Facilitator guide

This facilitator guide has been developed to help you to provide your employees with information about the Covid19 pandemic and to manage the work environment to ensure employee safety at work.

Manage the Covid-19 pandemic at the workplace

Manage COVID 19 at the workplace
Developed as a service to our clients by Gemini Training Material Pty Ltd

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## *Understanding the Corona virus and how it is spread*

The Corona virus originated in Wuhan[1], a city in the Hubei province in China. By December 2019 people in other countries were reported ill from the same strain as that first reported in China. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared a pandemic and by late March, COVID-19, as this strain of the Corona virus became known, caused travel to virtually shut down globally.

For most of us, this is our first experience of a pandemic that has and will continue to have worldwide social and economic consequences. Governments had to implement immediate strict and unpopular measures to protect their people against the further spread of the virus. In turn, companies needed to take similar measures to protect their employees from infection while finding new ways to ensure the sustainability of their business.

As the potential for pandemics is not as high as that for fire or other emergencies, not many companies included pandemics in their contingency and emergency response planning. We hope that this workshop will provide you with some guidelines on how to steer your company and employees safely through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Corona virus family and COVID-19
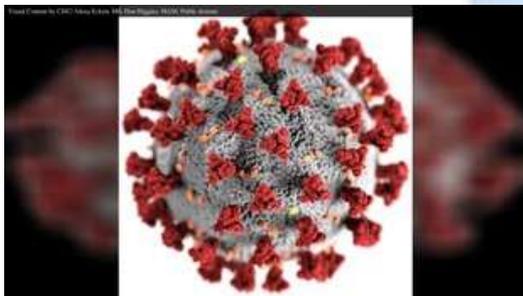
Corona viruses[2] are a large family that may cause infections ranging from common colds to more severe diseases e.g. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). This most recent outbreak of the Corona virus has been named COVID-19.

The signs and symptoms of COVID-19

Typical signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

The most common symptoms reported include fever, cough, sore throat and difficulty in breathing.

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[1] Image sourced from: https://www.bing.com/maps

[2] Image sourced from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic

In more severe cases, infection can cause:

- Pneumonia
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Kidney failure
- Death

	Facilitator Aid 1A Poster: **Signs and Symptoms of Covid-19 Infection**

Risk levels

Persons most at risk of being infected are elderly persons and persons with an underlying medical condition like high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, diabetes and cancer.

Some occupations have a higher risk exposure to the virus than others.

	Facilitator Aid 1B PowerPoint slides: **Exposure risk levels**

Preventing the spread of the virus

There are only two confirmed routes of transmission of the virus:

- Directly inhaled from person to person through respiratory droplets produced by sneezing and/or coughing
- Via respiratory droplets landing on environmental surfaces surrounding the infected person which are then transferred to persons by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching their faces or mucous membranes.

Apart from airborne viruses from persons coughing or sneezing in close proximity to another person, no other airborne transmission of the virus has been reported.

The level of risk determines what measures should be taken to protect persons and to prevent the spread of the virus. For low and medium risk of exposure at the workplace the following measures should be taken:

- Make sure workplaces are clean and hygienic
- Regularly wipe work surfaces with a disinfectant
- Ensure that employees, contractors and customers have access to places where they can wash their hands with soap and water

- Use posters to promote regular handwashing by employees, contractors and customers

- Place sanitising hand wipe dispensers in prominent positions around the workplace and ensure that these are filled regularly. Provide closed bins for disposing of used wipes at all dispensers.

- Use posters to remind people that coughing and sneezing spread the virus and to remind them to maintain good respiratory hygiene at all times.

- Ensure that face masks and tissues are available at the workplace with closed lid containers for disposing of used masks and tissues

- Advise employees and contractors to check with national travel before going on business trips

- Advise persons with a low-grade fever (37.3°C) or with a mild cough to stay at home

- Any employee or contractor that has taken medication for flu symptoms should also stay at home as medication may mask symptoms of infection

Remind everyone that persons may be carriers of the virus without displaying any symptoms and that it is important to maintain a safe social distance (2.5 – 3m) at all times.

Avoid the congregation of persons in large groups and limit the number of customers that enter the premises to a number that will make it possible to maintain a safe social distance.

Additional measures should be implemented for employees in very high and high exposure risk jobs.

	Facilitator Aid 2A PowerPoint slides: **PPE and workplace safety measures** ***Facilitator Aid 2B*** Poster: **Handwashing awareness**

The Disaster Management Act and COVID 19 Regulations

Several amendments to the Disaster Management Act were published in the Government Gazette during March and April 2020. The regulations in The Disaster Management Act: Regulations to address, prevent and combat the spread of Coronavirus COVID-19: Amendment, cover what companies and people may and may not do during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 regulations

The following presentation summarises the regulations that would impact most on companies and the public during the lockdown period. These regulations may be changed as needed by Government and will also be adapted as appropriate for each lockdown release phase. It is important to ensure that you comply with the latest regulations as applicable to companies and the public and that you are aware of updates to these regulations.

	Facilitator Aid 3 PowerPoint slides: **Summary of government department regulations**

Returning to Workplace Guidelines

The Department of Labour (DoL) has published the regulations for workplaces returning to work during **Level 4** lockdown across South Africa. These guidelines, aimed at preventing the spreading of COVID-19 as economic activity slowly resumes, must be followed across workplaces in all industries.

The DoL has stipulated the following initial regulations to be followed in every workplace:

- Employers must provide each employee, free of charge, with at least two cloth masks to wear while at work or commuting.

- Employees with COVID-19 symptoms must not be at work and employers must grant paid sick leave or apply for COVID-19 Temporary Employee/Employer Relief Scheme (TERS) benefits.

- Employers must further appoint a manager from within the existing structure to address the concerns of employees and workplace representatives.

- Employers must take measures to minimise the contact between workers and between workers and the public to prevent transmission.

- Employers must minimise the number of workers in the workplace at any time through shift or working arrangements to achieve social distancing.

In addition to these initial regulations, **employers must provide workers with information on Covid-19** and how to prevent transmission

In line with the Department of Labour's regulations, the following stipulations must be followed:

- **Social Distancing** - Workers must be screened upon arrival at work for COVID-19 symptoms.

  Workers with symptoms must be placed in isolation and arrangements made for their safe transport for a medical examination or for self-isolation.

  Employees who recover from COVID-19 may return to work after a medical evaluation and subject to ongoing monitoring, in line with instructions of the Department of Health.

- **Sanitising and Disinfectants** - Employers are also required to provide sufficient quantities of hand sanitiser with at least 70% alcohol content.

  Communal and shared equipment must be regularly cleaned and disinfected.

What to do if an employee displays covid-19 symptoms

Employers are required to report any diagnosis of Covid-19 at work to the Department of Health and the Department of Labour to investigate the cause, and assist in taking appropriate measures.

The Department of Labour and the Department of Health will not allow employers resuming operation to negate the guidelines they have put in place and all businesses are expected to comply with these regulations.

Lock down phases

The initial lock down phases implemented from 26 March 2020 were:

Level 5	Drastic measures are required to contain the spread of the virus to save lives
Level 4	Extreme precautions to limit the spread of the virus in communities while allowing some activities to resume
Level 3	Some restrictions are lifted but continuing restrictions, including on work and social activities, to address a high risk of transmission
Level 2	Further easing of restrictions, but the maintenance of physical distancing and restrictions on some leisure and social activities to prevent a resurgence of the virus
Level 1	Most normal activity can resume, with precautions and health guidelines followed at all times

Level 4 Lockdown Phase

On 1st May 2020 South Africa moved from Level 5 to Level 4 lockdown.

	Facilitator Aid 4A PowerPoint slides: **L4 permissions and restrictions**

Essential goods and services

An organisation that provides the following goods or services is an essential service provider and is allowed to continue operating during the lock down. Registered companies providing an essential service must apply to the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition for permission to continue trading. Healthcare professionals, registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa, sole proprietors who provide essential goods and services (like spaza shops), and small-scale farmers under the essential services must obtain a certificate from the CIPC to allow them to continue trading.

	Facilitator Aid 4B PowerPoint slides: **Essential goods and services**

Consequences of non-compliance with regulations

The consequences of non-compliance for both employers and employees with regulations include:

A fine or imprisonment for 6 months or both if you fail to comply with:

- The regulation on gatherings
- The closure of schools and partial care facilities
- Supply or purchase of alcohol
- The restrictions applicable to the lock down phase in progress

Any person that intentionally exposes another person to the Corona virus may be charged with assault, attempted murder or murder.

Enforcement by labour inspectors

Labour inspectors are empowered to promote, monitor and enforce compliance with the directives. Failure to comply with the directives may result in the closure of contravening businesses.

Level 3 Lockdown Phase

Level 3 Covid19 Lockdown phase will come into effect from 1 June 2020.

	Facilitator Aid 5A PowerPoint slides: **L3 permissions and restrictions** ***Facilitator Aid 5B*** Poster: **L4 to L3 permissions and restrictions**

Level 3 permissions and restrictions

Permissions

People can leave their homes to buy goods or obtain services including medical care.

People can exercise at any time during the day, provided this is not done in groups.

The curfew on the movement of people are lifted.

Alcohol may be sold for home consumption only under strict conditions, on specified days and for limited hours. Announcements in this regard will be made once discussions with the sector on the various conditions are concluded.

Restrictions

The sale of tobacco products will remain prohibited in alert level 3 due to the health risks associated with smoking.

All gatherings will remain prohibited, except for funerals with no more than 50 people or meetings in the workplace for work purposes.

Any place open to the public where cultural, sporting, entertainment, recreational, exhibitions, organisational or similar activities may take place will remain closed.

Opening up the economy

A number of sector protocols will be finalised and will require every company to develop a workplace plan before they re-open.

According to these plans, companies will need to put in place sanitary and social distancing measures and facilities; they will need to screen workers on arrival each day, quarantine those who may be infected and make arrangements for them to be tested.

They also need to assist with contact tracing if employees test positive.

Because of their vulnerability, all staff who are older than 60 years of age and those who suffer from underlying conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease and cancer should ideally stay at home.

Employees who can work from home should be allowed to do so.

Subject to the above measures, all manufacturing, mining, construction, financial services, professional and business services, information technology, communications, government services and media services, will commence full reopening from 1 June.

Appropriate restart and phasing in arrangements will need to be put in place for every workplace.

Wholesale and retail trade will be fully opened, including stores, spaza shops and informal traders. E-commerce will continue to remain open.

Other sectors that opened previously, such as agriculture and forestry, utilities, medical services, food production and manufacture of hygiene products, will remain fully opened.

Continuing prohibition of certain high-risk business activities

Restaurants, bars and taverns, except for delivery or collection of food.

Accommodation and domestic air travel, except for business travel, which will be phased in on dates to be announced.

Conferences, events, entertainment and sporting activities.

Personal care services, including hairdressing and beauty services.

Addressing challenges associated with the level 3 permissions

Level 3 will see up to 8 million people returning to work, many of which will be using public transport. The following measures must be taken to minimise the risk of infection:

Commuters will always need to wear masks, to wash their hands before and after they have travelled and avoid touching their faces with unwashed hands.

Commuters will also need to keep a safe distance from other commuters.

Taxi and bus operators need to observe the regulations to be announced by the Minister of Transport, including ensuring that their vehicles are regularly sanitised.

Our national borders will remain closed except for the transport of goods and repatriation of nationals.

Businesses can assist in reducing the risk to workers using public transport by introducing staggered working hours and where practical provide transport for employees.

Reopening of schools

Classes for grades 7 and 12 learners will resume from 1 June.

Strict infection control measures and, where necessary, additional water and sanitation infrastructure are being put in place to enable social distancing, regular hand washing and learner safety.

Measures are also being put in place to ensure safety as children access the school nutrition programme and learner transport.

The school calendar will be revised, and the curriculum trimmed so that we can still recover the 2020 school year.

No parent will be forced to send their child to school if they are worried about safety.

Level 3 and higher learning institutions

From 1 June, all public universities are expected to implement remote teaching and learning strategies to ensure that all students are given a fair opportunity to complete the 2020 academic year.

With the start of alert level 3, no more than a third of the student population will be allowed to return to campuses on condition that they can be safely accommodated.

Institutions will open up further as the coronavirus alert level changes[3].

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[3] Above taken from president's speech: 24 May 2020

Assessing and mitigating workplace risk

Companies already have contingency plans in place for most of the potential emergency situations associated with their operations and activities. The fact that very few companies have a contingency or emergency procedure to cover pandemics can easily be overcome by using your current emergency response structure and adapting it to assess and determine the risks that COVID-19 holds for your employees and business.

Initial assessment of potential risks to employees and business

Companies must be aware of the level of risk their employees will be exposed to during the performance of their duties.

The first step is to do an assessment of your workplace to determine how your specific operations and activities lessen or increase exposure to the virus. Planning is based on the risk assessment results which highlighted the risks to the organisation and its employees associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Use the Workplace assessment form to do an initial assessment of workplace risks and use the results of this assessment to scope the risk assessment.

	Facilitator Aid 6 Power Point slides: **Risk assessment process** Use the slides to do a quick refresher on the principles of risk assessment before doing the risk assessment. ***Facilitator Aid 7*** Form: **Workplace assessment form** The objective of the risk assessment is to analyse all tasks and activities to determine the level of exposure employees will have to the Corona virus.

Develop an action plan

Adopt the SMART format to ensure that all relevant parts of your action plan are covered:

S – Be **specific** about what you want to achieve with your action plant e.g. answer who, what, where, why, when, how to ensure that you are clear about your objective.

M – Make sure that you can **measure** your progress and effectiveness of your action plan outcomes

A – Make sure that your plan is **achievable**. Think about how to accomplish the goal and if you have the tools/skills needed.

R – Your action plan must be **relevant** to your business e.g. does it take into consideration the risk exposure level for your employees, current government regulations, COVID-19 workplace safety requirements, etc.

T -- Make sure that the **target dates** set (time bound) for achieving each phase of the plan is realistic. It makes no sense to set target dates that are unachievable. It also makes no sense to set goals without target dates.

Your action plan should include the following:

- Clear **lines of authority and responsibility** for the duration of the pandemic. It makes sense to have a response team to improve communications and ensures that employees know who to contact for what assistance.

- **Practical arrangements** for people and equipment to achieve action plan goals

- **Communication systems** capable of reaching all employees and other company stakeholders

- **Information management** planning to ensure effective coordination and collaboration between all persons involved in support and assistance during the pandemic

- Preparation and implementation of **procedures** to achieve the action plan goals

Prepare and agree action plans in consultation with stakeholders to ensure ownership of the action plans.

Align action plans to government regulations and disaster management plans

The government has put several plans in place to assist companies and the public during the pandemic.

	Facilitator Aid 8
	PowerPoint slides:
	How companies can fund employees during the lockdown

There are also several government websites that provide companies and the public with advice on how to protect their employees and themselves during the pandemic and to provide updates on the status of the pandemic.

Regularly update employees with the latest COVID-19 information. Visit the web page of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases who provides South African citizens with updates on the latest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and persons who died of the disease.
https://www.nicd.ac.za/

Information obtained from these government sites is accurate and management should encourage the use of these rather than other sources of information that are not always accurate.

Implementing action plans and monitoring effectiveness

Policies and procedures should provide management and employees with clear guidelines on their responsibilities as well as the measures that should be taken to protect themselves and to prevent the spread of the Corona virus.

Clearly communicate management and employee responsibilities

The Department of Labour[4] published a guide to employers on their responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employer responsibilities can be summarised as follows:

- **Engineering controls** - Isolate employees from work-related hazards, install high-efficiency air filters, increase ventilation rates in the work environment and install physical barriers such as face shields.

- **Administrative controls** –Encourage sick workers to stay at home; minimise contact among workers, clients and customers; minimise the number of workers on site at any given time e.g. rotation or shift work; discontinue nonessential local and international travel; develop an emergency communication system to reach all stakeholders with accurate information and to answer questions; Update employees on amended or new regulations and information about the pandemic; provide employees with training and information to enable them to protect them from and prevent the spread of the virus.

- **Safe Work Practices** – Develop and implement policies and procedures for safe and proper work; reduce the duration, frequency, or intensity of exposure to a hazard; provide resources and a work environment that promotes personal hygiene.

- **Personal Protective Equipment** (PPE) – Provide PPE as appropriate to employees that may be exposed to the virus. Provide training on the function and correct use and care of PPE to users.

Additional management responsibilities include:

- Conduct a risk assessment and implement appropriate controls to eliminate, minimise or protect employees against infection

- Implement monitoring and screening protocols for work environments

- Plan and implement procedures to support employees during the pandemic and how to ensure company sustainability for the future

Employees are responsible to comply with all management controls to protect themselves and to prevent the spread of the virus.

Employees are also responsible to comply with their legal duty to continue their service to their employer in whatever format or environment management has made available to protect and ensure their continued health during the pandemic.

Employees, however, may refuse to work under conditions or circumstances that pose a direct threat to their health and safety.

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[4] www.labour.gov.za/department-of-employment-and-labour-unveil-guidelines-to-deal-with-covid-19-at-workplaces

Conclusion

Estimating the repercussions to companies and employees while still in a state of lockdown with no immediate prospects of returning to a state of normality in the near future, is not possible. However, both companies and people have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in positive as well as negative ways.

On the positive side companies and employees are forced to look at innovative ways to continue working and generating turnover and incomes. Some of the novel steps taken to deal with the pandemic will certainly remain and change the way South Africans conduct business and personal lives in future.

On the negative side, the domino effect of companies unable to sustain their financial health, has had a ripple effect on smaller companies and individuals. Hardest hit are self-employed people and persons working in informal environments. Although many persons had to contend with lower incomes, working for established organisations still provides them with jobs in the future and a guaranteed, regular income even if lower than before.

Lack of information or incorrect information magnifies the negative effect of the current situation. The fact that just about anyone can make statements on social media or other media without checking the accuracy of the information they share or even in some cases, the posting of intentionally inaccurate information about COVID-19, add to the feelings of uncertainty and stress that people are already experiencing because of the lock down and strict regulations that are in place to manage the pandemic.

Self-isolation or social lock down also creates traumatic stress and feelings of confusion and anger. These feelings can be increased by fear of infection, having limited access to supplies, poor living conditions with insufficient space to allow a measure of privacy and, in many instances, loss of income.

Stress and anxiety can lead to an increase in domestic and family violence.

Many companies and employees are uncertain of the legal position if conditions require a relaxation of or an inability to meet certain employment contract conditions. Issues like excessive sick leave days, unpaid leave, payment for employees unable to work because of the current regulations, employers not able to pay employees their full salaries or wages because the company has lost income, etc. are all questions with no clear answer. The best employers and employees can do is to reach accommodations satisfactory to both parties that will at least create a measure of assurance that the employer can continue to offer employment once the crisis is over and for the employee that he or she can expect remuneration that would allow a reasonable standard of living.