

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES ON PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE FOR COVID-19 OUTBREAK FOR WORK SETTINGS



Source Documents

1. Document on Getting workplaces ready for COVID-19 by World Health Organization
2. COVID-19 Prevention Guidelines for all industries - Ministry of Skills Development, Foreign Employment and Labor Relations, Sri Lanka.
(Published on 17th April 2020)

Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19

- There are a number of practical steps employers can take to manage the risk of exposure to COVID-19 at the workplace.
- You must take action, it's the law.
- No matter what type of work your business carries out, these steps will help to identify all you can reasonably do to protect the health and safety of workers and others at your workplace.



How COVID-19 spreads

- When someone who has COVID-19 coughs or exhales they release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets fall on nearby surfaces and objects such as desks, tables or telephones.
- People could catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.
- If they are standing within one meter of a person with COVID-19 they can catch it by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them. In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to the flu. Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age: people over 40 seem to be more vulnerable than those under 40.



- People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.
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1. General Preventive Measures

Measures in this section apply to most work settings.

All employees and employers need to adhere to these recommendations in order to arrest any possible transmission of COVID-19 infection.

Workplace COVID-19 preparedness and response plan

All employers are advised to develop a COVID-19 Preparedness plan, considering the occupational exposure level of employees, the individual risk factors and other recommended good practices mentioned in this guideline.

- Where, how, and to what sources of COVID-19 might employees be exposed including, The general public, customers, and employees; and
- Sick individuals or those at particularly high risk of infection (e.g., international travelers who have visited locations with widespread sustained (ongoing) COVID-19 transmission.
- Non-occupational risk factors at home and in community settings.
- Employees' individual risk factors (e.g., older age, presence of chronic medical conditions, immunocompromised conditions, pregnancy, smokers).
- Controls necessary to address those risks.

- All workplaces should identify a suitable focal point (a nursing officer, a safety officer, Human Resource Manager or any officer found to be suitable and responsible for the position) to monitor the control activities implemented against COVID-19 infection and to provide necessary guidance in case of queries.
- A specific isolation room preferably with an attached bathroom has to be identified in the workplace in advance, to transfer employees suspected of having COVID-19 infection. It should be one that can be disinfected when necessary.



Following categories of employees should not report for work

- Those having fever, with or without acute onset respiratory symptoms such as cough, runny nose, sore throat and/or shortness of breath.
- Those who have had contact with suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 for the last 14 days.
- Those who are quarantined for COVID-19.
- The employer should ensure that if a sick person¹⁰ reports for work, he/she is sent back home immediately. Follow the steps mentioned in section 1.7 below if that individual is suspected of having COVID-19 infection.

Entering the office premises

- Anyone entering the premises (both visitors and staff) should wash their hands with soap and water before entering. Alternatively, hand rubbing with alcohol-based hand rub (minimum 70% v/v Alcohol) can be adopted.
 - Fingerprint scanners are not recommended.
 - Additional optional measures are to have a foot bath (with 0.1% Sodium hypochlorite solution) at the entrance.
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- Check temperatures of all the staff at the time of entrance to the workplace and any person recording a temperature above 98.4 F or 37 C should be re-checked after 10-15minutes of rest and if positive for a second time send him/her back. Ensure that the thermal scanner is of Medical grade.



While at work

- Keep a distance of one meter between employees at all times (while working, meetings, canteens etc.)
- All employees shall wear masks properly while at work. They should refrain from touching the mask or their faces, while wearing it. After removing the mask, it has to be discarded into a pedal operated closed bin and hands should be washed subsequently. There should be minimal handling of the mask when removing. Avoid touching the face at all times.
- Encourage respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes. Coughs and sneezes have to be covered by the inner side of elbow or sleeve. In a situation where this is not possible a tissue can be used to cover the nose/ mouth, provided the tissue is discarded into a closed bin and hands washed thereafter.
- Discourage employees from using others' mobile phones, pens and other common telephones, fax machines, desks, or other work tools and equipment, whenever possible. If any object has been shared it must be cleaned with soap and water or with minimum 70% v/v alcohol-based sanitizer.

- Advise staff to minimize direct verbal communication between co-employees and use alternative methods (Public address system, intercom etc.) to provide instructions.
- Doors should be kept open between sections to reduce unnecessary handling by the employees.
- Discourage employees from shaking hands/hugging and adopt other non-touch techniques of greeting.

Encourage employees to maintain good personal health and hygiene by practicing the following;

- A balanced diet
- Drinking adequate amounts of clean water
- Regular physical exercise
- Abstain from unhealthy habits such as smoking and consuming alcohol



Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces

- Maintain regular housekeeping practices, including routine wiping/cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, equipment, and other items in the work environment.
- After cleaning by damp dusting/wet mopping or washing with soap and water or a general-purpose detergent.
- All metal surfaces shall be disinfected with minimum of 70% v/v alcohol solution.
- All non-metal surfaces be disinfected with 0.1% sodium hypochlorite solution.

- The doorknobs/handles shall be cleaned and disinfected before every shift and every three hours.
- Floors, office equipment and furniture shall be cleaned with disinfectant a minimum of twice a day. (Or after every shift in places where there are shift duties.)
- Strip door curtains should be avoided and if they are absolutely necessary, they should be cleaned and disinfected 3 times a day as described above.



Guide for meal rooms and canteens

- Lunch breaks and tea breaks to be given in batch-wise manner to prevent crowding the canteen.
- The minimum distance of one meter is to be maintained among persons in the canteen and the furniture should be arranged to encourage this.
- Avoid sharing glasses, plates, and other utensils during meals.
- Meals/food/ beverages served in buffet style must be served by dedicated person(s). Employees should not be allowed to serve themselves as it leads to cross contamination.



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Transport for employees

- If employees are provided with transport the following special precautions are to be taken.
- Vehicles should be cleaned and disinfected (the seats, all handles, Interior door panel, windows, locks, exterior door handles, poles, etc.) before transport of passengers to prevent possible cross contamination.
- Arrange a vehicle with an appropriate seating capacity according to the number of employees to enable them to maintain the at least 1-meter distance inside the vehicle, once seated.
- A designated officer must be present to open and close doors of the vehicle for passengers. The passengers must refrain from handling the doors.
- All employees must wear masks when travelling.



Special advice in case of detecting a suspected case at the workplace

- In the event of detecting a suspected case in the workplace, seek assistance from hotline 1390 and follow the instructions given or alternatively transfer the worker to the nearest government hospital, by ambulance. Suwasariya ambulance service can be contacted by dialing 1990.
- The suspected employee should continue to wear a mask and kept in isolation and relevant precautions should be taken to limit the spread of the disease, until transfer hospital.
- If this person tests as positive the health authorities will visit the organization premises and will instruct on further preventive measures.



What needs to be done on returning home from the workplace.

Upon returning home before entering the house;

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Remove the clothing and shoes/slippers and leave them outside, and wash them before taking inside or wearing them again.
- Leave all your belongings outside. If any item is taken inside the house, either wash it with soap and water or disinfect with alcohol sanitizer. (This applies to your mobile phone, spectacles, wrist-watch etc.)
- Enter the house only after a bath.



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Safety of cleaning staff

- While on cleaning duty all staff shall wear the appropriate protective gear. (Face masks, impermeable aprons, gloves etc.)
- They should wash or sanitize their hands thoroughly after each encounter (after cleaning each room, washroom, front desk, sales counter etc.)
- They also should maintain one-meter distance²⁰ with each other at all times and the management need to look into this as the resting places of this category of staff are usually congested.

- After each cleaning session all cleaning utensils and cloths shall be thoroughly washed and disinfected as per section 1.3 above and dried in the dryer or under hot sun for about 30 minutes.
- Washing and bathing facilities shall be provided to the cleaning staff.
- They should be regularly educated and updated of the importance of their duty, the new guides and protocols and their safety as well.



Dealing with third party suppliers / contractors

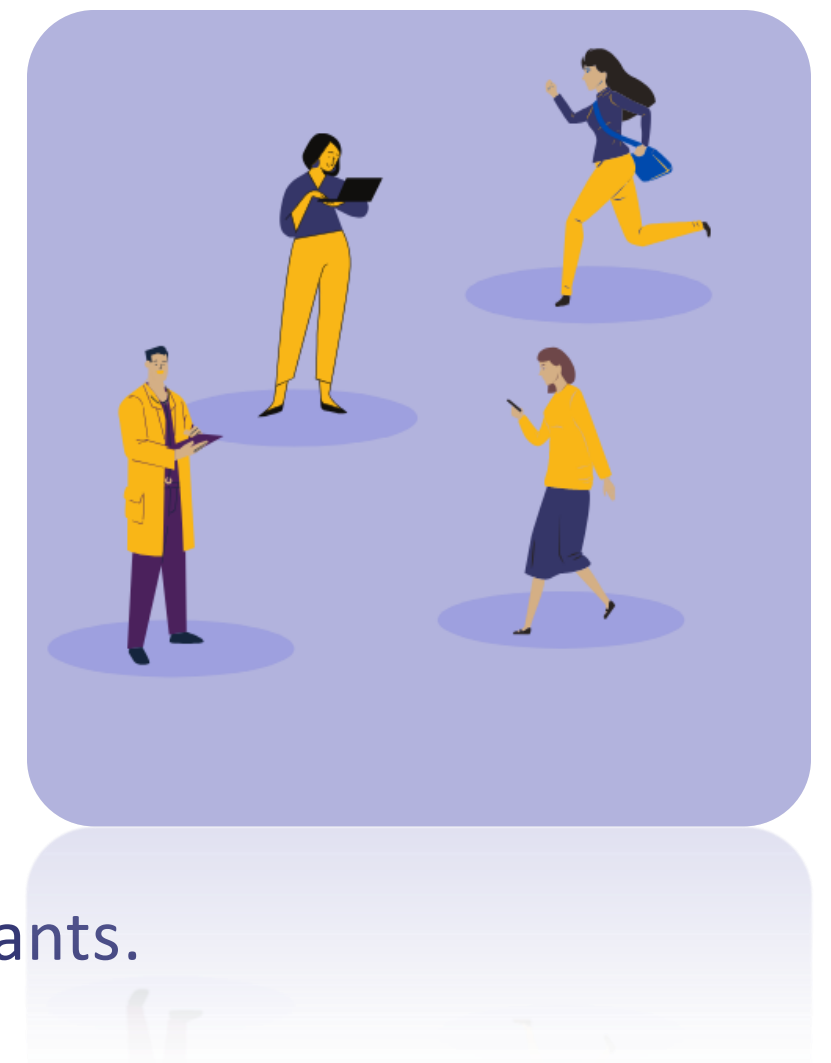
- Collect and record their names and contact details: mobile telephone number, email and address where they are staying. State clearly that their details will be shared with local public health authorities if any participant becomes ill with a suspected infectious disease.

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Responsibilities of the Management

- Depending on the requirement, personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, goggles, face masks, gowns or aprons (when appropriate), must be provided to the employees and they should be encouraged to wear them, according to recommendations.
- All employees in office have to be traceable at any given time. Their names and addresses must be documented in a register. Refrain from employing temporary employees during this period.
- Restrict large gatherings. Avoid in-person meetings²³ as much as possible. Alternative methods of communications like video conferencing are recommended. If an in-person meeting is essential, minimize the number of attendees. Pre-order sufficient supplies and materials, including tissues and hand sanitizer for all participants.



- Improve ventilation in workplaces and where feasible install air filters where air conditioners are not used leave the doors open.
- Ensure that all masks, gloves head covers etc. shall not be re-used and shall be securely disposed.
- Educate and train all employees on COVID-19 infection, risk factors and protective behaviors (e.g., cough etiquette and care of PPE and to follow the instructions in section 3.2 of this document).
- Posters and health education messages to be displayed to encourage employees to comply with given instructions.



2. Remote Working

Remote working is encouraged during this time and suggested approach is to bring back employees to work places in several stages.

It is recommended to use different modes of working (through emails, teleconferencing, video conferencing etc.) to minimize physical contacts.

Things to consider by employers when working remotely

- Internet connectivity - It is advised to provide working from home employees with adequate internet connection to effectively perform their work.
- Keep IT support teams standby to help employees who require technical support.
- Training materials to be shared with employees on Ergonomics, code of conduct, information security, how to work from home efficiently/effectively.
- New Employees - getting them a work buddy, immersion into work culture. Health and safety teams to check in with employees periodically



Things to consider by employees when working remotely

- Flexible working hours - Employees can discuss flexible work arrangements with line managers as best suited for role/job.
- Utilize leave to take breaks and to take time off
- If the employee is working from home and has to attend a visual meeting/conference the following protocols are to be maintained.
- Maintain a professional appearance
- Turn on the camera during the discussion
- Join in the conversation



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- Ensure all information security guidelines are followed even whilst working from home Remember to account for utilization and time via the time capturing system.
- Keep your communication channels open with line managers, teams, peers and friends at work.
- Make sure you follow all company communications for important information that will be cascaded to you.
- If there are employees who prefer to continue working from home, it is recommended to allow them to do so until they feel safe to come back to office.
- They can work normal working hours and ensure job completion as agreed with the line manager.

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Going back to office

- If there are employees who prefer to continue working from home, it is recommended to allow them to do so until they feel safe to come back to office. They can work normal working hours and ensure job completion as agreed with the line manager.
- It is discouraged to deploy staff at office unless there's no other alternative to carry out required work. It is advised to maintain an "Employee Tracker" that needs to be updated with employee details prior to visiting the office. Employees need to be instructed to seek prior approval from their manager or team lead.
- It is recommended to use a simple system (a seat booking system) where employees can book their seat in advance prior to coming to office.

Overseas travel

- It is advised all domestic and international trips/events to be cancelled till it is announced safe to travel by the authorities.
- Those travelling overseas on personal travel are to do so only if essential and keep the line manager, head of department, head of Human Resources and Facilities informed or the travel itinerary.



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Important contact numbers

- In the event of detecting a suspected case in the workplace, seek assistance from hotline 1390 and follow the instructions given or alternatively transfer the employees to the nearest government hospital, by ambulance. Suwasariya ambulance service can be contacted by dialling 1990.

National Institute of infectious diseases (IDH)	+ 94112411224,23,84
North Colombo Teaching hospital Ragama	+94112959261
District General Hospital Gampaha	+94332222779
District General Hospital Negombo	+94312222261, 4217
National Hospital Kandy	+94812222261
Teaching Hospital Karapitiya	+94912223341 32267
Teaching Hospital Anuradhapura	+94252222261
Teaching Hospital Jaffna	+94212222261
Teaching Hospital Kurunegala	+94372222261, 62,63
Teaching Hospital Batticaloa	+94652227501
Provincial General Hospital Rathnapura	+94452222261
Provincial General Hospital Badulla	+94552222164 261