International Labour Organization

▶ **Safe return to work**

**Guide for employers
on COVID-19 prevention**

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Contents

1. Objective of the guide

This guide contains recommendations for health and safety practices and approaches to COVID-19 prevention, based on materials developed by many organisations globally, including: "General guide for preventing the spread of COVID-19 at the workplace" prepared by Belgian social partners and government experts, as well as guides developed by Manufacturing NZ, IBEC, Union Industrial Argentina, Chilean Chamber of Construction, Guayaquil Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Agriculture in Guatemala together with various materials and guidance from the WHO.

The publication aims to provide general guidance and information to employers on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, to enable workers to return to work safely while keeping the risk of contamination as low as possible. It also provides ideas on how to protect workers' mental well-being during the pandemic.

Until the development of a vaccine or medicine, COVID-19 virus is likely to continue circulating in our communities. Physical distancing measures, increased hygiene and other precautions will therefore, have to be maintained to contain infections, including those in the workplace. Preventive actions are necessary in order to prepare companies and workers for a safe return to work and a gradual restart of business activities. The guide can also be useful for those companies who continued operations throughout the crisis, but who may now need to consider additional protective and preventive OSH measures.

All enterprises, regardless of their size or sector, are encouraged to adopt these recommendations to take care of people's health and, as far as possible, not affect business activities negatively.

As the epidemiological situation, health and safety regulations and public health guidance differ considerably from country to country, this generic tool should be further adapted to national situations. It should also be further customized by the different sectors to their specific sectoral context.

2. General considerations, information and awareness raising

Implementing protective and preventive measures may require significant changes to workplace processes and practices. To help with the transition, consider **gradual resumption of activities** (e.g. reduced number of product groups or activities) to simplify logistics and process flow at least at the start of the return to work period.

Determine **which workers should return to work first**. It is unlikely for most companies that all workers will be able to return to the workplace at once. Consideration should be given to which workers, departments, groups, or units should return first based on business needs. Consideration should also be given to compliance with ongoing restrictions regarding business operations and compliance with health precautions such as physical distancing. **Workers who can continue to telework should do so**. Flexible working time such as staggered hours or shift work can be considered to limit congestion in the workplace. Companies should document the legitimate business reasons for this process, to provide evidence of non-discriminatory selection criteria.

Update existing health and safety **risk assessments** (in light of the need to prevent COVID-19), to systematically assess any risk of infection in workplace settings and to determine any appropriate control measures that should be implemented. The hierarchy of control measures should be kept in mind.

Prepare the workplace for the return of workers. In particular, look into the workplace layout and implement changes to allow for physical distancing; put in place a plan for systematic cleaning and disinfection of workspaces and tools as well as stocking up on cleaning supplies and any protective equipment that may be needed (such as masks and gloves).

Maintain an open dialogue with workers (and/or with trade unions when applicable). In particular, involve workplace health and safety representatives or committees in the planning, introduction and monitoring of preventive and protective measures. Workers can make important contributions when assessing risks and identifying solutions. Also, some changes, e.g. with regard to shifts or telework, may need to be negotiated with the unions or individually.

Involve experts. When elaborating control and prevention measures and the "return to work" plan, consider calling on the expertise that may be available internally and externally, such as a prevention advisor or external occupational health services.

Monitor frequently the requirements and recommendations issued by relevant health and labour authorities. As the epidemiological situation is changing and knowledge about the virus is increasing, recommendations and requirements may change rapidly and will need to be incorporated into workplace policies and practices. **Adhere to any local laws and regulations** (e.g. concerning maximum number of staff or clients allowed on the premises, restrictions on meetings, types of business activities that can resume operations)

Inform and train workers about COVID-19. Include topics such as what the symptoms are, how each individual can protect themselves; current restrictions (e.g. travel bans), and the rationale behind physical distancing. Also, provide information about company policies, processes and practices related to the management of COVID-19. Keep track (register) of workers that have participated in information sessions and/or training, to make sure that all workers have been trained.

Make sure **workers are well aware of company "return to work" plans and procedures**.

Make sure that workers, as well as customers and visitors **know whom in a company they may contact** in case they have questions related to COVID-19.

Take steps to **support the mental well-being of workers**, taking into account the diversity of circumstances.

There may be a tendency to 'de-risk' the situation as people become used to the return to work. Managers will need to **repeatedly emphasise the ongoing requirements for preventive and protective measures**, and ensure that they are being consistently applied.

3. Hygiene measures

Personal hygiene

Hand washing

Hand hygiene is extremely important in the prevention of the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Ensure that workers have facilities to wash their hands properly and regularly with soap and water.

Provide paper wipes to dry hands (rather than towels or electric hand dryers).

Remind workers that hands need to be washed frequently, with soap and water, for **at least 20 seconds**, especially upon arrival at work, after using the bathroom, after blowing their nose/coughing/sneezing, and before eating.

Place posters and signs promoting correct hand washing. Bright clear infographics without too much accompanying text seem to be the most effective.

Provide alcohol-based hand gels (containing 60-80% alcohol [1]) in places where it is not possible to wash hands with soap and water.

Instruct workers to avoid contact with objects or surfaces used or touched by other people (e.g. door handles) and to wash hands after contact with such surfaces or objects.

Respiratory hygiene

Remind workers about the need to cover coughs or sneezes with a tissue or elbow and to immediately discard the used tissues.

Provide paper tissues and specific bins for tissues to be discarded. Covered, no-touch bins are best.

Set up a system for disposing bin contents and disinfecting bins.

Place posters and signs reminding workers that they should avoid touching their nose, eyes or mouth.

Cleaning of workplaces, work equipment and facilities

Establish daily cleaning protocols to ensure workplace, workstations, equipment and facilities are clean and tidy.

Establish specific crew(s) to keep things clean and to sanitize. The crew should have the supplies, training and personal protection equipment necessary to carry out these tasks.

Consider keeping and displaying a record of cleaning activities (as per the practice in airport toilets, for example).

When cleaning, pay particular attention to high touch / high traffic areas. These can include: canteen facilities, lockers / changing rooms, corridors, smoking areas, shared desks and keyboards, vending machines, door and window handles, handrails, light switches, buttons of elevator doors, toilet doors, washbasin taps, soap dispensers, control panels/buttons of appliances and machines such as printers, frequently used tools etc.

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1   According to **WHO guidance**, an effective alcohol-based hand rub product should contain between 60% and 80% of alcohol and its efficacy should be proven according to the European Norm 1500 or the standards of the ASTM International (formerly, the American Society for Testing and Materials)

Limit the number of high touch / high traffic areas, for example:

▶ Consider reducing some high contact areas by leaving some internal doorways open
   (bearing in mind that some may be fire doors).

▶ Examine the possibilities of opening doors and cupboards without contact
   (e.g. leaving toilet doors permanently partially open).

▶ Discourage staff from sharing common office supplies (e.g. pens, staplers) and items
   such as cups, plates and cutlery.

▶ Remove magazines and newspapers from reception areas and lunchrooms.

Provide additional cleaning stations across the workplace where workers can source materials
(e.g. alcohol-based cleaning wipes) to clean their own areas, workstations, etc.

Ensure a good supply of cleaning agents is available.

> ▶ **Box 1.**
>   **Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility – Center for Disease Control and Prevention advice**
>
>   ▶ Disposable gloves should be worn to clean and disinfect.
>
>   ▶ Clean surfaces using soap and water, then use disinfectant.
>
>   ▶ It is recommended to use disinfectant approved to work against SARS-CoV-2. Follow
>   the instructions on the label to ensure safe and effective use of the product. Diluted
>   bleach solutions may also be used if appropriate for the surface. Alcohol solutions
>   containing at least 70% alcohol may also be used.
>
>   ▶ Alcohol-based wipes or sprays (containing at least 70% alcohol) can be particularly
>   useful to disinfect electronics and other high touch surfaces.
>
>   Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, **Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility**

Ventilation

Thoroughly ventilate the workplace using mechanical or natural ventilation (between shifts, regularly
during the day). For example, in buildings with mechanical ventilation consider switching ventilation to
nominal speed at least 2 hours before the start of the building usage time and switching to lower speed
2 hours after the end of the building usage time.

Keep toilet ventilation 24/7 in operation. Instruct building occupants to flush toilets with closed lids.

Secure ventilation with outdoor air. Switch air-handling units with recirculation to 100% outdoor air.

Ensure regular airing by opening the windows even in mechanically ventilated buildings.

Inspect heat recovery equipment to be sure that leakages are under control.

Do not use individual fans that can spread the virus.

Personal protective equipment

Personal protective equipment can include surgical facemasks and respirators, disposable gloves, eye
splash protection or disposable overalls. Non-medical masks are not considered personal protective
equipment, but can help prevent persons with COVID-19 from spreading the infection while talking or
coughing.

Follow official guidance from national and local health authorities on whether provision of personal protective equipment (or non-medical masks) is advised or required, and in what situations. For example, there are different types of facemasks, which may be recommended for different purposes. This will depend on specific occupations or job tasks, location, updated risk assessments for workers, and information on the effectiveness of masks in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

In general, in line with the hierarchy of hazard control, collective protection measures (e.g. installation of plastic panels to separate workers, or separation of areas by tape/ribbons to ensure physical distancing) have priority over individual protective measures. Facemasks are often recommended as a complementary preventive measure in situations where physical distancing rules cannot be fully respected.

Facemasks are also often recommended for any person who starts to develop COVID-19 symptoms, and for workers who need to be in contact with such persons.

For any type of mask, appropriate use and disposal are essential to ensure that they are effective and to avoid any increase in transmission. If an employer requires workers to use facemasks, or any other protective equipment, information and training should be provided on their proper use.

Even if masks are used, remind workers it is crucial to continue to strictly follow all other preventive measures (e.g. hand hygiene, physical distancing).

▶ **BOX 2. Types of masks: Non-medical masks, surgical masks, and respirators**

There are different types of face-masks available. Consult the official advice of your health authorities on the use of masks.

Non-medical face-masks
(also called **"community"** masks or **"barrier"** masks) include various forms of self-made or commercial masks and face covers made of cloth, other textiles, or other materials (e.g. paper). They are not standardised and not intended for use in protecting from the virus. However, wearing such masks can slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others.

Surgical masks
(also called **"medical"** or **"procedure"** mask). A surgical mask is a loose-fitting, disposable device that creates a physical barrier between the mouth and nose of the wearer and potential contaminants in the immediate environment. Surgical masks are regulated. Surgical masks are made in different thicknesses and with a different ability to protect the wearer from contact with liquids. If worn properly, a surgical mask is intended to help block large-particle droplets, splashes, sprays, or splatter that may contain germs (viruses and bacteria), keeping them from reaching the mouth and nose. Surgical masks may also help reduce the spread of large respiratory droplets from the person wearing it. While a surgical mask may be effective in blocking splashes and large-particle droplets, a face-mask, by design, does not filter or block very small particles in the air that may be transmitted by coughs, sneezes, or certain medical procedures. It should also be noted that surgical masks do not provide complete protection from germs and other contaminants because of the loose fit between the surface of the face-mask and the wearer's face.

Respirators
(FFP2, N95, KN95, etc.). A respirator is a respiratory protective device designed to achieve a very close facial fit and highly efficient filtration of airborne particles. It is subject to regulation and classified as personal protective equipment. If properly fitted, the filtration capabilities of respirators exceed those of surgical face-masks. However, even a properly fitted respirator does not completely eliminate the risk of illness.

Source: US food and drug administration, **N95 Respirators and Surgical Masks (Face-masks)**

▶ **BOX 3. WHO guidance on the use of masks in the community setting**

Potential advantages of the use of masks by healthy people in the community setting include reducing potential exposure risk from an infected person during the "pre-symptomatic" period and de-stigmatization of individuals wearing a mask for source control.

However, the following risks should be taken into account in any decision-making process:

▶ Self-contamination that may occur by touching and reusing a contaminated mask.

▶ Depending on the type of mask used, potential breathing difficulties.

▶ False sense of security, leading to potentially lower adherence to other preventive measures such as physical distancing and hand hygiene.

▶ Diversion of mask supplies and consequent shortage of masks for health care workers.

▶ Diversion of resources from effective public health measures, such as hand hygiene.

WHO stresses that medical masks and respirators should be prioritized for health care workers especially given the current shortages of respiratory personal protective equipment reported in many countries.

Source: WHO, 2020, **Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19: interim guidance, 6 April 2020**

EBMOs may want to add national guidance on face-masks

4. Actions to consider: from home to the workplace

Before leaving home

Instruct workers with any symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, dry cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, head cold e.g. runny nose or sneezing, loss of sense of smell) to stay at home, contact a medical centre or call the health services designated by the country's authorities and follow their guidance. The workers should also inform her/his supervisor about this situation.

Check guidance from your health authorities on what to do when someone at a workers's household is self-isolating. In many cases, in such situations a worker should also be requested to stay at home and quarantine.

EBMOs may want to add national guidance on self-isolation and quarantine

Transport to and from work

For short distances, encourage workers to come to work on foot or by bicycle.

Encourage workers to avoid public transport, especially at peak times. Advise workers who need to travel by public transport to follow the instructions given by transport companies.

Consider providing additional parking spaces as increased number of workers may want to come to work by private cars.

Remind workers about the importance of maintaining good hand and respiratory hygiene before, during and after travel.

If an employer provides transport (e.g. a van or a bus):

▶   Maintain **a minimum recommended distance of 1 meter**[2] between each person (e.g. block certain seats). The number of persons that can be transported will therefore vary according to the type of vehicle.

▶   If the recommended distance cannot be assured, consider providing additional protection such as face-masks, in line with the recommendations of national health authorities.

▶   Consider increasing the frequency of transport provision to reduce congestion.

▶   Pay attention to proper ventilation (e.g. open windows while driving).

▶   Clean the vehicle regularly, paying attention to frequent cleaning of high touch areas (e.g. door handles, handrails) in particular.

▶   Separate the driver front seat area from the remainder of the vehicle (e.g. using tape or floor signs).

▶   Ask passengers to enter and exit the vehicle through rear entry doors.

▶   Avoid crowding at transport access points.

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2   Throughout this guide ensuring 1 meter of distance between people is recommended, in accordance with the **World Health Organization's recommendations**. However, each country's authorities may make its own recommendations and these usually vary from 1 to 2 meters. Employers' organizations and companies should comply with the regulations and recommendations established in their own countries.

5. Actions to consider: before entering the workplace

Symptom-screening (e.g. temperature checking)

Check laws, regulations and guidance from relevant health authorities concerning symptom-screening policies.

In some countries, workers may be subjected to body temperature control before access to the workplace. In case of fever (temperature higher than 37.5°) access is refused.

If the temperature check is to be performed, it should be carried out for all workers in a uniform manner (irrespective of function, type of contract etc.) and with reliable equipment (e.g. infrared thermometer) by persons who have received appropriate instructions. This person could be medical personnel, human resources personnel, or designated trained personnel. However, it should be made clear that this screening is not intended to be, nor is it a substitute for, a clinical diagnosis.

Some countries do not recommend temperature screening as COVID-19 does not always involve the presence of fever. Additionally, screening may lead to unintended consequences - people with fever may be more likely to conceal their condition by taking anti-pyretic medication (e.g. paracetamol) to suppress the high temperature and this can give a false sense of security.

In some countries, employers ask each worker upon arrival for a signed declaration that they are free of the symptoms (cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, head cold e.g. runny nose or sneezing, loss of sense of smell, with or without fever) before they are allowed on site.

If any screening is performed, communicate clearly to workers that the sole rationale for this screening is to protect them from potential contagion. Also, inform workers how the data will be managed. Data protection and privacy rules should be respected.

> EBMOs may want to add national laws and guidance on symptoms screening/temperature checking

Registering entries and exits

Minimise the number of entries to company premises – in general, people who are not directly involved with the company's activities should not enter. Inform any visitors (for example customers and suppliers) about the company's hygiene and safety policies before they enter company premises. Consider requesting visitors to sign their agreement with such policies.

In some countries, employers record all entries and exits and contact details (address, phone number, etc.) of workers, contractors, and visitors on site. Documenting entries and exits can facilitate contact tracing in case of the detection of a COVID-19 infection or a suspected infection. Existing HR and visitor registration systems can often be used for this purpose. Electronic systems should be preferred. If a fingerprint-controlled access system is usually in place, consider temporarily switching to a system using individual access cards. A paper-based system also creates a potential hazard – multiple people touching the same surfaces when clocking in and registering. If it is not possible to switch to an electronic system, make sure that workers and visitors have washed their hands or applied alcohol gel before signing the company entry book or using the control clock.

Avoiding congestion at the entrance / exit

Promote physical distancing and use dispersion measures at entrances and exits. Use aids such as floor markings, ribbons or physical barriers.

If possible, consider staggered shifts or staggered entry and exit times (with some workers starting earlier and some later in the day) to reduce congestion.

If possible, plan separate access and exit routes for various teams, where appropriate.

Pay attention to the layout of the car parks (number, distribution of vehicles and bikes) to facilitate distancing.

Promoting good hygiene habits

Place posters reminding workers to wash hands upon arrival at the workplace.

Place posters reminding workers to avoid handshakes and other greetings that involve contact.

6. Actions to consider: inside the workplace

Changing rooms

Limit the number of people present at the same time in the changing rooms, to ensure sufficient distance between workers.

If necessary, provide additional temporary changing rooms.

Ensure regular cleaning of the changing rooms, and in any case between shifts and at the end or at the beginning of each work-day.

Bathroom facilities

Remind workers to wash hands before and after using the toilet.

Respect physical distancing as much as possible, for example by installing temporary additional toilets, limiting the number of people present in the toilet area at the same time, and leaving sufficient space between urinals and sinks that can be used.

If possible, provide liquid soap to wash hands (rather than a bar soap), and paper towels to dry hands (rather than towels or electric driers).

Ensure regular cleaning of bathroom facilities and areas, and in any case between shifts and at the end of each work-day.

Canteen and rest areas

Unless on-site canteens / catering facilities cannot be managed in accordance with the measures below, keep them open to avoid workers leaving the site during meal breaks.

Remind workers to wash their hands prior to entering the canteen, and consider providing hand-gel stations in the canteen area.

Determine the maximum number of people that can safely stay at the canteen at the same time, while respecting physical distancing measures.

Implement staggered lunch and rest breaks to avoid congestion. If you split workers into teams/shifts, avoid mixing different teams of workers in the same space at the same time.

Set up the canteen area to maintain physical distance (i.e. space tables and chairs further apart, reduce the number of available chairs).

Reduce/eliminate the availability of serving from common food sources (e.g. soup, porridge) as well as reduce the use of common equipment (e.g. microwaves).

Consider changing food service to a pre-packed "grab and go" option.

Introduce/encourage cashless payments to avoid cash handling.

Keep dining areas clean and hygienic, especially when it comes to the utensils provided by the company, such as cutlery, tableware, and glasses.

Remind workers not to share utensils (cups, plates, cutlery) or food.

Keep particular attention to regular cleaning of keyboards of any beverage or snack dispensers. Consider placing hand gel or cleaning wipes in the relevant areas.

Organisation of work, work stations and / or production lines

Promote telework so that its use is maximised for those functions that allow it.

Organise work so that physical distancing rules are respected by those present at the workplace.

In the office context, this may involve creating sufficient distance between workstations by spacing them further apart. If this is not possible, rearrange workstations in a way to maintain a sufficient distance e.g. do not use certain desks in open spaces, place some workstations in separate spare rooms, place workstations in a way that people work back to back or side by side rather than face to face.

If it is not possible to assure sufficient distance between workers, first of all, use collective protective equipment such as plastic screens and walls to compartmentalize workspaces and/or organizational measures such as staggered working hours and breaks and/or adapting a sequence of tasks to maximise distancing. For example, in assembly operations, it may be possible to get a single worker to complete more (than one) assembly task that would normally be performed by two people if a physical separation of assembly stations would otherwise be hard to implement.

In case of teamwork, consider limiting the size of the teams, keep the membership of the teams fixed and minimize contact between workers from different teams (e.g. by staggered working time or dividing workspace into zones and instructing specific teams to keep to certain zones only).

If one of the team members gets sick, consider quarantining the whole team (if they are considered close contacts) and use a replacement team. Team composition could be functional, so that all critical functions in a particular process are covered, or by location, so that all team members work in the same area of the office/factory.

Apply floor markings showing safe distance between workstations.

If collective and organizational measures are not sufficient to ensure adequate physical distancing while tasks leading to such situations have to be performed, provide additional protection (face-masks and/or other personal protective equipment) in line with national requirements and recommendations.

Work equipment

Instruct workers to use their own work tools only or those provided by the company. Sharing work tools between co-workers should be discouraged or prohibited.

Ensure work tools are cleaned regularly (especially at the end of the shift, and before a tool will be used by another workers).

Contacts log

Consider establishing a contacts log. In its simplest form it is a list (Date/ Name of colleague/ Department) of all colleagues that a worker comes into contact with over the course of a shift or a working day without being able to observe the minimum distance rules for longer than 15 minutes.

Each worker should be responsible for maintaining a contact log and returning it to the team leader at the end of the shift / working day. The log can then be used to establish a list of tasks that cannot be achieved using physical distancing – these tasks can be reviewed, and alternative control measures can be put in place for these tasks.

Internal circulation

Limit internal circulation as much as possible – instruct workers not to go to rooms or places where they do not have to be present or if they do not have a particular task to do.

Remind workers to respect physical distancing rules when moving across the workspace to the full extent possible.

Remind workers to avoid using elevators. If this is not possible, limit the number of people using the elevator at the same time (e.g. only allow one person in a small lift). Instruct workers to keep distance and stand back to back.

Enable, as far as possible, separate circulation circuits at the workspaces. Use tools such as floor markings or tapes to indicate safe walkways as clearly as possible.

Consider introducing one-way traffic or priority rules on narrow stairs where people cannot keep a sufficient distance when passing each other (for example, priority for those coming down).

Consider introducing one-way traffic in corridors where people meet often or without sufficient distance.

Use these rules both inside and outside the building, for example in car parks, to get to the production lines and workstations, to get to the social facilities, coffee corners or smoking rooms.

When it is not possible to arrange circuits in a way to ensure physical distancing, consider additional protection (face-masks), in line with requirements and recommendations of national authorities.

Meetings and travels

Cancel non-essential meetings, trainings and travels.

Suspend any meeting that requires the presence of a greater number of people than the maximum determined by national requirements or recommendations.

Use alternatives to face-to-face meetings, such as digital tools and digital means of communication.

Daily kick-off meetings or toolbox meetings can be held through a speaker system where everyone stays at their workstations and keeps their distance.

If a face-to-face meeting is necessary, keep it as short as possible, reduce the number of attendees to the minimum possible, provide a room of an adequate size to ensure physical distancing (or hold the meeting outside), and keep the room clean and well ventilated. Consider keeping the list and contact details of the meeting participants for at least 14 days to facilitate contact tracking if need be.

For each meeting room, consider indicating the maximum number of people that can safely stay in a meeting room at the same time.

EBMOs may want to add national guidance on meetings and travel

7. Actions to consider: leaving the workplace

Instruct the workers to wash their hands before exiting the workplace.

As much as possible, spread out the exit times, to avoid congestion.

In case of transport organised by a company, make sure that the vehicle is properly cleaned before the transfer (see also recommendations in point 4).

Remind workers to wash hands upon arrival at home.

8. Dealing with suppliers and clients

Suppliers and deliveries

A specific procedure should be established for the reception of goods, reviewing the safety protocols (loading, unloading) to take into account the possible risks associated with COVID-19 and to reduce the opportunities for contact between suppliers and workers.

Limit the number of workers designated to handle deliveries. These workers should be trained on the relevant procedures.

Consider if loading and unloading can be done entirely by the supplier, or entirely by the recipient. In any case, safe distances should be maintained and hand washing may be requested.

If possible, plan deliveries in a staggered manner to avoid having too many external persons present at the same time.

COVID-19 virus can survive for up to 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel, less than 4 hours on copper and less than 24 hours on cardboard[3]. If possible, consider disinfecting deliveries at delivery bays before entry into warehouses or production processes. (However, keep in mind that COVID-19 spreads primarily from person to person).

If possible, consider setting up dedicated mobile toilets for use by suppliers to limit entries of suppliers into company premises.

Provide a place where mail or parcels can be deposited without contact.

If possible, make payments electronically and avoid the use of cash. Also, ensure that the payment terminal is cleaned regularly.

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3   **https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses**

Clients

Restarting operations may be particularly complex for companies that provide face-to-face services to the public (for example, companies within the commerce and service sectors), as in addition to measures protecting workers, they also need to keep in mind the safety of their clients. Additional measures to consider in such situations include the following:

▶ Frequently check and apply any official requirements, recommendations and limitations concerning the operation of your activity.

▶ Put up signs asking customers with any symptoms not to enter the premises.

▶ Put up signs to remind both staff and customers of safety precautions, in particular to keep within a safe distance from other people wherever possible, and to follow good hygiene habits.

▶ To protect staff and customers and limit congestion, determine the maximum number of people that can simultaneously stay inside your premises at any given time. Follow the official guidelines and consult with your local health authorities on how to do this.

▶ Manage entries into your premises, only allowing a limited number of people at any given time. Designate a staff member to carry out this control. Once the maximum capacity has been reached, new customers should only be allowed to enter gradually as those inside the premises withdraw.

▶ When customers are waiting outside the company's premises for their turn to enter, make sure that physical distancing rules are respected. Consider using floor marks or other aids to indicate appropriate distances.

▶ Manage circulation inside your premises. Every effort should be made to avoid cross flows, facilitating the circulation of people in one direction only. Floor marks can be used to indicate walkways.

▶ At the entrance/exit, provide for alcohol-based gel in sufficient quantity, advising customers to use it when entering and exiting the premises.

▶ Ask customers to only touch objects that they intend to buy.

▶ If feasible, put up plexiglass barriers at all points of regular interaction (e.g. reception areas, checkout areas) to further reduce the risk of infection for all parties involved. Clean the barriers regularly.

▶ Consider requesting customers and workers to wear face-masks, taking into account the recommendations of national authorities.

▶ Consider taking orders online or by telephone in advance and pre-packing orders to limit face-to-face time.

▶ Consider delivery services, if possible.

▶ If feasible, consider allowing customers to enter premises by appointment only.

9. Vulnerable workers

COVID-19 is a new disease and there is limited information regarding risk factors for severe illness. Based on information currently available, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.[4]

Advise workers that if they belong to a group that can be more vulnerable to COVID-19 they should consult with their doctors. The doctor can assess the case and make recommendations for particular preventive activities, including preventive "work incapacity".

Preventive measures can also include e.g. telework or reassigning workers to tasks entailing lower risk of contracting COVID-19.

The doctor can also advise on increased preventive measures at home.

Any details about the workers medical condition must be kept confidential.

10. Protecting the mental well-being of workers in times of COVID-19 pandemic

The impact of the pandemic on workers' well-being

The coronavirus pandemic can induce a considerable degree of fear, worry and concern. There are several factors that can contribute to increased stress and anxiety, including:

▶ Anxiety caused by the health risks of coronavirus, especially for those who have been identified as being in a "vunerable group" or who live with someone identified as being in a 'vulnerable group'.

▶ Isolation, especially in the case of people working from home.

▶ Being overwhelmed with constant information.

▶ Uncertainty: not knowing how long the crisis will last, fear of losing a job or income, etc.

▶ Losing one's job, even if only temporarily.

▶ Increased pressure placed on working parents and carers by school closures.

▶ Increased workload demands placed on workers due to high number of absences and/or – especially in critical sectors – increased demand; and

▶ Dealing with grief and bereavement.

To help workers reduce stress and anxiety associated with pandemic consider:

▶ Engaging in clear, regular and accurate communication with workers, providing as much information as is needed to answer main questions but without fuelling speculation.

▶ Reassuring workers of what the company is doing so as to be as prepared as possible in responding to the pandemic.

▶ Making sure workers know whom to contact in case they need support or are feeling overwhelmed.

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4   Including people over 65 years of age, people with chronic respiratory diseases, cardiovascular diseases, diabetics, undergoing cancer treatments, immunosuppressed people (e.g. with HIV).

▶ Encouraging workers to limit media consumption as continuous exposure to news, media, and social media may trigger or elevate anxiety, stress, or panic. It is better to stay informed by following just a few, authoritative resources such as a national health agency or the WHO.

▶ Setting a culture of compassionate leadership: equip line managers with the skills and tools necessary to have conversations with their teams to check in on how they are doing and recognise signs of distress.

▶ Reminding workers of the details of the Employee Assistance Programme if the organisation has one in place. They can be a key resource on issues such as mental health or finance.

▶ Even when there is no Employee Assistance Programme in place, pointing workers to the sources of information and advice regarding mental health and well-being e.g: from **WHO**, mental health organisations or national health bodies.

Adapting the support to the needs of workers

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. The concerns that workers have during the pandemic are likely to vary from person to person. Thus, the first step in supporting workers' mental health is to understand how they are feeling and what the factors influencing their well-being really are. Consider carrying out an employee survey or discuss these well-being issues with various employee groups. Having such information will help develop a more targeted support.

When preparing mental well-being support consider, as appropriate, three broad groups of workers: workers who telework, workers who are temporarily laid-off, and workers who continue or return to work on-site.

Supporting teleworkers

Many workers are teleworking full-time for the first time, isolated from co-workers and friends. Daily living routines can be disrupted causing added anxiety and stress. It is thus important to support workers in adapting to this situation.

Point workers to advice on how they can support their own mental health during telework period. For example, advise workers to: keep a regular work schedule, set up a designated space to work and take periodic breaks, set boundaries on work to avoid working unreasonable hours, engage in activities that bring joy and distract from existing challenges, stay connected with friends and family through online communication tools to prevent feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Also, consider supporting teleworkers by:

▶ Showing empathy and availability: Managers should understand that workers are likely feeling overwhelmed and anxious. They should be ready to listen to the workers, to answer questions and to reassure them about work and other issues that might come up.

▶ Encouraging connection, using digital communication tools: virtual meetings can be used for regular check-ins and to allow teams to connect with one another.

▶ Encouraging workers to "switch off": home working can contribute to an 'always on' culture, so managers should try to lead by example e.g. refrain from sending messages in people's downtime, and encourage workers to switch off too.

Pay particular attention to the needs of teleworkers with care responsibilities as during periods of schools and day care closures it can be challenging to combine care responsibilities with work. Discuss and consider with workers various options such as adjustment of performance targets, more flexible working time arrangements, reduction of working time, or leave.

Supporting workers who are temporarily laid off

People impacted by such arrangements may respond in different ways. Some may welcome a break from work, however, for many it will be a difficult time with emotions running high such as uncertainty over the future, losing a sense of purpose or feeling undervalued.

Consider asking workers placed on temporary lay-off schemes what they want and need. Different workers may have different preferences on how they wish to be kept updated, how often, and by whom.

For many people, their job forms a significant portion of their identity. Holding online sessions to bring workers together can help those on temporary-lay off to remain connected to the organisation and keep in touch with colleagues.

Consider suggesting alternative activities such as volunteering or online trainings to workers, so they can continue to develop during this period.

Workers who continue to work at company premises or return on-site

It is especially important to ensure that workers who continue to work on-site or return to company premises feel safe and supported. Communication about safety and hygiene measures is thus crucial.

Also, be aware of any special circumstances that workers may be in (such as being a carer), and discuss any possible adaptations that may be helpful to them such as flexible schedules, reductions in working time.

11. What to do if a worker develops COVID-19 symptoms at the workplace?

Check and follow guidance or procedures established by national and local health authorities.

Establish a plan on what should be done if a worker develops symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath) at the workplace. Inform workers about relevant steps and procedures. Consider the following:

▶ Isolate the affected worker, preferably in a separate room behind a closed door. If possible, open a window for ventilation. Provide a surgical mask for the affected worker.

▶ If it is an emergency (a worker has severe symptoms such as shortness of breath), call the emergency health services immediately. In other cases, call the designated public health helpline. Implement the instructions given.

▶ Restrict contact with the infected worker to what is absolutely necessary. Any person providing assistance to the affected worker should wear a mask, glasses and gloves.

▶ Clean the areas used by the affected worker in line with the guidance from public health authorities.

▶ Identify the affected worker's close contacts among co-workers (up to 2 days prior to the symptom onset) to identify other workers who could be considered as being exposed. Follow further instructions of the health authorities. Collaborate with them in any epidemiological investigation.

EBMOs may want to add national guidance and procedures

▶ References and resources

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