

Stay safe together while staying two metres apart

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Are temperature checks effective in stopping the spread of COVID 19?

Employers across the globe, faced with the need to reduce the risk of workplace transmission of COVID-19, may be contemplating imposing standard temperature screenings on their employees as a measure to slow the spread of the virus by identifying and isolating employees who have a fever, which is one of the common symptoms of COVID-19.

United States

On March 17, 2020, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued an [update to its guidance](#) that now expressly acknowledges that employers may implement temperature screening measures in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

As European companies have frequently a parent company in the US, Corporate headquarters may advise their European counterparts to consider introducing temperature screening of employees

Firstly as this is a public health emergency the European company will require to follow the guidance of their respective government

In Ireland, after having reviewed the expert evidence, Public Health /HSE have deemed temperature screening is ineffective and therefore not recommended

Public health England and Public Health Portugal have not recommended imposing standard temperature screenings of their employees

The Evidence

Questions remain over asymptomatic people spreading COVID-19

The WHO advises that a person could transmit COVID-19 up to 14 days before symptomatic

Medical and Public Health Experts have stated that temperature checks will not detect all potentially infective people

Because the virus is spread by close contact temperature guns have to be used rather than more accurate ear thermometers

The temperature guns are non-contact infra-red thermometers

Although the guns can quickly measure surface temperature without touching people's skin, experts say using non-contact devices to avoid spreading the infection meant some accuracy was sacrificed.

Dr James Lawler, a medical expert at the University of Nebraska's Global Centre for Health Security has stated:

“These devices are notoriously not accurate and reliable,”

Even if used correctly, thermometers won't catch everyone who could spread the new virus. Studies show that infected people can go up to 14 days without showing symptoms, and some preliminary research

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suggests that period could last as long as 24 days. It's still unclear if infected people without symptoms can spread the virus to others.

Temperature screenings can flag people who aren't infected.

We must also consider that the criteria for COVID-19 testing in Ireland is a combination of a high fever 38 degrees Celsius plus a respiratory symptom, both symptoms are required

A high fever alone will not result in passing the criteria for screening

I'm aware the current criteria for COVID-19 testing in the US are currently different

Research published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* last month showed two of 126 people evacuated to Frankfurt in Germany on a flight from China's Hubei province had tested positive for the coronavirus after arrival despite passing symptoms-based screening before boarding the plane.

The German researchers said this suggested that transmission "may occur in persons who have no fever and no signs or only minor signs of infection".

Dr Sanjaya Senanayake, an infectious diseases specialist at Australian National University Medical School in Canberra has stated that:

"Even if people have a Covid-19 illness with fever, they may not have a fever at the time they are screened due to the natural fluctuation of the fever or the use of medicines to bring the fever down,"

Last month, British researchers showed that temperature checks at airports can fail to detect a Covid-19-infected passenger in almost half of cases, in a study published in scientific journal *Eurosurveillance*.

Screening works only if transmission of infection by asymptomatic people is negligible, screening sensitivity is almost perfect and the incubation period is short, the report of the above study concludes

This does not correlate with what is known to date of the transmission of COVID-19

It's clear that even when some airports but temperature checks in place at the onset of COVID-19, these haven't stopped the spread of the virus

Sense of false security?

Due to the following I feel the introduction of employee temperature screening could lead to a sense of false security as:

1. The infra-red thermometers are not as accurate as ear thermometers
2. The evidence suggests they will not pick up all cases
3. Employees might become complacent of social distancing and hand washing which is the most important preventative measure
4. In Ireland, UK and Portugal a high fever alone won't result in a COVID-19 test

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Recommendation

Follow the Guidance of Public Health in your country

Common symptoms of coronavirus include:

- [a fever \(high temperature - 38 degrees Celsius or above\)](#)
- [a cough](#) - this can be any kind of cough, not just dry
- shortness of breath
- breathing difficulties

For people who get infected with coronavirus:

- 80% will have mild illness and make a full recovery within a few weeks
- 14% will have a more severe illness
- 6% will have a critical illness

Any employee exhibiting the above symptoms should not present for work

Adhere to Social Distancing –two metres apart

Regular Hand washing for 20 seconds

Regular disinfection of work surfaces

Strict adherence to Public Health Advice in your country