



Ministry of Health

GUIDANCE ON WORKPLACE PREPAREDNESS FOR COVID-19

Interim Guidance 19th March 2020

In January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new coronavirus disease in Hubei Province, China to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. WHO stated there is a high risk of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spreading to other countries around the world.

Kenya has since reported confirmed cases and the Government of Kenya is taking action to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. For effective response the Whole of Society -including businesses and employers – must play a role if we are to stop the spread of this disease.

How COVID-19 spreads

- ⇒ When someone who has COVID-19 coughs or exhales they release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as desks, tables or telephones.
- ⇒ People could catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.
- ⇒ If they are standing within one meter of a person with COVID-19 they can catch it by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them.
- ⇒ COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu.
 - Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover.
 - However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age: people over 40 seem to be more vulnerable than those under 40.
 - People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.

This document gives advice on:

1. Simple ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in your workplace
2. How to manage COVID-19 risks when organizing meetings & events
3. Things to consider when you and your employees travel
4. Getting your workplace ready in case COVID-19 arrives in your community

1. SIMPLE WAYS TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN YOUR WORKPLACE

The low-cost measures below will help prevent the spread of infections in your workplace, such as colds, flu and protect your customers, contractors and employees.

Employers should start doing these things now, even if COVID-19 has not arrived in the communities where they operate.

- ✓ Make sure your workplaces are clean and hygienic
 - Surfaces (e.g. desks and tables) and objects (e.g. telephones, keyboards) need to be wiped with disinfectant regularly
 - Why? Because contamination on surfaces touched by employees and customers is one of the main ways that COVID-19 spreads

- ✓ Promote **regular** and **thorough hand-hygiene** by employees, contractors and customers
 - Put sanitizing hand rub dispensers in prominent places around the workplace. Make sure these dispensers are regularly refilled and containers cleaned with soap and water and dried prior to refilling.
 - Display posters promoting hand-hygiene
 - Combine this with other communication measures such as offering guidance from occupational health and safety officers, briefings at meetings and information on the intranet to promote hand-hygiene.
 - Make sure that staff, contractors and customers have access to places where they can wash their hands with soap and water
 - Why? Because washing removes the virus on your hands and prevents the spread of COVID-19

- ✓ Promote **good respiratory hygiene** in the workplace
 - Display posters promoting respiratory hygiene. Combine this with other communication measures such as offering guidance from occupational health and safety officers, briefing at meetings and information on the intranet etc.
 - Ensure that ordinary surgical face masks and / or paper tissues are available at your workplaces, for those who develop a runny nose or cough at work, along with closed bins for hygienically disposing of them.
 - Why? Because good respiratory hygiene prevents the spread of COVID-19

- ✓ Advise employees and contractors to consult national travel advice before going on business trips. Trips should be restricted to essential travel only.

- ✓ Brief your employees, contractors and customers that if COVID-19 starts spreading in your community anyone with even a mild cough or low-grade fever (37.3 C or more) needs to stay at home. They should also stay home (or work from home) if they have had to take medications such as paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin which may mask symptoms of infection.
 - Keep communicating and promoting the message that people need to stay at home even if they have just mild symptoms of COVID-19.
 - Display posters with this message in your workplaces. Combine this with other communication channels commonly used in your organization or business.
 - Your occupational health services, local public health authority or other partners may have developed campaign materials to promote this message
 - Make clear to employees that they will be able to count this time off as sick leave.

2. HOW TO MANAGE COVID-19 RISK WHEN ORGANIZING MEETINGS & EVENTS

Why do employers and organizers need to think about COVID-19?

Organizers of meetings and events need to think about the potential risk from COVID-19 because:

- There is a risk that people attending your meeting or event might be unwittingly bringing the COVID-19 virus to the meeting.
- Others might be unknowingly exposed to COVID-19.
- While COVID-19 is a mild disease for most people, it can make some very ill.

Key considerations to prevent or reduce COVID-19 risks

BEFORE the meeting or event

- Develop and agree on a preparedness plan to prevent infection at your meeting or event.
 - Consider whether a face-to-face meeting or event is needed. Could it be replaced by a teleconference or online event?
 - Could the meeting or event be scaled down so that fewer people attend?
 - Ensure and verify information and communication channels in advance with key partners such as the Ministry of Health or County Departments of Health
 - Pre-order sufficient supplies and materials, including tissues and hand sanitizer for all participants. Have surgical masks available to offer anyone who develops respiratory symptoms.

- Actively monitor where COVID-19 is circulating. Advise participants in advance that if they have any symptoms or feel unwell, they should not attend.
- Make sure all organizers, participants, caterers and visitors at the event provide contact details: mobile telephone number, email and address where they are staying.
State clearly that their details will be shared with local public health authorities if any participant becomes ill with a suspected infectious disease. If they **WILL NOT** agree to this they cannot attend the event or meeting.
- Develop and agree on a response plan in case someone at the meeting becomes ill with symptoms of COVID-19 (dry cough, fever, malaise). This plan should include at least:
 - Identifying a room or area where someone who is feeling unwell or has symptoms can be safely quarantined and notify the nearest health facility or call the toll free lines provided by the Ministry of Health (719, **0729471414, 0732353535, 0748592455, 0800721316 (Toll free)**).
 - If a meeting participant, staff member or service provider tests positive for COVID-19 during or just after the meeting, the convener should inform the participants.
 - Agree on the plan in advance with your healthcare provider.

DURING THE MEETING OR EVENT

- Provide information or a briefing, preferably both orally and in writing, on COVID-19 and the measures that organizers are taking to make this event safe for participants.
 - Build trust. For example, as an icebreaker, practice ways to say hello without touching.
 - Encourage regular hand-washing or use of an alcohol hand rub by all participants at the meeting or event
 - Encourage participants to cover their mouth and nose with the bend of their elbow or a tissue if they cough or sneeze. Supply tissues and closed bins for disposal
 - Provide contact details or a health hotline number that participants can call for advice or to give information.
- Display dispensers of alcohol-based hand rub prominently around the venue.
- Arrange seats so that participants are at least one meter apart
- Open windows and doors to make sure the venue is well ventilated.
- If anyone starts to feel unwell, follow your preparedness plan or call your hotline.
 - Depending on the situation in your area, or recent travel of the participant, place the person in the quarantine room. Offer the person a mask so they can get home safely, if appropriate, or to a designated assessment facility.
- Thank all participants for their cooperation with the provisions in place.

AFTER THE MEETING

1. Retain the names and contact details of all participants for at least one month. This will help public health authorities trace people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 if one or more participants become ill shortly after the event.
2. If someone at the meeting or event was isolated as a suspected COVID-19 case, the organizer should let all participants know this. They should be advised to monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days and take their temperature twice a day.
3. If they develop even a mild cough or low-grade fever (i.e. a temperature of 37.3°C or more) they should stay at home and self-quarantine. This means avoiding close contact (1 meter or nearer) with other people, including family members. They should also telephone their healthcare provider or the Ministry of Health or County Department of Health hotlines, giving them details of their recent travel and symptoms.
4. Thank all the participants for their cooperation with the provisions in place.

3. THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU AND YOUR EMPLOYEES TRAVEL

- **Before traveling**
 - Make sure your organization and its employees have the latest information on areas where COVID-19 is spreading. You can find it at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>
 - Based on the latest information, your organization should assess the benefits and risks related to upcoming travel plans.
 - Avoid sending employees who may be at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. older employees and those with medical conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease) to areas where COVID-19 is spreading.
 - Make sure all persons travelling to locations reporting COVID-19 are briefed by a qualified professional (e.g. staff health services, health care provider or county department of health)
 - Consider issuing employees who are about to travel with small bottles (under 100 ml) of alcohol-based hand rub. This can facilitate regular hand hygiene while on travel.

- **While traveling:**
 - Encourage employees to wash their hands regularly and stay at least one meter away from people who are coughing or sneezing
 - Ensure employees know what to do and who to contact if they feel ill while traveling.
 - Ensure that your employees comply with instructions from local authorities where they are traveling. If, for example, they are told by local authorities not to go somewhere they should comply with this. Your employees should comply with any local restrictions on travel, movement or large gatherings.

- **When you or your employees return from traveling:**
 - Employees who have returned from an area where COVID-19 is spreading should 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) they should stay at home and self-quarantine. This means avoiding close contact (one meter or nearer) with other people, including family members. They should also telephone their healthcare provider or the local public health department, giving them details of their recent travel and symptoms.

4. GETTING YOUR WORKPLACE READY IN CASE COVID-19 ARRIVES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- Develop a plan of what to do if someone becomes ill with suspected COVID-19 at one of your workplaces
 - The plan should cover putting the ill person in a room or area where they are isolated from others in the workplace, limiting the number of people who have contact with the sick person and contacting the local health authorities or the provided hot lines.
 - Consider how to identify persons who may be at risk, and support them, without inviting stigma and discrimination into your workplace. This could include persons who have recently travelled to an area reporting cases, or other personnel who have conditions that put them at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. diabetes, heart and lung disease, older age).
 - Tell your local public health authority you are developing the plan and seek their input.

- Promote regular teleworking across your organization. If there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community the health authorities may advise people to avoid public transport and crowded places. Teleworking will help your business keep operating while your employees stay safe.

- Develop a contingency and business continuity plan for an outbreak in the communities where your business operates
 - The plan will help prepare your organization for the possibility of an outbreak of COVID - 19 in its workplaces or community. It may also be valid for other health emergencies
 - The plan should address how to keep your business running even if a significant number of employees, contractors and suppliers cannot come to your place of business - either due to local restrictions on travel or because they are ill.
 - Communicate to your employees and contractors about the plan and make sure they are aware of what they need to do – or not do – under the plan. Emphasize key points such as the importance of staying away from work even if they have only mild symptoms or have had to take simple medications (e.g. paracetamol) which may mask the symptoms
 - Be sure your plan addresses the mental health and social consequences including re-integration of a case of COVID-19 in the workplace or in the community and offer information and support.
 - For small and medium-sized businesses without in-house staff health and welfare support, develop partnerships and plans with your health care providers in advance of any emergency.
 - The County Department of Health or MOH may be able to offer support and guidance in developing your plan.

Remember:

Now is the time to prepare for COVID-19. Simple precautions and planning can make a big difference.

Action now will help protect your employees and your business.

This guidance has been adapted from WHO Guidelines on Getting Your Work Place Ready for COVID-19, March 03 2020

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