

Employees exposed to coronavirus at work must be listed

The employer must keep a list of employees who have been exposed to hazardous biological agents at work, including coronavirus. This obligation applies to all sectors.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, workplaces in most sectors have not had to keep a list of exposed employees. Biological agents posing a serious hazard or illness have mainly occurred in the social and health care sector, waste and wastewater management, agriculture and forestry.

Coronavirus has changed the situation, and as a result, listing has become topical in almost all sectors. Many employers have been confused about what the obligation to list means and who it applies to. This workplace bulletin contains the occupational safety and health authority's answers to questions concerning listing.

Who must be included in the list?

The list is kept for employees who have in their work been exposed to biological agents that pose serious hazard and illnesses – such as Covid19. Biological agents include bacteria, viruses, yeast, mould and parasites.

Exposure at work does not require becoming ill, but a situation in which the employee has had a real possibility of being infected. In this case, the employee has come to contact with a hazardous biological agent, for example through a person, material or an animal. Human contact can be customers, patients, students, colleagues – anyone whose encounters are related to work or work tasks.

Exposure is always assessed on a case-by-case basis. Exposure to Covid19 is affected by, for example, the use of personal protective equipment or masks, space size, ventilation, distance and duration of encounter. The mere use or non-use of a mask does not necessarily indicate whether exposure has occurred.

The National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) has defined that e.g. persons who have been in a confined space or face-to-face with a Covid19 infected person at a distance of 2 metres for a total of 15 minutes within 24 hours, or who have handled material containing the virus, or who have treated a Covid19 patient without adequate protection, are considered to have been exposed to Covid19. An up-to-date definition of exposure can be found on the THL website [Toimenpideohje epäiltäessä koronavirusen COVID-19 aiheuttamaa infektiota](#) (in Finnish).

If someone in the work community is infected with Covid19, then exposure at work can be, for example, encounters in social rooms and in the coffee room or working side-by-side on a production line. If the colleague is not encountered during the workday, but in the gym in the evening, for example, then the exposure is not due to work and is not entered in this list.

What information should be entered in the list?

The list of exposed employees must include:

1. The name and occupation of the exposed employee
2. The sector of the workplace and what work was carried out
3. Available information on the biological agent the employee was exposed to
4. Description of where and when the exposure event took place.

Who was exposed?

In what type of work?

To what?

How and when?

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Can the list be kept even though it contains personal and health data?

Yes. The Occupational Safety and Health Act provides that the list must be kept without prejudice to secrecy regulations.

Who can view the list?

The list of exposed persons constitutes a personal data file, so it cannot be freely visible to everyone. The list can be requested to be seen by the occupational safety and health authority, occupational health care, the Infectious Disease Officer of the municipality or the Infectious Disease Officer of the hospital district, as well as occupational health and safety personnel at the workplace. An individual employee has the right to view the data concerning him or her.

Can an employee prohibit their data from being included in the list?

No, as keeping the list is a statutory obligation of the employer (Occupational Safety and Health Act 738/2002, section 40a).

How long must the list be retained?

The list must be retained for a period of at least 10 years and, in specified cases, for 40 years. For Covid19 exposures, the retention obligation is 10 years. The retention period is specified in the Decree of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health on the classification of biological agents (748/2020).

Why is listing important?

An up-to-date list allows the employer to monitor the overall exposure situation and assess the adequacy of occupational safety and health measures. The information in the list is used, for example, to investigate cases of occupational disease and to monitor persistent or latent illnesses and serious long-term after-effects. The occupational safety and health authority will use the list e.g. to assess whether the means used at the workplace to prevent and reduce exposure have been effective. The communicable diseases authority may also need the list.

How is keeping the list enforced?

Occupational safety and health inspectors enforce the management of biological agents in workplaces. In particular, enforcement focuses on how workplaces have identified and assessed biological hazards and assessed their risks, implemented exposure reduction measures and monitored their effectiveness. The list of exposed employees is one of the enforced issues.

Due to the Covid19 epidemic, inspections are also carried out in sectors where biological agents have not been considered much in the past, such as transport, schools and trade. Inspections are carried out throughout the country.

USEFUL LINKS:

- > [Tyosuojelu.fi > Working conditions > Biological agents](#)
- > [Tyosuojelu.fi > Questions on coronavirus and occupational safety and health](#)

