

President Biden Directs OSHA to Escalate COVID-19 Safety Precautions

January 22, 2021

On his second day in office, President Biden signed an [executive order on protecting worker health and safety](#) directing the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to escalate its efforts to prevent workers from contracting COVID-19 in the workplace.

Declaring the health and safety of workers “a national priority and a moral imperative,” President Biden’s executive order calls upon the federal government to “take swift action to reduce the risk that workers may contract COVID-19 in the workplace.” The order directs the agency to update COVID-19 safety recommendations for businesses by February 4, 2021, review its enforcement efforts, conduct a multilingual outreach campaign to inform workers of their rights, and study whether an emergency temporary standard is necessary. The agency must issue the emergency standard by March 15, 2021, if so. The proposed standard would likely require employers to create a plan to minimize worker exposure to the coronavirus through procedures such as mandates on masks, physical distancing, and ventilation standards. Employers would likely have to present their plans to OSHA during a workplace inspection and could be fined for violations. The order marks an abrupt shift from the Trump administration’s more business- and industry-friendly approach and signals a new emphasis on the plight of workers, including a focus on issues of race and equity, in the Biden administration.

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