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MEC FOR HEALTH

## 1. SUPPORT FOR COVID-19 AFFECTED EMPLOYEES

When an employee has tested positive for Covid-19, they must be notified by a doctor or nurse that they are infected and need to be isolated for 10 days. However, there are certain cases where such notification happens while an employee is at work. If the employee is at work, then:

Immediately separate him/her from other employees preferably by placing him/her in a well-ventilated isolation room. Encourage adherence to Infection Prevention Control measures i.e. provision of mask, practicing of basic hygiene, among others.

- Ensure that your employee is counselled and is in a reasonable mental state to follow other instructions, such as advice regarding isolation. Establish if the employee is able to effectively self-isolate at home, or if isolation at a public facility would be required, and whether they are able to travel safely to a place of isolation (home or isolation facility).

If the employee is at home or at a Quarantine Facility, then:

- Assist the employee to follow advice regarding isolation that is required to protect their family, friends, and colleagues.

### Additionally:

- a. Provide suitable sick leave arrangements for the 10 days that the employee will be away from work. Note that 10 days is the minimum time of isolation and that it might be longer, depending on how ill the employee becomes and the treatment required.
- b. Provide supportive counselling via the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or Employee Wellness Programme.
- c. If the likelihood is high that the infection was occupationally acquired, (in other words it arose out of or in the course of work duties), then a Workers' Compensation Claim needs to be completed through Human Resources Department.

## 2. SUPPORT FOR OTHER EMPLOYEES

- Follow advice from your Occupational Health Practitioner, and assure staff that you are supporting the affected employee(s).
- Communicate to the employees the process that will be followed, update them throughout the process, and provide them with the necessary counselling and psycho-social support.

## 3. INFORM THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PRACTITIONER AND DISTRICT HEALTH OFFICE

- Inform the Occupational Health Practitioner as soon as the infection of an employee is reported.
- The Occupational Health Practitioner is responsible for:
  - Screening all employees in the affected workplace to determine possible exposure to the virus, and will advise on what further steps to take;
  - Advising the nearest Tracing Team for Contact Tracing; and
  - Management of contacts and quarantined employees

## 4. IDENTIFY WHO THE EMPLOYEE CAME INTO CLOSE CONTACT WITH

- The employee could have been infected by fellow workers, customers, or by someone within their home or social circle. Therefore, it is important to differentiate between the following 3 possible scenarios;
  1. Employees who are told by their health care provider that they have tested positive
  2. Employees who present at work with symptoms, and were referred for testing and had positive results
  3. Employees who were identified as a contact of a positive case within the workplace, and subsequently test positive
- For scenario 1 and 2: Assist the employee to identify if he/she came into contact with anyone;
  - o i.e. within 1 metre, for more than 15 minutes without PPE (no face cover/mask/visor) or with failure of PPE and/or direct contact with respiratory secretions (Clinically or Laboratory).
- For scenario 3: This employee already has an identified index case and had already been in quarantine as a contact and is therefore unlikely to require any further investigation within the workplace. The employer needs to provide support as stated above.
- Contact tracing for contacts outside the workplace is not a primary responsibility of the employer. However, the employer should collaborate with the health authorities (District's Tracing Team) in the identification of contacts.

## 5. ASSIST WITH TRACING AND QUARANTINING OF PEOPLE WHO MAY HAVE BEEN INFECTED

- Quarantine means that people who are at high risk of being infected with coronavirus are separated from other people for 10 days from the date that they were exposed to their infected colleague, so that they cannot infect others should they also become infectious
- For certain front-line workers, quarantine may be for a minimum of 7 days, with daily symptom self-checking until 10 days from the last COVID-19 exposure.
- Depending on their home circumstances, they can be quarantined either at home or at a specially designated quarantine facility.

## 6. STEPS TO TAKE TO PREVENT ANY FUTURE INFECTIONS AMONG EMPLOYEES

- Symptom screening twice a day for all employees, and on-going education of employees on measures to reduce their own risk of infection e.g. appropriate use of PPE, donning and doffing (wearing and removing) of PPE, etc.
- Ensure continued physical distancing, hand hygiene, wearing of face masks and regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces is in line with National Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidelines, both in work areas and in rest areas.
- Ensure adherence to IPC zoning criteria in facilities.

## 7. TEMPORARY CLOSURE FOR CLEANING AND DISINFECTION ONLY

- All areas where the affected employee worked or visited in the work site will need to be temporarily closed for aeration, cleaning and disinfection as per National IPC guidelines.
- This process should take between 24 to 48 hours, depending on the size of the Unit/Section/Facility that needs to be cleaned.

**NB:** In terms of the Statement issued by the National Department of Health, on the 10th of June 2020, on Cleaning and Decontamination of Workplaces in the context of Covid-19, it states:

**“The Department of Health does not endorse or require ‘deep cleaning’ that involves fumigation, demisting or fogging. Nor does the Department of Health require such a ‘certificate of cleaning’.”**

## 8. POSSIBLE TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF THE WORK SITE FOR OTHER REASONS

### 8.1 Temporary Closure of a Unit/Section (Maximum 48 hours)

Whether the workplace will close or not will be determined by the outcome of the investigation. The closure of a Unit/Section should be considered if there is an insufficient number of employees for the work site to continue its operations safely because of the following;

- The number of employees who have been screened and have symptoms and therefore need quarantine is considerably large.
- The number of employees who are contacts and therefore needing quarantine is considerably large.
- The number of employees diagnosed with COVID – 19 and therefore needing isolation is considerably large.

### 8.2. Temporary Closure of a Facility (Maximum 48 hours)

As a matter of principle, no CEO/Director/Chief Director/DDG has a mandate to close a Facility/Building. The decision to close a Facility/Building can only be made by the Honourable MEC, through the Head of Health.

The closure of a Facility/Building can only be considered if it meets the criteria listed above and multiple Units/Sections/Wards in a Facility/Building are affected.

In the case of a Hospital/CHC/Clinic, the Facility may need to remain open, with a brief suspension of some services, or usage of alternative means such as a mobile health service.

## 9. RE-OPENING OF THE WORK SITE

In order for the work site to be re-opened, the following minimum requirements should be in place:

- An assessment of the circumstances which resulted in the exposure of the employee/s to the coronavirus.
- A description of steps that will be taken to remedy any shortcomings in prevention activities uncovered during the assessment.
- Cleaning and disinfection of all surfaces and objects that have been contaminated has been done.
- Procedures are in place to implement all the prevention activities.
- If a workplace was closed upon instructions from an inspector of the Department of Employment and Labour, then formal compliance needs to be demonstrated before it can be permitted to re-open.

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