

COVID-19: MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR WORKPLACES

COVID-19 is a respiratory infection caused by a new corona virus first discovered in Hubei Province, China and deemed by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. In view of this, many of your employees may have concerns regarding their potential for exposure to COVID-19 at work and the steps you are taking to ensure their well-being. The Ministry of Health would like to recommend that employers and industry take the following steps:

(A) Acquire an understanding of COVID-19 to plan and act accordingly

Symptoms:

Common symptoms include fever, dry cough and tiredness. Other symptoms include aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea.

1 in 6 people infected may become seriously ill and develop difficulty breathing.

Transmission:

Droplets from someone with COVID-19 who coughs or sneezes within a distance of 1 meter

Droplet contaminated surfaces and objects: by touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth

Incubation Period

Incubation period is currently estimated to range between 2-14 days

Vulnerable Employees:

- Older persons
- Those with pre-existing medical conditions e.g. high blood pressure, heart disease, lung diseases, cancer or diabetes

(B) All parties in any organization should take appropriate steps to ensure maximum protection of staffs and business.

I. Action by Employers

- a) Communicate to employees about COVID-19;
 - i. Advice employees on preventive methods; including personal hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Refer Appendix 1.
 - ii. Remind employees of the need to practice hand hygiene regularly e.g. via e mail, social media, gamification etc. Refer Appendix 2.
 - iii. Provide regular updates on COVID-19 to employees
 - iv. How to Use Surgical Masks refer Appendix 3
 - v. Provide appropriate health education materials regarding COVID-19 to all employees
- b) Instruct supervisors to monitor symptoms of employees at workplace
- c) Encourage employees to take temperature regularly and monitor for respiratory symptoms
- d) Consider obtaining travel declaration from employees on travel history.
- e) If employee develops symptoms;
 - i. If at home:
 - Wear a surgical mask and seek medical attention at the nearest health facility immediately.
 - Avoid contact with family members
 - Accompanying person should also wear a surgical mask.

ii. If at workplace:

- Relieve staff members from work if they are sick
- Wear a surgical mask and seek medical attention at the nearest health facility immediately
- Avoid contact with fellow employees
- Accompanying person should also wear a surgical mask

f) Conduct mental health assessment among employees and carry out appropriate measures to reduce stress among employees.

g) Monitor sick leave and absenteeism among employees. Keep a record of staff sick leave including reasons for leave, duration of leave and current status.

II. Action by Employees

a. Always maintain good personal hygiene;

- i. Frequent hand washing with soap and water or hand sanitizer
- ii. Practice respiratory etiquette

b. Employees are encouraged to take their meals at their desk

c. Limit food handling and sharing of food in the workplace

d. Keep updated on COVID-19

e. If develop symptoms;

- i. Need to alert supervisor immediately
- ii. Wear surgical mask
- iii. Seek medical treatment immediately
- iv. Avoid contact with fellow employees

III. Action at the Workplace

a. Ensure a clean and hygienic work environment through regular disinfection of the office and its equipment. Disinfection procedures: Refer Appendix 4.

b. Consider a no handshaking policy

- c. Enforce hand sanitization at entrance for visitors
- d. Provide easy access to frequent hand washing for employees
- e. Proper maintenance of toilet facilities and floor drains.
- f. Provision of lidded rubbish bin, regular refuse disposal and adequate supply of liquid soap and disposable towels.
- g. Plan for contingency measures in case there are limited human resources e.g. working from home for those on home surveillance, mobilization of employees etc. This is also to avoid stress to employees who have to work during a period of human resource deficiency.
- h. Consider alternate communication methods e.g. virtual meetings in place of face to face meetings, group chats etc.
- i. Consider deferring large meetings or events
- j. Consider having meetings outside in open air if possible
- k. In case of indoor meetings or events, ensure all precautions are taken:
 - i. Informing participants not to attend if they are unwell and to join the meeting using a virtual platform
 - ii. Ensuring all relevant information is given to the participants such as the practice of hand hygiene and the use of surgical masks for those who develop respiratory symptoms
 - iii. Providing:
 - Hand sanitizers where necessary or ensuring availability of soap and water
 - Surgical masks and tissues for those who develop respiratory symptoms
 - iv. Consider opening windows for natural lighting and better ventilation
 - v. Monitor participants daily and provide support for isolating those with symptoms and transporting them to a health facility.
 - vi. Keep in touch with participant on their health status after seeing the doctor.

- vii. Keep contact details of all participants and organizers in case there is a need to contact them. Records should be kept for at least one month for the date of completion of the event.
- viii. If any of the participants become positive, organizers are to assist the Ministry of Health who will carry out measures such as contact tracing and placing of close contacts under Home Surveillance.
- h) In the setting of public transport e.g. taxis, ride-hail services, trains and buses, drivers should ensure the following measures;
 - i. Frequent hand washing using soap and water, or hand sanitizer and practice respiratory etiquette at all times.
 - ii. Wear mask and seek medical attention if develop symptoms
 - iii. Ensure passengers to wear mask if they have symptoms.
 - iv. Regularly disinfect the interior of the vehicle after alighting passengers or after each trip as well as door handles (both outside and inside).
- i) Keep all employees informed of the latest developments in COVID-19

IV. Travel Considerations for the workplace

- a. Before traveling:
 - i. Make sure your organization and its employees have the latest advisory on traveling from MOH
 - ii. Based on the latest information, your organization should assess the benefits and risks related to upcoming travel plans.
 - iii. Ensure employees travelling are not of high risk to develop COVID-19
 - iv. Consider issuing employees who are about to travel with small bottles hand rub. This can facilitate regular hand-washing.
 - v. Consider providing employees with face mask in case there is a need to use it

b. While traveling:

- i. Always bring along surgical mask and sanitizer for use when required
- ii. Avoid crowded places and closed contact with people showing symptoms
- iii. Avoid visiting animal farms, market, selling live animals, slaughterhouses or touching any animal
- iv. Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat
- v. Seek prompt medical treatment if developing symptoms

c. When employees return from traveling:

- i. Observe home surveillance if necessary as per MOH advise
- ii. Immediately seek medical attention if you have symptoms of respiratory tract infections such as fever, cough or difficulty breathing within 14 days after returning from the visit

This guideline may be used as a basis for managing employees during this period of time. Employers and employees are advised to keep up to date with the latest developments and advice issued by the Ministry of health.

Prepared by;

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Personal hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- Good personal hygiene should be observed at all times. Regular hand hygiene by washing with soap and water or use hand sanitizer
- Maintain at least 1 meter (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing
- Put used tissue in a waste basket
- If no tissue available, use upper sleeve or elbow instead of hands while sneezing and coughing.

Guidelines for Hand Hygiene

- Wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer after any contact with respiratory secretions
- Remove jewelry before hand wash procedure.
- Rinse hands under warm running water
- Lather with soap; cover all surfaces of the hands and fingers using friction.
- Rinse under warm running water.
- Dry hands thoroughly with a disposable towel
- Turn off faucet without recontaminating hands.
- Keep fingernails short and do not use fingernail polish or artificial nails.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be used to decontaminate hands that are not visibly soiled
 - Apply alcohol-based hand sanitizer to palm of one hand and rub hands together, covering all surfaces of hands and finger, until hands are dry.

Respiratory Etiquette

- Cover mouth and nose with bend of elbow or tissue if coughing or sneezing.
- Throw tissue in the trash after using it
- Wash hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer

Guidelines on wearing surgical masks (3 Ply)

1. If you have running nose or flu like symptoms, you are advised to stay at home. If you need to go out, make sure you wear a surgical mask.
2. Avoid crowded places. Wear a surgical mask if you cannot avoid them
3. Wash hands before wearing a surgical mask and after taking one off.
4. When wearing surgical mask, the following should be noted:
 - 4.1. The facemask should fit snugly over the face
 - 4.2. The coloured side of the mask should face outside
 - 4.3. Tie all the strings that keep the mask in place
 - 4.4. The mask should fully cover the nose, mouth as well as the chin.
 - 4.5. The metallic wire part of the mask should be fixed securely over the bridge of the nose to prevent leakage
 - 4.6. The surgical mask should not be used more than a day but if it is wet, damaged or soiled by secretions or body fluid at any time, change the mask immediately.
 - 4.7. Discard all used surgical masks into a plastic bag which should then be tied properly before disposing it into a rubbish bin.

DISINFECTION PROCEDURES**Surfaces**

- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol should be effective.
 - Diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.
- Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:
 - 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water* or
 - 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water **
 - For soft (porous) surfaces such as carpeted floor, rugs, and drapes, remove visible contamination if present and clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces. After cleaning:
 - If the items can be laundered, launder items in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and then dry items completely.

* 1 Gallon = 3.8 Liters

** 1 Quart = 0.95 Liters

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