

**Frequently asked questions re preventing and managing coronavirus infections in the business
workplace Date: 19 June 2020**

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References:

- COVID-19 Occupational Health and Safety Measures in Workplaces, 2020 (Issued by the Department of Employment & Labour on 4 June 2020): “C-19 OHS 4 June”
- Guidelines for symptom monitoring and management of essential workers for COVID-19 related infection (Issued by the National Department of Health on 12 April 2020): “National DoH Guidelines: Symptom Monitoring & Management”
- Circular H70 of 2020: Preventing and Managing Coronavirus Infection in the Workplace (Issued by the Western Cape Department of Health 6 May 2020): “WC DoH Guideline’
- Simplified management of COVID-19 in the workplace (Issued by Western Cape Department of Health 11 June 2020): “Simplified WC DoH Guideline’
- Guidelines for Quarantine and Isolation in Relation to COVID-19 Exposure and Infection (Issued by the National Department of Health on 5 May 2020): “National DoH Guidelines: Quarantine & Isolation”

Question	Answer	Reference
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<p>1. What are the most important things that I should do to ensure I don't get infected or risk infecting my colleagues at work or loved ones at home?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work from home if you can or if you are feeling unwell • Practice social distancing and stay 1.5 metres from others at all times • Wash or sanitise hands regularly • Practicing good hygiene • Wear face masks or a face covering when in public • Practice all the above in your work space as well as in communal break areas, such as canteens and smoke areas. 	<p>WC DoH Guideline</p>
<p>2. Must I wear a mask the whole time that I'm at work?</p>	<p>Yes, face masks or face coverings must be worn at all times when at work except when you are having something to eat or drink. Masks should be carefully taken off by the strings/elastic bands and stored in a packet when not in use.</p>	<p>Sections 37 to 41 of C-19 OHS 4 June</p>
<p>3. Must customers or suppliers also wear a face mask?</p>	<p>Yes, every person in the workplace, including customers and clients, must wear a cloth face mask or another appropriate item to cover the nose and mouth when in public.</p>	<p>Sections 37 to 41 of C-19 OHS 4 June</p>
<p>4. If I don't have a mask, will my employer give me one?</p>	<p>Yes, by law every employer must provide every employee free of charge, with a minimum of two cloth masks, which comply with the requirement set out in the guidelines issued by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, for the employee to wear while at work and while commuting to and from work. Additionally, your employer must make sure that employees are informed, instructed and trained on how to use masks correctly.</p>	<p>Sections 38.1 and 39 of C-19 OHS 4 June</p>

<p>5. Must my employer provide hand sanitiser?</p>	<p>Yes, your employer must, free of charge, ensure that there is sufficient quantity of hand sanitiser at key points of need in the workplace, for example work entrances, canteens and toilets based on the number of workers or persons who access the workplace. Employers should ideally ensure that sanitisers are readily available so they're easy to access and use.</p> <p>This does not mean that the employer must provide each employee with free hand sanitiser. Only employees who work away from the workplace, other than at home, must individually be provided with an adequate supply of hand sanitiser, or those employees who interact with the public.</p> <p>Employees are required to wash and sanitise their hands at frequent intervals and particularly after contact with other people and after contact with surfaces/objects touched by other people.</p>	<p>Sections 32 to 34 of C-19 OHS 4 June</p>
<p>6. What cleaning measures must my employer take to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace?</p>	<p>Every employer must ensure that all work surfaces and equipment are disinfected before work begins, regularly during the work period and after work ends. All heavily used areas such as toilets, common areas, door handles and shared electronic equipment must also be regularly cleaned and disinfected.</p> <p>Biometric systems should be disabled or used in a non-touch mode. Employees are likely to be required to help clean / disinfect their workspaces as cleaning staff will be unable to undertake all the extra cleaning / disinfecting required on a regular basis.</p>	<p>Section 35 of C-19 OHS 4 June</p>

<p>7. What physical distancing measures are required to stop the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace?</p>	<p>Employers must arrange the workplace to ensure minimal contact between workers, and as far as practical, ensure that there is a minimum of 1.5 metres between people in the workplace.</p> <p>While the number of people in the workplace (including employees and customers) is not defined in the national regulations, the Western Cape Department of Health recommends that the number of people in a workplace should be limited to one person per 6 m² (i.e. the floor meterage divided by 6).</p> <p>A practical tip to achieve safe physical distancing is to reduce the number of workers present at the workplace at any time through, for example, allowing all employees who can work from home to do so, implementing shift working, working on alternative days, staggered start hours, staggered lunch and tea breaks and / or limiting each employee's physical area of work. Employees must not shake hands, hug, fist bump, or elbow bump and must keep their distance from fellow employees and customers as far as is possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sections 20.8 and 21 - 23 of C-19 OHS 4 June • WC DoH Guideline
<p>8. What if my employer is unable to achieve appropriate physical distancing?</p>	<p>Your employer must arrange for physical barriers to be placed between work stations to form a solid physical barrier between workers if they are unable to separate employees by at least 1.5 metres.</p> <p>Note that the directive from the Dept of Labour excludes certain workplaces, such as medical and health care services.</p> <p>As per the recommendations from the Western Cape Department of Health, where possible employees should not share work surfaces or use the same equipment. If workstations and equipment need to be shared, they must be cleaned between shifts/ use.</p> <p>Employers should also prevent employees from being in contact with many other employees as far as possible by keeping them working in the same small team and not shifting employees between teams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 22 of C-19 OHS 4 June • WC DoH Guideline

<p>9. What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?</p>	<p>Isolation is for those who are already sick and/or have tested positive for Covid-19, but don't require hospital admission for medical care.</p> <p>Quarantine is for people or groups who were exposed to Covid-19 by being in close contact with someone who has or might have been infected by the Covid-19 and therefore might be infected with Covid-19. Quarantine keeps these people away from others, so they do not unknowingly infect anyone if they have actually been infected. Some people quarantined would have been infected and some would not have been infected. Quarantine should last for 14 days from when the person was last in contact with the sick person.</p>	<p>National DoH Guidelines: Quarantine & Isolation</p>
<p>10. What is the difference between screening and testing?</p>	<p>Screening is undertaken through a questionnaire to determine whether a person has any symptoms and a possible temperature check. Those who "screen positive" i.e. display symptoms of Covid-19 might have been infected. If they are >55 yrs and / or have comorbidities, they will be tested for Covid-19 and asked to isolate while they await the test results. If they are <55 yrs and / or have no comorbidities, they will be asked to isolate for 14 days. If a person "screens negative" they will be allowed to continue with their work.</p> <p>Testing is a laboratory test to find out if a person has Covid-19. If you test positive for Covid-19 you will be asked to isolate to prevent you infecting others.</p>	

<p>11. What screening measures must an employer have at the workplace?</p>	<p>Every employer must take measures to screen any worker at the time they report for work to determine if the employee has any of the observable symptoms associated with Covid-19, such as fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, or loss of smell or taste; and determine whether they suffer from any of the following additional symptoms: fever, body aches, redness of eyes, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fatigue, weakness or tiredness.</p> <p>Employees should be reminded not to come to work if they develop symptoms of Covid-19 and they must report these to their supervisors. If there has previously been a positive case at the workplace, who this person may have come into contact with, they should be sent for testing.</p> <p>Should an employee feel unwell during the working day, they should be screened again for symptoms of Covid-19 and managed accordingly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sections 25 - 26 of C-19 OHS 4 June • National DoH Guidelines: Symptom Monitoring & Management • WC DoH Guideline
<p>12. What if an employee has coronavirus symptoms?</p>	<p>The employer must not permit the employee to enter the workplace or to report for work. If the employee is already at work, the employer must ensure that the employee is isolated, provided with a surgical mask, washes their hands, and arrange for the worker to be transported in a manner that does not place other workers or members of the public at risk, either to be self-isolation (if < 55 yrs old and with no comorbidities) or for a medical examination or testing (if >55 yrs and / or with comorbidities). While the employee awaits their test results, the employee must remain in self-isolation.</p> <p>The employer is not obliged to test everyone in the business, but should an employee test positive, the employer should identify close contacts of the employee and either send these for testing or self-quarantine depending on whether they have symptoms or not and on whether they meet the testing criteria or not (>55 yrs old and / or co-morbidities).</p> <p>The employer should also disinfect the area that the employee operated in and the employee's workstation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 27 of C-19 OHS 4 June • WC DoH Guideline
<p>13. Must the employer pay for the testing?</p>	<p>The employer is not compelled to cover the cost of any private or public testing fees incurred.</p>	

<p>14. Must the business close if an employee tests positive for coronavirus?</p>	<p>Not automatically. The closure of the business depends on the number of employees tested positive, the exposure of these employees to others in the business and the area of the business affected.</p> <p>If there is a positive case of Covid-19 in a workplace, the employer has to immediately notify the Western Cape Department of Health and the National Department of Employment and Labour. They will decide whether it is necessary to close the business. Even if the authorities determine that it is not necessary to close the business, a business may for operating reasons decide to temporarily close – such a decision is the business’ choice and no approval is needed from a third party for the business to reopen under such circumstances.</p>	<p>WC DoH Guideline</p>
<p>15. Is approval needed from government for a business to re-open?</p>	<p>If a business has closed itself due to an employee testing positive, it should indicate that it has undertaken all steps to comply with the regulations and guidelines with respect to disinfecting the workplace. It may then re-open itself and does not require a formal permit from government.</p> <p>If the business has been closed by the Department of Employment & Labour, it will need permission from the Department of Employment & Labour to reopen.</p>	<p>WC DoH Guideline</p>

<p>16. Must the whole workplace be deep cleaned or decontaminated by a registered cleaning company?</p>	<p>No. The extent of cleaning will depend on the number of people that could have been infected and the extent to which the case/s moved around the workplace. If the case 'passed through' the workplace without touching anything and without spending much time in face-to-face communication with other employees, then simple cleaning measures are appropriate. However, if they spent a lot of time in the workplace, touched and handled many objects and surfaces and had close contact with many people, then more comprehensive cleaning of the environment would be warranted, and it will take more time to interview contacts and determine if they had close contact.</p> <p>If an employee tests positive, all areas where the employee worked or visited in the work site should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and water and wiped down with a diluted bleach solution (dilute 30ml of bleach per litre of water to give a 0.1% mixture). If the area cannot be cleaned with soap and water then it should be wiped down carefully with a bleach solution, or a 70% alcohol solution.</p> <p>The area to be cleaned will be specific to each case and includes the kitchen, staff room, canteen, toilet facilities, trolleys, baskets, door handles, work stations, computers and counters among others. If large surface areas and large numbers of objects need to be cleaned and disinfected then the work site may need to close temporarily while this is being done.</p> <p>The deep cleaning does not need to be done by a registered cleaning company. The Western Cape Department of Health does not endorse or require cleaning that involves fumigation, fogging or demisting, nor does the WC Department of Health require a 'certificate of cleaning'.</p>	<p>WC DoH Guideline & Simplified WC DoH Guideline</p>
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<p>17.If an employee tests positive for Covid-19, must all other employees in the business also be tested?</p>	<p>If an employee tests positive, all other employees in the business should be interviewed to assess their level of exposure and whether they need to be quarantined or not.</p> <p>If an employee has been in close contact (less than 1m for more than 15 minutes) with the positive employee, and displays Covid-19 symptoms, if they are >55 yrs and / or have comorbidities, they should be tested; if they are <55 yrs and have no comorbidities, they should be sent home for self-isolation.</p> <p>If an employee has been in close contact with the positive employee and had no or inadequate PPE, but has no Covid-19 symptoms, they should be sent home for self-quarantine for 14 days from the last date of contact with the positive employee and if they start to show symptoms, should be tested if >55 yrs and / or have comorbidities.</p> <p>If an employee was in close contact with the positive employee but was wearing PPE and has no Covid-19 symptoms or if an employee has not been in close contact with the positive employee and has no Covid-19 symptoms, they may continue working, but should self-monitor for 14 days. If they begin to show symptoms, they should be managed accordingly.</p> <p>If clusters of employees are tested positive, the whole relevant shift may have to go into quarantine and be asked to monitor for Covid-19 symptoms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National DoH Guidelines: Symptom Monitoring & Management • Section 30 & 31 of C-19 OHS 4 June
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<p>18. If an employee tests positive, can they only return to work if they have tested negative?</p>	<p>If an employee tests positive, they do not need to test negative before returning to work. Instead an employee should return to work based on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asymptomatic positive Covid-19 patient: Return to work 14 days after date of testing positive for Covid-19 • Mild disease positive Covid-19 patient: Return to work 14 days after symptoms are displayed. • Severe disease positive Covid-19 patient: Return to work 14 days after clinical stability achieved. This date will be determined by staff at the hospital. • If the patient was sent for testing and is awaiting results while in isolation, and then tests negative: return to work the day after they receive the negative test result. • Contacts in quarantine: return to work 14 days after potential exposure 	<p>National DoH Guidelines: Symptom Monitoring & Management</p>
<p>19. Is an employee entitled to sick leave if sick or if the employee has symptoms associated with Covid-19?</p>	<p>Yes. If you are sick or have symptoms associated with Covid-19 then you must inform your employer, self-quarantine and not go to work. You will be entitled to take paid sick leave in terms of section 22 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act.</p>	<p>Section 27.3 of C-19 OHS 4 June</p>
<p>20. What happens if I don't have any more sick leave left?</p>	<p>If you don't have any more sick leave left, your employer must make application for an illness benefit in terms of clause 4 of the Directive issued on 25 March 2020 on the COVID-19 Temporary Employer Relief Scheme under regulation 10(8) of the Regulations promulgated in terms of section 27(2) of the Disaster Management Act.</p>	<p>Section 27.3 of C-19 OHS 4 June</p>
<p>21. Must my employer inform anyone if an employee has been tested positive for Covid-19?</p>	<p>Yes. Your employer must inform the Department of Health (the COVID-19 hotline can be contacted on 0800 02 9999) and the Department of Employment and Labour (david.esau@labour.gov.za). They are also asked to inform the Western Cape Department of Health Provincial COVID-19 hotline: WorkplaceCovidReporting@westerncape.gov.za or https://coronavirus.westerncape.gov.za/reporting-covid-19-workplace</p>	<p>Section 20.11.1 of C-19 OHS 4 June</p>
<p>22. Are employees permitted to be discriminated against if they have tested positive for Covid-19?</p>	<p>No. Employers must ensure that employees are not discriminated against if they have tested positive for Covid-19 in terms of section 6 of the Employment Equity Act, 1998.</p>	<p>Section 27.4 of C-19 OHS 4 June</p>

<p>23. What if an employee contracted Covid-19 while they were in the workplace?</p>	<p>If there is evidence that an employee became infected by Covid-19 because they were exposed in the workplace, the employer must lodge a claim for compensation in terms of the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act, 1993 (Act No. 130 of 1993) in accordance with Notice 193 published on 3 March 2020 (13 GG 43126 GN193 of 23 March 2020.)</p> <p>In addition to the obligations of employees under the OHS Act, every worker is obliged to comply with measures introduced by their employer as required by the Directive: COVID-19 Occupational Health and Safety Measures in Workplaces, 2020 (Issued by DoEL on 4 June 2020).</p>	<p>Sections 27.5 and 47 of C-19 OHS 4 June</p>
<p>24. Is there a low-risk work environment?</p>	<p>All workplaces have an element of risk, including workplaces such as hospitals which have very stringent health and safety measures. Employees can play a key role in managing risks in the workplace by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicing social distancing and stay 1.5 metres from others at all times • Washing or sanitising hands regularly • Practicing good hygiene • Wearing face masks or a face covering when in public • Practicing all the above in your work space as well as in communal break areas, such as canteens and smoke areas. 	
<p>25. If I tested positive and, after 14 days, someone in my family tests positive, am I still permitted to return to work?</p>	<p>You can return to work and will not pose an infectious risk to others after 14 days. As a precautionary measure, you are advised to abide by the required infection control measures at home and work i.e. the person at home who is infected should be self-isolating in any case. At work, you should be practicing handwashing, physical distancing and wearing a mask as required by the labour regulations.</p>	

26. What are the responsibilities of employees?

Employees have an important role to play in managing the spread of COVID-19, and should:

- Immediately inform the employer if they are tested positive for COVID-19 or have been in close contact with a positive case.
- Try as much as possible to always travel in the same transport, work in the same place or production line and have break times with the same colleagues observing physical distancing measures and wearing masks wherever possible. This helps to reduce the potential spread of infection and makes it easier for the employer and health officials to determine who employees have been in contact with where there is a positive case of COVID-19.
- Inform your employer if you are sick and do not come to work if you are sick.
- Take responsibility for your own health by:
 - Practicing social distancing and staying 1.5 metres from others at all times
 - Washing or sanitising hands regularly
 - Practicing good hygiene
 - Wearing face masks or a face covering when in public
- Practicing all the above in your work space as well as in communal break areas, such as canteens and smoke areas.