



Epidemiology Unit

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Guidance for workplace preparedness for COVID-19

COVID 19, the novel coronavirus infection, which began in Hubei Province, China in December last year has now been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. All sections of society should engage with the public health authorities to take action to prevent and contain the spread of the virus.

It is crucial to remain vigilant as Sri Lanka has recently reported cases of COVID 19. Businesses and employers, in particular, have a major role to play to keep workplaces safe if we are to stop the spread of this disease as workplaces are frequented by a large number of people.

This document outlines the key steps to be taken at workplaces to prevent the spread of the virus. Employers should start doing these things now, to keep the workplaces safe to prevent the spread of the virus. This may help to reduce working days lost due to illness and stop or slow the spread of COVID-19. The following simple measures can be easily adopted in the workplace to reduce the spread of infections.

Be aware of how the COVID-19 spreads

This virus can be transmitted from person to person (when they are within a proximity of about 1m) when someone breathes in droplets coughed or exhaled by persons infected with the virus. Further, when an infected person coughs or exhales, droplets of infected fluid may get released and contaminate nearby surfaces and objects, such as desks, tables or telephones. An uninfected person may contract the virus by touching these surfaces and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Be aware of who is more at risk

Most persons infected with the virus develop mild symptoms and recover without any complications. Those with reduced immunity and people suffering from conditions such as diabetes, heart, liver and lung disease are more at risk. The risk also increases with advancing age and people over 40 years seem more vulnerable.

Promote good hand hygiene among employees and customers

Hand hygiene includes either cleaning hands with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand rub.

- Make it mandatory to clean their hands before entering the workplace by employees and customers.
- Make handwashing facilities or sanitizing hand rub dispensers available to employees and customers to clean their hands at the main entrances as well as suitable other places.
- Ensure the hand rub dispensers are regularly refilled and soap and water are freely available at all time.
- The correct handwashing technique can be demonstrated by posters, leaflets, via LCD panels and, dissemination of information at meetings.

Why? Because washing hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub kill the virus on hands and prevent the spread of COVID-19

Ensure the cleanliness and hygiene of the workplace

- Pay attention to regular disinfection of surfaces (e.g. desks and tables) and objects (e.g. shared used telephones, keyboards, teller machines, door handles and railings etc.) with a suitable disinfectant several times a day.
- Keep the doors open as much as possible (eg. non-air conditioned areas) – This will minimize the necessity to touch the door handles.
- In air-conditioned areas – open the doors with your body by pushing (this will minimize the contact of door handles, places, where you have to pull to open - it is advisable to use a disposable tissue for the door handle and immediately discard it)
- Minimize the overcrowding of customers (supermarkets, shops, banks, government offices, etc) inside the workplace. Control the incoming customers to the premises through the main entrances with the support of the security officers. Let them enter in manageable numbers where the staff can handle. Arrange a suitable place outside of the office until they get their turn.
- Try to keep at least one meter (1M) gap between the customers and the officers who have direct customer relationships. If this is not possible, it is advisable to wear a face mask by such officers while on duty, wash their hands more often than others and **should not** touch their face with unwashed hands.

Why? Because touching surfaces contaminated with infectious material is one of the main ways that COVID-19 spreads. These instructions are more important for the workplaces where a large number of customers/clients are regularly visiting. Eg. Banks, Hospitals, Shopping malls, religious places etc...

Promote good respiratory hygiene in the workplace

- Keep surgical masks and/or paper tissues at your workplace for use by those who develop a runny nose or cough at work, along with closed bins for their hygienic disposal

Why? Because good respiratory hygiene, including covering a cough or sneeze with a tissue or flexed elbow, prevents the spread of COVID-19

Ensure access to Information

Employers can take steps to display posters promoting hand washing and respiratory hygiene. Furthermore, information can be shared through intranet or at meetings and necessary information to be shared can be obtained from the websites of health authorities (www.epid.gov.lk).

It is advised to brief employees to stay at home if anyone experiences a mild cough or low-grade fever (37.3 C or more). Keep communicating and promoting the message that people need to stay at home even if they have just mild symptoms of COVID-19.

Overseas travel

Be updated on areas where COVID 19 is currently spreading if you or anyone in your organization wish to travel abroad. This information can be accessed at, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>. Assess the benefits and risks related to planned international travel based on this latest update.

International travel to areas where COVID-19 is spreading should be avoided for employees at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. older employees and those with medical conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease).

Advise employees who have returned from an area where COVID-19 is spreading to monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days and take their temperature twice a day. If they develop even a mild cough or low-grade fever (i.e. a temperature of 37.3 C or more) instruct to seek care at the nearest government hospital immediately.

Adapted from, Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19 https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6

How to manage COVID-19 risk when organizing meetings & events

BEFORE the meeting or event,

Consider whether a face-to-face meeting or event is needed. Could it be replaced by a Teleconference or online event?

If a meeting is essential to be held,

- Minimize the number of attendees
- Do not shake hands with other participants, instead say 'Ayubowan'
- Pre-order sufficient supplies and materials, including tissues and hand sanitizer for all participants. Have surgical masks available to offer anyone who develops respiratory symptoms.
- Maintain a distance of 1m between participants
- Follow all the hygienic measures outlined above