, workers – especially in retail and service businesses – have been threatened, assaulted, and even killed in response to some of these policies and practices. For example, the media has reported that customers defying requests to wear masks have, among other things, shot and killed an employee, broken an employee’s arm, and coughed or sneezed on employees. In another incident, a customer reportedly wiped his nose on an employee’s clothing.

Recently, the CDC updated its website to offer “strategies to limit violence towards workers that may occur when businesses put in place policies and practices to help minimize the spread of COVID-19 among employees and customers.” It includes links to resources and trainings that both employers and employees in retail, services, and other customer-based businesses can use to learn how to prevent and deal with workplace violence. In addition, it outlines steps that employers can take to prevent workplace violence, including providing employee training about the warning signs of violence and how to respond. It also contains some basic “dos and don’ts” that employees can use to defuse and help prevent violence in their workplace. While the recommended measures are not mandatory, they are useful, and employers would be wise to implement them.

For more information about the CDC’s guidance, you can visit its website [here](#). Since the CDC may update its guidance on various subjects periodically, it is advisable to check the [CDC COVID-19](#) website on a regular basis.

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