



## Epidemiology Unit

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## Guidance for workplace preparedness for COVID-19

COVID 19, the novel corona virus 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 a case 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 and lung disease are more at risk. The risk also increases with advancing age and people over 40 years seem more vulnerable.

### Ensure the cleanliness and hygiene of the workplace

- Pay attention to regular disinfection of surfaces (e.g. desks and tables) and objects (e.g. telephones, keyboards) with a suitable disinfectant

**Why?** Because touching of surfaces contaminated with infectious material is one of the main ways that COVID-19 spreads

### 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.

- Keep sanitizing hand rub dispensers in prominent and accessible places in the workplace and ensure they are regularly refilled

- Make handwashing facilities available and easily accessible to employees and customers to wash their hands with soap and water
- Promote regular and thorough handwashing at workplace by communicating the need to wash hands through posters, via intranet and, dissemination of information at meetings

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

#### **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 handwashing 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](http://www.epid.gov.lk)).

In the event of more cases being detected in the future, it is advised to brief employees and customers 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\\_4](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_4)