



GUIDELINE AND INFORMATION ON COVID

Introduction

The recent outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is an unprecedented situation globally. The World Health Organization (WHO) and public health authorities around the world are taking action to slow the outbreak of COVID-19 and reduce infection rates. A range of policies and measures are being taken by national governments, including border closures, mandatory quarantines, restrictions of movement, prohibitions on large gatherings, and lockdowns of cities or entire countries, resulting in widespread changes to ordinary life and business activity.

While many enterprises are developing and implementing business continuity plans during the current pandemic, all employers need to adequately prepare, manage, and respond as the COVID-19 pandemic develops, including preparing for scaling down operations or possible mandatory business closures.

What should employers do? This Guide was developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to help employers manage their workplace during COVID-19: running your business, protecting your workers, and answering some of the workplace relations and occupational safety and health (OSH) questions that employers have.

The Guide is based on a series of questions and answers to address key employment and safety issues. As the situation is changing rapidly, it is critical that employers keep up-to-date with the latest information and developments, as published by the WHO and national and local health authorities in their respective country. Additionally, employers should always be conscious of their legal obligations under relevant laws and regulations, contracts, and collective agreements, and they should seek legal advice when necessary.

To address COVID-19, employers should:

- **u** monitor advice provided by national and local authorities, including on work arrangements, and communicate critical information to the workforce;
- **u** assess the potential risks of business disruption;
- **u** review or draw up a business continuity plan that is consistent with guidelines offered by national

and local authorities to enhance business resilience and support workers and their families;

- **u** identify and mitigate risks to workers and other persons connected to the workplace arising from exposure to COVID-19;
- **u** promote workplace hygiene and apply the principles of social distancing (also called physical distancing) in the workplace; assess business liability for workers' compensation, particularly in sectors with high work-related exposure to COVID-19;
- **u** seek advice and support from EBMOs who can channel concerns to the government and shape policy measures that are conducive for business resilience and sustainability.

The advice and guidance given in this Guide is generic in nature and needs to be seen in the context of national laws and practise.

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1. How can employers protect workers and the workplace?

Generally, employers have a duty to ensure the safety and health of their workers and others in the workplace. This includes providing and maintaining a work environment that is without risk to health and safety and adequate facilities for workers in carrying out their work, as is reasonably practicable.¹ Most national health and safety legislations have such provisions.

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. What do employers need to do to protect the safety and health of their workers and the workplace in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic? This chapter lays out a series of questions and answers to assist employers in understanding, managing and mitigating the risks to protect their workers and the workplace.

1.1 How does COVID-19 spread?

According to the WHO, when someone who contracts COVID-19 coughs or exhales, they release droplets containing the virus. Most of these droplets fall on nearby

surfaces and objects – such as desks, tables, or telephones. Workers could catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. If they are standing within 1 metre of a person with COVID-19, they can catch it by breathing in droplets in the air. In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu.

1.2 What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

According to the WHO, the most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some people may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but do not develop any symptoms and do not feel unwell. Most people infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some experience more severe illness and may require hospital care. The risk of experiencing severe symptoms rises with age, in people with weakened immune systems and in people with pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and lung diseases.

1.3 Should employers provide information to their workers?

Workers are likely to be anxious about the COVID-19 pandemic, and they may have questions about the health risks and changes to their working arrangements or employment status. To ensure a smooth and steady flow of information throughout the workplace and prevent confusion, rumours or misinformation, employers should regularly communicate relevant information to their workers, designating a staff member or coordinator for that purpose, if possible.

Employers should:

- identify a point person or team to take the lead on communicating on COVID-19;
- keep up with the latest information from national and local authorities;
- regularly provide up-to-date and reliable information to workers;

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- clarify and communicate the company's procedures and policies, including for flexible work arrangements, remote working, absence, sick leave, annual leave, redundancy, etc.

As the situation on COVID-19 is constantly changing, providing regular updates to workers about the status of COVID-19 will help them to feel informed and well supported, and in return, stay motivated to assist and adapt through this challenging time. Employers should also provide up-to-date, reliable information to suppliers and customers.

Box 1: Updates and guidance from the WHO on COVID-19

- [v](#) Guidance for employers on “Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19.”
- [v](#) Dashboard on “Novel Coronavirus situation” and daily situation report: provides figures on confirmed

cases, deaths by affected countries, areas or territories.

- [v](#) Advice for public: Myth busters.

Source: WHO, 2020, Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019> [23 March 2020].

1.4 What kind of health information should be provided to workers?

Employers should provide essential health information to everyone in the workplace about COVID-19 using guidance provided by the national and local health authorities and the WHO (box 1). For example, workers should be aware of individuals the WHO has identified as at risk of developing serious illness, including older persons and those with underlying health conditions, such as a compromised immune systems.

Different measures and guidance are being introduced by authorities to slow down the spread of COVID-19. Employers should take steps to provide the following health information to workers:

- [v](#) advice on workplace hygiene and practising social distancing or physical distancing.

1.5 What should employers do to safeguard workplace safety and hygiene?

Employers have an overall responsibility to ensure a safe and healthy work environment, as far as reasonably practicable, including specific measures to control the spread of viruses like COVID-19.² Safety and health measures are specific to each enterprise and should be developed in response to a risk assessment. Some sectors, such as health care and those where workers are in close contact with the public, require stricter control and prevention measures than other sectors. Critically, employers should identify risks and take necessary measures to control and mitigate those risks.

Every workplace can play an important role in containing the outbreak by taking measures such as:

- organizing work to reduce person-to-person contact, ensuring physical distance at the workplace or implementing remote work arrangements;
- disinfecting the workplace regularly;

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- maintaining good environmental hygiene and good indoor ventilation;
- providing adequate facilities (e.g., soap, hand sanitizer, signage, and reminders) and encouraging workers to practice workplace hygiene (e.g. frequent hand hygiene, avoid touching eyes/nose/mouth);
- promoting respiratory hygiene (e.g. providing face-masks to workers especially those at risk to minimise potential infection);
- limiting or banning non-essential work travel;
- reducing interaction with people outside the workplace as much as possible;
- empowering workers to take action if they feel they are facing an unprotected work situation with imminent and serious risk to their health;
- developing infection control policies and procedures;
- directing workers to comply with quarantine measures, particularly following travel to the high-risk

area or have contact with someone who has tested positive;

- directing workers to stay at home or work from home if they have flu-like symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, etc.) regardless of travel or contact history;
- complying with reporting obligations to health authorities and labour inspectorates according to national legislation and practice.

1.6 What is social distancing, also called physical distancing?

Social distancing or physical distancing refers to keeping at least a 2-metre space between people. The objective is to deliberately increase the physical space between people to prevent or minimize spreading the virus. At the workplace, this means:

- implementing flexible work arrangements (e.g. teleworking);
- increasing physical space between workers at the workplace;
- implementing flexible meetings and delivering services remotely (e.g. holding meetings via video conferencing or phone calls or considering if large gatherings can be rescheduled, staggered or cancelled);

- **u** changing workplace culture (e.g. stop handshaking, workers taking lunch at own desk or outside rather than in the cafeteria or breakrooms, limit sharing of food in the workplace);
- **u** reconsidering non-essential business travel;
- **u** delivering products through curbside pick-up or delivery.

1.7 How can employers manage and control the risk of COVID-19 in the workplace?

Identifying and controlling risks from COVID-19 to workers or other people connected to the workplace may involve:

- **u** closely monitoring official guidance and advice, particularly updates from the national and local health authorities and the WHO;
- **u** reviewing internal policies and measures for infection control, including educating workers on best practices on safety and hygiene;
- **u** ensuring workers are aware of the isolation/quarantine periods and requirements in line with the directive/advice from the national and local authorities;
- **u** providing clear advice to workers about actions they should take if they become unwell or think they may have the symptoms of COVID-19;

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- **u** monitoring the latest travel advice and restriction for anyone planning to travel for work;
- **u** assessing whether work activities put other people at risk;
- **u** contingency planning to manage staff absences and plans to manage increased workloads;
- **u** providing workers with information and links to relevant services should they require support;
- **u** contacting relevant national and local health information hotlines or helpdesks on COVID-19 for latest information and guidelines.

1.8 What are the obligations of workers concerning safety and health?

Workers have the responsibility to take reasonable care for their own and others' health and safety, and have a duty to cooperate with their employers in the implementation of preventive and control measures.³ This includes adopting safe work behaviours, using safety devices and protective equipment correctly, and ensuring good hygiene practices, such as frequent hand washing, to protect against infections.

Workers are also obliged to notify the employer if they become aware that they are suffering from any disease or physical or mental impairment, which affects the performance of their work activities or that could risk the safety, health, and welfare of other people at work.⁴ Workers have a duty to protect themselves and others, which is especially critical in the current situation.

1.9 Is COVID-19 covered under workers compensation?

Workers' compensation insurance provides support for workers with a work-related injury or illness.⁵ Whether the impact of COVID-19 is covered by workers' compensation or not is a legal question that will differ by jurisdiction and circumstance. Employers should determine the situation in their country since any workers' compensation claim will require fact finding inquiry, and certain group of workers are more vulnerable and may be protected under specific legislations.

Box 2: Persons particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 identified by the ILO

- v Young persons already facing higher rates of unemployment and under employment;
- v Women are over-represented in more affected sectors (such as services) or in occupations;

that are at the front line of dealing with the pandemic (e.g. nurses);

- v Unprotected workers, including the self-employed;
- v Migrant workers.

Source: ILO, 2020a