

Guidance note for workplaces in the event of identification of a COVID-19 positive employee (V5: 14 May 2020)

(Document prepared by Academic Group within the Occupational Health and Safety Workstream of the National Department of Health – Covid-19 Response)

Please note: This is an interim guide that may be updated as the outbreak in South Africa intensifies, to guide additional workforce preserving strategies

This guidance note outlines some key aspects in relation to COVID-19 that need to be considered by the workplace health and safety regulator, employers and employees should a worker become diagnosed as COVID-19 disease. The following issues need to be addressed in dealing with identification and management of a COVID-19 positive worker. These procedures must be read in conjunction with other relevant / updated guidelines or regulations from the National Department of Health and the Departments of Employment and Labour, Mineral Resources and Energy, and Public Service and Administration.

1. Personal health procedures

- a. Provide prompt counselling and support to the employee as per institution's guidelines / standard operating procedures (SOPs);
- b. Promptly provide the employee with a surgical mask and relocate the employee to a secure, well ventilated area (should ideally be identified prior to such incident) if employee presents at the work place;
- c. Provide or arrange for their clinical condition to be assessed with respect to their personal health care (workplace provider / private health provider); and
- d. If the employee does not need admission and is sent home, ensure that the employee undergoes self-isolation at home, or at a designated isolation facility identified by the employer, in line with National Department of Health guidelines.
- e. Ensure that the worker is not discriminated against on grounds of having tested positive for COVID-19;
- f. Note that COVID-19 personal health interventions are part of the Prescribed Minimum Benefits of the Council for Medical Schemes¹.

2. Public health communicable disease procedures

- a. Report the personal details to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) in line with the Notifiable Medical Conditions protocols;
- b. Ensure that the employer with the appropriate authorities to initiate contact tracing of fellow employees, patient contacts, family and community by working with all relevant

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https://www.medicalschemes.com/files/PMB%20Benefit%20definition%20guidelines/PMB_definition_guideline-COVID-19_v2_6_May_2020.pdf

stakeholders such as outlined in the NICD Guidelines for case-finding, diagnosis, management and public health response in South Africa;¹

- c. Assist district / provincial health authorities and the NICD to identify close contacts and facilitate quarantine and / or isolation as per the guidelines above.

3. Infection prevention and control procedures

- a. Identify Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) practitioners that are able to advise on specific IPC procedures to be followed in the workplace. Workplaces can access this through Provincial Department of Health or via the NICD Hotline 0800 029 999;
- b. Implement protocols to prevent further infection spread in the workplace to workers, clients, visitors and suppliers
- c. Depending on the initial investigation and the number of infected workers, this may entail temporary closure of affected work areas, for decontamination in line with the relevant regulatory authorities' guidance.

4. Workplace related occupational health and safety procedures

- a. Relevant staff members (preferably staff of the occupational health services) must conduct an incident-based risk assessment - find out what went wrong, identify lapses in current workplace control measures such as disinfection, personal protective equipment (PPE), social distancing, education/training, staff symptom screening / testing / monitoring) and take steps to address gaps;
- b. Clean and decontaminate the area that has been identified as per COVID-19 national IPC Guidelines;
- c. Implement improved control measures based on the risk assessment, in consultation with the Health and Safety Committee and/or COVID-19 Committee
- d. Communicate details of the incident in accordance with appropriate communication lines that exist with management, health and safety committee and/or COVID-19 committee and co-workers including organised labour (notwithstanding respecting the confidentiality rights of the affected employee);
- e. Communicate incident investigation and remedial measures taken by the employer to relevant authorities and committees;
- f. Manage return to work of affected employees in line with protocols and special circumstances, which should include completion of isolation period, ensuring public health, personal hygiene and social distancing measures, and ongoing close symptom monitoring of the employee on their return to work. It is recommended that this is informed by the Department of Employment and Labour directive on COVID-19 Occupational Health and Safety measures in workplaces COVID-19 (C19 OHS) 2020,² and the NDOH's Guidelines for symptom monitoring and management of essential workers for COVID-19 related infection.³

5. Labour relations procedures

- a. Management and labour should use the incident to work collectively and cooperatively to safeguard employees and the workplace to prevent future lapses and incidents;
- b. Management and organised labour should work cooperatively to address issues and strengthen labour relations to deal with challenges on an on-going basis;
- c. Organised labour representatives, health and safety representatives and committees should provide ongoing feedback to management on areas needing attention such as

control measures, access to appropriate PPE, education and training needs, health and isolation support, leave or any other issues identified by employees.

6. Incident reporting and engagement with relevant Regulator

- a. Employer to inform the relevant authorities such as Departments of Employment and Labour; Mineral Resources and Energy; Public Service and Administration, and / or the relevant Provincial Department of Health public health response teams;
- b. Employer to initiate a joint meeting with relevant authorities, safety officers, health and safety committees, and relevant management staff to outline actions taken to date, and proposed plans of action and timelines to reduce further exposure and health transmission risk;
- c. Enlist the assistance of the relevant inspectorate to support workplaces in using the prescribed approach in addressing any lapses in control measures and to ensure the health and safety of the workers in the workplace.

7. Leave and worker's compensation arrangements

- a. The employer to pro-actively facilitate all applicable leave requests such as sick leave in terms of section 22 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997 (Act 75 of 1997) (BCEA);
- b. Report all alleged, presumed and confirmed cases of COVID-19 related occupational disease to the Compensation Commissioner in the prescribed format using the relevant documentation as required in terms of the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act 130 of 1993 (COIDA);
- c. Facilitate procedures for all worker's compensation benefits available to employees, including:
 - i. Leave for temporary disability
 - ii. Assessment by an occupational medicine practitioner / specialist in cases of complex disease that may result in permanent disability
 - iii. Provision of medical aid for the testing and treatment, as well as permanent disability assessments
 - iv. Compensation to dependents in case of death

8. References

1. National Institute for Communicable Diseases [Internet]. Guidelines for case-finding, diagnosis, management and public health response in south africa. Johannesburg South Africa ,: NICD; 2020 [cited 2020]. Available from: https://www.nicd.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/NICD_DoH-COVID-19-Guidelines-10March2020_final.pdf.
2. Department of Employment and Labour [Internet]. COVID-19 occupational health and safety measures in workplaces COVID-19 (c19 ohs), 2020. Department of Employment and Labour; 2020 [cited 2020].
3. National Department of Health [Internet]. Guidelines for symptom monitoring and management of essential workers for COVID-19 related infection. Pretoria, South Africa 2020 [cited 2020].