

HR Policy

CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19)

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POLICY: CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19)

This official guidance should serve as the foundation for organizational decisions about health- and legal-risk mitigation. Being able to demonstrate corporate policy alignment with official recommendations can be an important legal safeguard in cases where the company's infection-control efforts are challenged.

The priority for governments and the global community is to prevent people from contracting the disease and to cure those who do.

Given the virus' rapid contagion, action can help ensure that countries' health systems—including those that have limited capacity—do not become overwhelmed.

Regulations specific to Covid-19 have not as yet been published. Such regulations shall override an employer's HR Policy and Procedure.

Biology

The Corona virus, or COVID-19, as the new virus is called, will cause symptoms similar to Influenza virus (common flue). The most common symptoms are fever (88%) and dry cough (68%). Exhaustion (38%), expectoration of mucus when coughing (33%), shortness of breath (18%), sore throat (14%), headaches (14%), muscle aches (14%), chills (11%) are also common. Less frequent are nausea and vomiting (5%), stuffy nose (5%) and diarrhoea (4%). Running nose is not a symptom of COVID-19.

Spread of the virus is most often (78-85%) caused by an infection within the family by droplets and other carriers of infection in close contact with an infected person. Transmission by fine aerosols in the air over long distances is not one of the main causes of spread.

The vast majority of those infected sooner or later develop symptoms. Cases of people in whom the virus has been detected and who do not have symptoms at that time are rare - and most of them fall ill in the next few days. The duration from the beginning of the disease until recovery is only two weeks on average for the mildly ill but can be longer for severe and critical patients.

Pandemic

COVID-19 is a pandemic, which means that it is present all over the world. The greatest threat lies in the mass hysteria that media has created calling it a 'deadly' virus and making people believe that we will die. In South Africa, 11,000 people die every year of Influenza. The proportion of people infected with Influenza who die is 0.1-2%. The variation depends on the different strain of Flue-virus each year.

The estimated number of people that have died from COVID-19 is between 1.4-3.4%. This number is very difficult to calculate as it requires that you know the total number of people that were infected. For example, if 3 people out of 100 people died, the death rate would be 3%. But if there were in fact 1000 people who were actually infected but 900 of them never had themselves tested, the real number would be 3 deaths out of 1000 people, and the death rate would be 0.3%.

The chance of dying depends on your age, gender and other pre-existing conditions. In China it is shown that women and men are equally infected by the virus, but men were more likely to die. It is hypothesised that this may be because in China the majority of men smoke, whereas almost none of the women do.

The younger you are, the less likely you are to be infected and the less likely you are to fall seriously ill if you do get infected. However, your personal likelihood of getting infected or die is influenced by other risk factors, such as cancer, uncontrolled diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases and being immune compromised.

HIV

Although HIV weakens the immune system, Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) stops the HIV virus from replicating and thereby the immune system strengthens. Evidence from other countries have shown a direct link between increasing roll-out of ART and reduction of the number of Tuberculosis (TB) cases. ART is sometimes called the best prevention and treatment of TB. In short, if you are infected with HIV and take ART regularly your immune system bounces back to a level that is comparable to not being infected with HIV.

With regards to COVID-19, the recommendation is:

- Know your HIV status
- Take your ART

Seeing that COVID-19 is essentially 'a flue-virus', the only current difference with it being 'new' is that there is not yet a vaccine. Therefore, if you are normally worried about Influenza and used to getting vaccinated every flue-season, you may be worried now. Over 20 different vaccines studies are under way and a vaccine should soon be available.

Infection Control

You can only be infected if the virus enters your mucus membranes either via your eyes, your nose or your mouth. The virus cannot enter through your skin. Therefore, if you have virus on your hands you will not get sick unless you touch your eyes, mouth or nose.

Handwash is the best way to protect yourself and others. It is the soap (not the water) that kills the virus when you wash your hands. Therefore, make sure to work up a good lather and wash your hands thoroughly for 20 seconds (long enough to sing Happy Birthday two times). Make sure to wash the back of your hands, your wrists, your fingers and under your fingernails.

If you don't have access to soap and water, you can use hand sanitizer but do not replace your handwashing with hand sanitizer.

You should wash your hands frequently so that you minimise spread to others. When you cough, you should use standard cough etiquette and cough into a napkin that you throw away immediately afterwards or you should cough into your bent elbow.

Who should be tested for COVID-19?

- A person with acute respiratory illness (fever and at least one sign/symptom of respiratory disease (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) and with no other aetiology that fully explains the clinical presentation and a history of travel to or residence in a country/area or territory reporting local transmission of Covid-19 disease during the 14 days prior to symptom onset; or
- A person with any acute respiratory illness and having been in contact with a confirmed or probable Covid-19 case in the last 14 days prior to the onset of symptoms; or
- A person with severe acute respiratory infection (fever and at least one sign/symptom of respiratory disease e.g., cough, shortness breath) and requiring hospitalisation and with no other aetiology that fully explains the clinical presentation.

Laboratory Test:

Lancet Laboratories has introduced testing for the Covid-19 coronavirus at its molecular laboratory in South Africa. The group said that patients will only be tested if referred by a doctor and it will prioritise individuals that fulfil epidemiological and clinical case definitions as outlined by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).

Lancet said the expected turnaround time is 48 hours but is dependent on where the sample is coming from. The cash price is approximately R1,400 and medical rates vary dependent on the scheme the patient is on. It is up to each individual employer to decide whether such fee will be met as a cost of employment, or whether the employee will bear such cost.

Evaluate Leave

Employers should analyse their legal obligations to provide employees with leave in the event of sickness and evaluate whether their policies need to be adjusted in the current circumstances.

In practice, it is recommended that employees apply for sick leave, and provide medical reports confirming the health condition. Thereafter, after exhausting sick leave, the employee can apply for leave using annual leave days available.

It is compulsory for employers to accommodate the situation by applying the above recommendation or considering "Special Leave" which does not impact the employees sick or annual leave days.

**STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA, ON THE 15TH MARCH 2020,
ON MEASURES TO COMBAT COVID-19 EPIDEMIC**

Following an extensive analysis of the progression of the disease worldwide and in South Africa, Cabinet has decided on the following measures:

Firstly, to limit contact between persons who may be infected and South African citizens.

We are imposing a travel ban on foreign nationals from high-risk countries such as Italy, Iran, South Korea, Spain, Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom and China as from 18 March 2020.

We have cancelled visas to visitors from those countries from today and previously granted visas are hereby revoked.

South African citizens are advised to refrain from all forms of travel to or through the European Union, United States, United Kingdom and other identified high-risk countries such as China, Iran and South Korea. This is effective immediately.

Government will continue to regularly issue travel alerts referring to specific cities, countries or regions as the situation evolves based on the risk level.

Any foreign national who has visited high-risk countries in the past 20 days will be denied a visa.

South African citizens returning from high-risk countries will be subjected to testing and self-isolation or quarantine on return to South Africa.

Travellers from medium-risk countries - such as Portugal, Hong Kong and Singapore - will be required to undergo high intensity screening.

All travellers who have entered South Africa from high-risk countries since mid-February will be required to present themselves for testing.

We will strengthen surveillance, screening and testing measures at OR Tambo, Cape Town and King Shaka International Airports. South Africa has 72 ports of entry in the country which are land, sea and airports.

Of the 53 land ports, 35 will be shut down with effect from Monday 16 March.

2 of the 8 seaports will be closed for passengers and crew changes.

Effective immediately, all non-essential travel for all spheres of government outside of the Republic is prohibited.

We further discourage all non-essential domestic travel, particularly by air, rail, taxis and bus.

Secondly, it is essential therefore that we minimize the risk of the spread of this virus by limiting contact amongst groups of people.

While we appreciate the economic, religious, and cultural significance of social and community gatherings, the coronavirus is spread through contact between persons.

As we have said before, the current circumstances require extraordinary measures to curb the spread of infections. Countries that have heeded the call to implement these radical measures, have fared much better than those that do not.

Therefore, to encourage social distancing Cabinet has decided on these additional measures:

Gatherings of more than 100 people will be prohibited.

Mass celebrations of upcoming national days such as Human Rights Day and other large government events will be cancelled.

Where small gatherings are unavoidable, organisers will need to put in place stringent measures of prevention and control.

Schools will be closed from Wednesday, 18 March, and will remain closed until after the Easter Weekend. To compensate, the mid-year school holidays will be shortened by a week.

Government is working closely with colleges, universities and other public facilities such as Parliament, prisons, police stations and military installations to intensify hygiene control.

Visits to all correctional centres are suspended for 30 days with immediate effect.

Government is aware of the confirmed case of a student who has tested positive for the coronavirus at Wits University.

Those who have been in contact with the student will be quarantined.

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation is consulting with vice chancellors of universities and colleges across the country and will soon be announcing measures in this regard.

We call on all businesses including mining, retail, banking, farming to ensure that they take all necessary measures to intensify hygiene control.

We also call on the management of malls, entertainment centres and other places frequented by large numbers of people to bolster their hygiene control.

Thirdly, to further strengthen our health response:

Government is strengthening its surveillance and testing systems.

We are in process of identifying isolation and quarantine sites in each district and metro.

Capacity is being increased at designated hospitals in all provinces.

We are also increasing the capacity of existing contact tracing processes.

We are partnering with the private sector to set up a national tracking, tracing and monitoring system of all people infected with the coronavirus and those they have been in contact with.

We are undertaking a mass communication campaign on good hygiene and effective prevention behaviour.

Therefore, we are calling on everyone to:

- Wash their hands frequently with soap and water or hand sanitisers for at least 20 seconds.
- Cover their nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with tissue or flexed elbow.
- Avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms.

In essence, we are calling for a change of behavior amongst all South Africans.

We must minimise physical contact with other people, and, encourage the elbow greeting rather than shaking hands.
