



**Directorate of Environmental health, Occupational health and Food safety,
Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medical Services**

Guidelines on COVID-19 preparedness for workplaces

This document outlines the guidelines to be followed at workplaces, to prevent/control the spread of COVID-19 infection and to promote the health of workers. The measures are simple to follow and can be adopted easily.

1. Possible methods of transmission at workplaces

The transmission of the disease could happen by the following 3 methods

- **Droplets** – The virus can be transmitted by breathing infected droplets. Droplets can be produced during coughing or sneezing or even by exhales from infected persons. These droplets can travel up to a distance of 1m.
- **Direct** – Person to person transmission by direct contact with an infected person. (Eg: hugging, shaking hands). The virus can enter the body through nose, mouth or eyes.
- **Indirect** – When an infected person coughs, sneezes or exhales, droplets of infected fluid may get released and contaminate nearby surfaces and objects, such as desks, tables, telephones, computers etc. An uninfected person may come in contact the virus by touching these surfaces and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

2. Preventive Measures

All workers and employers are expected to adhere to the following good practices.

2.1 Following categories of workers 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 contacts with suspected or confirmed case of Covid-19 for the last 14 days.
- Those who are on quarantine for Covid-19.

The employer should ensure that if a sick person is reported for work to send him/her back home immediately. Follow the steps mentioned in section 06 if there is a suspicion of COVID-19 infection in him/her.

2.2 Anyone entering the premises (both visitors and staff) should wash their hands with soap and water before entering. (Foot operated tap is the best for the wash basin). Alternatively hand rubbing with alcohol based hand rub (75% - 85% v/v alcohol) can be adopted.

Additional optional measures are to **have a foot bath at the entrance** or **remove shoes** at the entrance and provide a separate set of shoes to be used inside the premises.

2.3 Check the temperature of all the staff at the time of entrance to the workplace and any person recording a temperature above 98.4⁰F or 37⁰C should be sent back home.

2.4 Keep a distance of one meter between workers at all times (while working, meetings, canteens etc.)

2.5 All workers shall wear masks while on duty. Refrain from touching the mask, while wearing it. After removing the mask, it has to be discarded into a closed bin and hands washed. There should be minimal handling of the mask when removing.

2.6 Avoid touching the face at all times.

2.7 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.

2.8 Discourage workers from using other workers' mobile phones, pens and other common telephones, fax machines, desks, or other work tools and equipment, whenever possible.

2.9 Maintain regular housekeeping practices, including routine wiping/ cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, equipment, and other items in the work environment. All metal surfaces shall be

disinfected with 70% alcohol solution and all non-metal surfaces disinfected with 0.1% sodium hypochlorite, after cleaning by damp dusting/wet mopping with soap and water or a general-purpose detergent. The door knobs/handles shall be cleaned and disinfected every three hours.

Floors and machines shall be cleaned by disinfectant twice a day. (or after every shift in places where there are shift duties.)

2.10 Strip curtains should be avoided and if it is necessary they should be cleaned with disinfectants 3 times a day as described above.

2.11 Discourage workers' from shaking hands/hugging and adopt other non-touch techniques of greeting.

2.11 Encourage workers and if possible take action 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

3. Specific instructions for the staff at service counters.

(Ticket counters, super market counters, banks etc.)

3.1 Always wear a mask. (Mask should be worn securely and properly and should not be touched thereafter until it is removed)

3.2 If possible keep a distance of one meter from the customer **or alternatively** have a blind/glass/plastic shield in front of the counter leaving a space at the bottom to carry out transactions.

3.3 Minimum handling of cash. (Ask for a credit/debit card). When using the credit/debit card ask the customer to insert it and remove it from the machine.

- 3.4 The officer in the counter should not share the pen used to sign the documents (The customer should use his/her own pen). In case the customer doesn't carry a pen and use the pen of the cashier it should be sanitized after use by the customer.
- 3.5 Keep an alcohol rub/hand sanitizer by the side (one per each person in the counter) and use it as frequently as possible **or alternatively** wear gloves. (Gloves should never be re-used and disposed into a closed bin when the duty shift is over).

4. 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 should be taken inside only after washing. Do not wear them again without washing.
- Leave all your belongings outside and if any item is taken inside the house, either wash them with soap and water or sanitize with alcohol sanitizer. (This applies to your mobile phone, spectacles, wrist-watch etc.)
- Enter the house only after a bath.

5. Employers are expected to ensure the following:

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 Improve ventilation in workplaces and where feasible install air filters. Where air conditioners are not used leave the doors open.
- 5.3 Restrict large gatherings. Avoid face-to-face meetings as much as possible, alternative methods of communications like video conferencing is recommended.

If a meeting is essential to be held,

- Minimize the number of attendees

- Pre-order sufficient supplies and materials, including tissues and hand sanitizer for all participants.

5.4 Lunch breaks and tea breaks be given in batch-wise to prevent crowding the canteen.

5.5 Different modes of working (through e-mails, teleconferencing etc) to be employed to minimize contacts.

5.6 All masks, gloves head covers etc. shall not be re-used and shall be securely disposed.

5.7 Disposal of waste shall be carried out as per the guidelines routinely followed. All cleaning staff should be given training on the correct procedure of waste management. They should be provided with suitable PPE, including industrial gloves and provided with adequate facilities for hand washing, with soap and water.

5.8 Educate and train all workers on COVID-19 infection, risk factors and protective behaviors (e.g., cough etiquette and care of PPE and to follow the instructions in section 04 of this document).

5.9 Posters and health education messages to be displayed to encourage workers to comply with given instructions.

5.10 All workplaces should develop 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.

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

In the event of detecting a suspected case in the workplace, necessary action should be taken to transfer the worker to the nearest government hospital, by ambulance.

Suwasariya ambulance service can be contacted by dialing 1990 or seek assistance from the contact numbers mentioned below.

The suspected worker should wear a mask and kept in isolation and all relevant precautions mentioned above to be taken to limit the spread of the disease, until transfer to hospital. A specific

isolation room has to be identified in the workplace in advance. In the event of the suspected case becoming positive, inform the area MOH and follow the instructions given.

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. This will not only enable the prevention/ control of the spread of infection but will also prevent panic situations in the event of detecting a suspected case.

For more information

In case more information regarding COVID-19 infection is required please contact;

- The Ministry of Health hotline, available 24 hours - 94 113 071 073
- The Government media unit hotline – 117
- Suwa Sariya Health line – 94 710 107 107
- Medical Officer of Health of the area

Or please visit the following websites

Epidemiology unit, Ministry of Health <http://www.epid.gov.lk>



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