Return to Work Guidelines

Getting your workplace ready to resume operations after the
COVID-19 Lockdown

TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR

South Africa

Contents

1.   INTRODUCTION

This document has been developed in conjunction with Business 4 South Africa (BSA) in response to the global COVID19 pandemic. This document is intended to serve as a guideline to inform the development of procedures, which aims to enable employers the ability to ensure that when they resume operations, at the appointed time and in line with National Government directives, they do so in a manner that is safe, and has minimal risk to the health of employees, or the health of members of the public.

Since it is impossible to address every and all aspect of the various industries, this document provides a generic guideline to organisations. Whilst these guidelines will provide a basis for organisations to adopt, it is recommended that each sector supplements this guide with workplace procedures specific to its conditions pertaining to its industry.

2.   SCOPE OF APPLICATION

2.1   SHORT SUMMARY ON DISASTER MANAGEMENT REGULATIONS

In his statement on 23 April 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the five levels to risk adjustment strategy for a gradual and phased recovery of the economy, guided by scientists to avoid a mass spread of the infection.
He outlined the five COVID-19 levels as:

- **Level 5:** drastic measures to curb infection and save lives.
- **Level 4:** some activity will be permitted, subject to extreme precautions in order to limit community transmissions.
- **Level 3:** easing of some restrictions within the work and social environment, to limit high risk of transmission.
- **Level 2:** a further easing of restrictions but maintenance of physical distancing with some social restrictions to prevent resurgence.
- **Level 1:** most normal activity can resume, subject to health guidelines and a resurgence in infections.

Summary of alert levels

ALERT LEVEL 5	ALERT LEVEL 4	ALERT LEVEL 3	ALERT LEVEL 2	ALERT LEVEL 1
🎯 OBJECTIVE				
Drastic measures to contain the spread of the virus and save lives.	Extreme precautions to limit community transmission and outbreaks, while allowing some activity to resume.	Restrictions on many activities, including at workplaces and socially, to address a high risk of transmission.	Physical distancing and restrictions on leisure and social activities to prevent a resurgence of the virus.	Most normal activity can resume, with precautions and health guidelines followed at all times. Population prepared for an increase in alert levels if necessary.

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Responses to the relaxation of levels will be addressed at a national, provincial, district, and metro level. Each level will be determined based on the level of infection rate and the capacity of the healthcare system to cope with the pandemic. Parts of the economy have been classified according to the risk of transmission within that sector, the expected impact of the lockdown, the economic contribution of the sector, as well as the effect on livelihoods.

With effect 01 May 2020, South Africa will enter Level 4 restrictions, which means:

• **Reopening of business** - Some businesses will be permitted to resume operations under specific conditions. Every business will have to adhere to detailed health and safety protocols.

Workplace plans must be put in place to detail disease surveillance and prevent the spread of infection. All businesses permitted to resume operations must do so in a phased manner;

- o preparing the workplace for return;
- o one third of the workforce may return in batches (encouraging a work from home strategy where possible).

• **Travel** - Borders will remain closed for international travel except for repatriation. No travel between provinces except for the transportation of goods and for funerals. Public transport will continue with limitations on carrying capacity and hygiene requirements.

• **Movement** - The Public is encouraged to stay at home. Movement will only be permitted for essential work or subject to sectors under controlled reopening. All gatherings remain prohibited. The elderly and those with underlying conditions must remain at home.

NB: As of 01 May 2020, all South Africans are to wear a face mask whenever leaving home.

It is important that all people clearly understand how masks must be managed including how to put masks on and how to take them off, as well as washing and ironing of masks.

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1   OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

- The OHSA, read with its regulations and incorporated standards, the Hazardous Biological Agents Regulations and the Environmental Regulations for Workplaces, requires the employer to:
  - o Provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and does not risk the health of their employees;

  - o Carry out practical steps to eliminate or mitigate potential hazards;

  - o Ensure the Health and Safety of everyone who may be directly affected by the employer's activities is not exposed to hazards that could affect their health or safety.

- These obligations also apply to self-employed persons whose working activities bring them into contact with members of the public.

- For the purposes of OHSA, the identifiable hazard relating to COVID-19 that workers face is, the transmission by an infected person to workers in the workplace. Studies show that the virus is airborne and lives for prolonged periods on certain surfaces.
  - o In workplaces accessible to the public, the risk of infection is increased

In terms of Section 8 of the above-mentioned act, every employer is obligated to provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and has minimal risk by:

- determining the hazards associated with any work that is performed.
- establishing and applying the precautionary measures necessary to ensure the Health and Safety of workers

NB: In order to comply with the above, an effective risk assessment should be conducted.

4. APPLICABLE LEGISLATION
- Occupational Health and Safety Act, Act 85 of 1993
- Facilities Regulations - GNR 924 of 3 August 2004
- Hazardous Biological Agents Regulations – GNR 1390 of 27 December 2001
- Disaster Management Act, Act 57 of 2002, Amended Regulations GNR 318 of 18 March
- PPE Directive (Government Gazette - still to be finalised at NEDLAC)

5. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTATION
- Guidance on the processing of personal information in terms of the POPI Act, Act 4 of 2013
- Recommended Guidelines for Fabric Masks manufactured by South Africa's Clothing and Textile Manufacturing Industry – 09 April 2020
- Guidelines for symptoms monitoring applicable to essential services workers covered by regulation GN R.398 of Government Gazette 43148 under section 3 of the Disaster Management Act, 1957 (Act 57 of 2002) as amended on 25 March 2020
- DoEL audit legislation and Covid-19 Best Workplace Guidelines (Jason Pain to advise)

6. DEFINITIONS

Definition	Definition in full
COVID-19	Novel Coronavirus Disease of 2019.

7. ACRONYMS

Acronym	Acronym in full
OHSA	Occupational Health and Safety Act
DOH	Department of Health
WHO	World Health Organization
ILO	International Labour Organization
SARS-Cov-2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2
DoEL	Department of Employment and Labour
MMI	Maximum Medical Improvement

8. RISK ASSESSMENTS

The objective of conducting or updating a risk assessment in respect of COVID-19 is to provide specific focus and adapt the measures required by the direction to specific working environments, considering the Risk Assessment Guides published online by the National Department of Health. Risk assessments should be dynamic and adapted as soon as there is a scope change or change in business process.

The purpose of a risk assessment is to assess the potential risk of exposure to COVID-19 infection and control measures to be implemented at the workplace. By conducting a risk assessment, an employer will ensure that control measures are identified and implemented to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 from recognised and unrecognised sources of infection in a workplace.

This content must not be regarded as the absolute content of a Risk Assessment, rather it is the minimum requirements.

Figure 1 – Principles of Conducting a Risk Assessment

Conducting a Risk Assessment

The following points can be considered when compiling a risk assessment or reviewing it to include COVID-19 risk controls.

Planning	Identify Hazards	Analyse Risks	Evaluate Risks	Control Risks	Monitor and Review
- Establish a team to do risk assessment. - List all the activities or tasks in the workplace. - Resources needed while conducting risk assessment. - Develop training awareness and communication to be done to ensure employees are informed.	- Categorize activities to determine exposure. (e.g. direct contact, indirect contact). - Identify hazards from all activities and classify (e.g. biological hazards, environmental hazards). - Identify exposure - From community, visitors or contractors. - Occupationally acquired.	- Examine identified hazards to determine risk and the impact. - Classify risks - High risk - Medium risk - Low risk - Risk Impact - Health (COVID 19) - Safety - Environmental - Consider risk of vulnerable employees. (Age, Medical conditions, etc.)	- Determine whether the activity is normal, abnormal or an emergency activity. - Establish the methodology to evaluate risk. Different criteria can be used such as below. - Severity - Probability - Exposure	Hierarchy of controls. - Eliminate: change in process to have zero risk. - Substitute: process to reduce the risk. - Engineering controls: limit the hazard at its source. - Administrative controls: work instructions or working procedures. - Personal protective equipment (PPE): reduces risk by protecting individual and to be considered as last resort.	- Monitor and evaluate if the implemented control measures are effective. If not take corrective measures. - Review the risk assessment.

Example of a Risk Assessment Report. Source: Department of Health:

COVID-19 Risk Assessment Report				
Site: Sector*:	Date:			
Department:	Risk Assessor:	Name & Surname	Signature	
Work Area/s:	Area Supervisor:	Name & Surname	Signature	
Occupations in Area:	Health & Safety Representative:	Name & Surname	Signature	
Risk Assessment				

Source of Hazard	Route of exposure	Activities & tasks	Existing Control Measures	Control effectiveness	Risk classification	Additional Controls Required	Responsible person(s)	Due Date/s

Department of Employment and Labour Exposure Risk Classification

Low Exposure Risk	Medium Exposure Risk	High Exposure Risk	Very High Exposure Risk
Lower exposure risk (caution) jobs are those that do not require contact with people known to be or suspected of being infected with SARS-CoV-2, nor frequent close contact with (i.e. within 2 metre of) the general public.	Medium exposure risk jobs include those that require frequent and/or close contact with (i.e. within 2 metres of) people who may be infected with SARS-CoV-2, but who are not known or suspected COVID-19 persons.	High exposure risk jobs are those with high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19.	Very high exposure risk jobs are those with high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19 during specific medical, post-mortem, or laboratory procedures.

9.   RETURN TO WORK – THE OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

9.1 Addressing risks associated with office space

It has been communicated by the President's office that as from 04 May 2020, employers employer will be allowed to introduce no more than one third of its workforce back into the market, it remains preferred that those who can fully perform their duties remotely, be allowed to do so, and that employers have a strict remote work policy to manage performance in this regard.

It is expected that return to work readiness risk assessments will be conducted by suitably qualified personnel, prior to the reintroduction of staff. Each employer shall ensure that it possesses a comprehensive report on its ability and readiness for its employees to return to work safely. Recommendations related to, for example, disinfection of the workplace, entrances and lobbies will need to be implemented prior to employee's returning to the workplace.

It is widely accepted that the most effective way by far to flatten the curve is by avoiding overcrowding. Therefore, reducing the number of employees in the office at any one time, is the first and foremost step to ensure that contamination is avoided. Introducing ongoing work from home policies are strongly encouraged.

Alternatively, short time, employers may then consider implementing a reduced number of hours/shifts worked by an employee in order to limit the number of employees at the workplace at the same time.

Regarding personnel that can work remotely from home, it is important for employers to consider the following employee characteristics:

- Employees 60 years and older;
- People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including:
    - People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma;
    - People who have serious heart conditions;
    - People who are immunocompromised;
    - People who are/have recently received cancer treatment, bone marrow or organ transplants;
    - People with HIV or AIDS;
    - People with prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications;
    - People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher);
    - People with diabetes;
    - People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis;
    - People with liver disease.

9.2. On-Site Screening

- Upon arrival at workplaces, employers should ensure screening (which includes body temperature measurements) of employees.
- Daily completion of risk assessment questionnaires for employees should be completed.

Questions should include:

- Who could have potentially met a person who is COVID-19 positive/a person showing possible symptoms) and potential risk assessment on suspected cases?
- If an employee or visitor meets case definition/criteria set by NICD (National Institute of Communicable Diseases) they will be referred for further testing, example swabs, possible quarantine/referrals.
- Have you travelled internationally the last 14 (fourteen) days?
- Have you been in contact with someone known to be COVID-19 positive in the last 14 days?
- Are you suffering from the following symptoms?
  - Fever
  - Coughing
  - Sore throat
  - Body aches and pains
  - Shortness of breath

10. SITE RULES AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

On 27 March 2020, the Minister of Labour and Employment published a directive on OHS in the workplace. The directive can be accessed here. Key paragraphs of the directive are referenced throughout this document.

10.1 The WHO stance on social distancing

When a person coughs or sneezes small liquid droplets are projected through the air which may contain virus. If a person is too close, they can breathe in the droplets, and if the person is infected with the COVID-19 virus they will infect others. Therefore, it is recommended to maintain a minimum of 1 metre distance between employees.

Physical greetings, such as handshakes or hugs should not be permitted at the workplace.

10.2 Department of Employment and Labour Directive on OHS in the workplace

- Employers must, as far as practicable, minimize the number of workers at the workplace at any given time through rotation, staggered working hours, shift systems, remote working arrangements or similar measures in order to achieve social distancing as contemplated in clause 17.
- Every employer must arrange the workplace to ensure minimal contact between workers and as far as practicable and ensure that there is a minimum of one and a half meters between workers when they are working, for example, at their workstations. Depending on the circumstances of the workplace or the nature of the sector, the minimum distance may need to be longer. Reducing the number of workers present in the workplace at any time in terms of clause 16.5 may assist in achieving the required social distancing.
- If it is not practicable to arrange a worker's workstation to be spaced at least one and a half meters apart, the employer must:
  - Arrange physical barriers to be placed between worker's workstations or erect a solid, physical barrier between employees while they are working; or
  - If necessary, supply the worker free of charge with appropriate PPE based on a risk assessment of the working place.

10.3 Regulations R (446) (Regulates how employees travel to work)
To be followed in conjunction with related regulations for phase 4 and beyond

10.4 Department of Small Business Development Regulations 450 (Regulates how work is conducted)
All enterprises must ensure that the absolute minimum number of staff necessary to safely operate the enterprises are at work during the lockdown period. Furthermore, employers are encouraged to provide transport for their employees during the lockdown period.

10.5   Regulation R (459) (Regulates work in call centres / operations & surveillance)

The social distance standard of at least one and a half square metres between any two employees must be maintained in all call centres and their precincts. Arrangements for employees relating to clocking-in and the use of canteen facilities must be organised to maintain social distance.

10.6   Hygiene standards

People could become infected with the coronavirus by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. Employee hygiene practices are important to prevent and contain the spread of the coronavirus, avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.

If an ill person has touched a surface, they may have inadvertently transferred the virus to the surface. If other hands touch that surface the virus can be transferred to that person. Once contaminated, people can transfer the virus to their eyes, nose, or mouth if they touch their face. From there, the virus can enter their body and make them sick.

Further recommendations:

o   Ongoing sanitation of door handles, lift buttons, and furniture

o   Social distancing to be applied in elevators

o   Designated coffee cups and other crockery as far as possible

o   Continued wearing of masks

Employers are encouraged to put up appropriate signage on their premises and communicate and educate employees on the Department of Health recommendations to prevent infection spread:
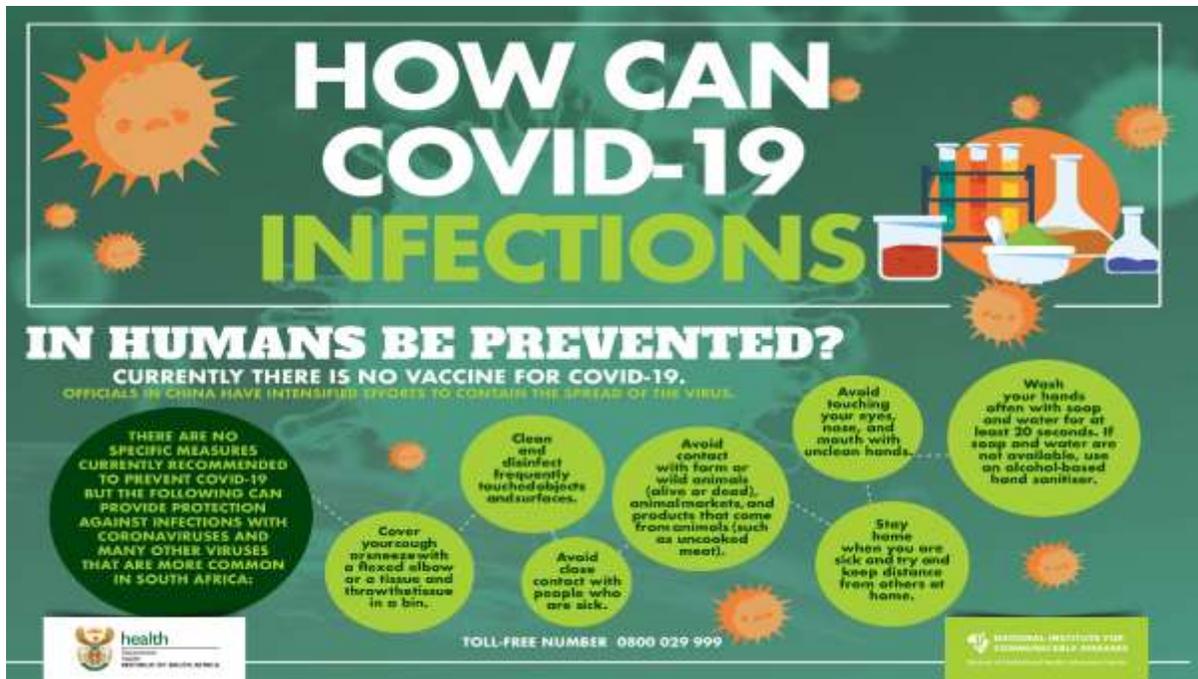
10.7 Workplace hygiene measures employees must comply with as per DoEL directive:

- Employers and employees are responsible to:
  - There are adequate facilities for the washing of hands with soap and clean water.
  - Only paper towels are provided to dry hands after washing – the use of fabric towelling is prohibited.
  - Additional measure for employees interacting with the public should include sanitizing of hands between each interaction with the public.
  - Surfaces that employees and members of the public come into contact with are routinely cleaned and disinfected.

- Employees must ensure that they:
  - Wash hands frequently during the day (guideline is once per hour, or a frequency that is compatible with an employee's work schedule)
  - Make sure employees wash their hands when:
    - they arrive at work

- before they touch food, make drinks
- move between departments visit other places / return home
- After bathroom visits
  - Use soap and water and wash hands for at least 20 seconds
  - Dry hands thoroughly after washing
  - Use hand sanitiser in the event of no soap or water available or if the employee cannot leave their workstation to access soap and running water

- Further recommendations:
  - Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
  - Always cough and sneeze into a tissue:
  - Dispose of used tissues in toilets/bins and wash your hands.
  - If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
  - No sharing or common use of other employees' phones, desks, stationary, offices, or other work tools and equipment, wherever possible.

Practice respiratory hygiene

The virus can spread via droplets thus by following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19. All employees in an office environment should always keep their masks on during their shift.

Employees be educated on good respiratory hygiene.

This means covering their mouth and nose with bent elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing.

Dispose of the used tissue immediately.

DoEL directive on awareness

Employers must provide employees with information that raises awareness in any form or manner, including where reasonably practicable leaflets and notices placed in conspicuous places in the workplace informing workers of the dangers of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the manner of its transmission, the measures to prevent transmission such as personal hygiene, social distancing, use of masks, cough etiquette and where to go for screening or testing if presenting with the symptoms;

Communication

An employer should assign responsibility to its OHS and HR departments for monitoring pandemic information to ensure the organization has the most up-to-date information.

All employees will need accurate and current information on the workplace risks associated with COVID-19, as well as clear guidance on how these risks will be controlled or minimized. An employer should actively communicate and promote awareness through electronic communication, posters, brochures and surveys that will include:

- Information on the nature of the disease, where they can get information, and actions they can take in the workplace to help control risks;
- How they will be consulted and advised on the issues of work attendance and work arrangements;
- Training and education on the use of personal protective equipment and other preventative measures.
- Good communication strategies must be established, both at the workplace and for when employees are at home.

Legal guidelines associated with hand sanitizer

- For the purposes of these clauses, a hand sanitizer must be one that has at least 70% alcohol content and is in accordance with the recommendations of the Department of Health. MSDS's must always be available.
- Every employer must, at no cost to employees, ensure that:
  - o There are adequate hand sanitizer based on the number of workers or other persons who access the workplace at the entrance of, and in, the workplace which the workers or other persons are required to use;
  - o Every employee who works away from the workplace, other than at home, must be provided with an adequate supply of hand sanitizer.

- Where an employee, in the execution of its duties interact with the public, the employer must provide the worker with enough supplies of hand-sanitizer at that worker's workstation for both the worker and the person with whom the worker is interacting.

- After every second hand-wash with sanitizer it is important to ensure that employees are made aware to wash their hands with soap and water for no less than 20 seconds. This will be to prevent a new layer of mucus forming that may enable the COVID-19 virus of spreading.

WHO opinion on hand sanitizers

To help countries and health-care facilities to achieve system change and adopt alcohol-based hand rubs as the gold standard for hand hygiene in health care, WHO has identified formulations for their local preparation. Logistic, economic, safety, and cultural and religious factors have all been carefully considered by WHO before recommending such formulations for use worldwide.

At present, alcohol-based hand rubs are the only known means for rapidly and effectively inactivating a wide array of potentially harmful microorganisms on hands.

WHO recommends alcohol-based hand rubs based on the following factors:

- evidence-based, intrinsic advantages of fast-acting and broad-spectrum microbicidal activity with a minimal risk of generating resistance to antimicrobial agents;
- suitability for use in resource-limited or remote areas with lack of accessibility to sinks or other facilities for hand hygiene (including clean water, towels, etc.);
- capacity to promote improved compliance with hand hygiene by making the process faster and more convenient;
- economic benefit by reducing annual costs for hand hygiene, representing approximately 1% of extra-costs generated by HCAI;
- minimization of risk from adverse events because of increased safety associated with better acceptability and tolerance than other products.

Legislative Compliance

According to Section 8 of OHS *Act* 85 of 1993, employers must, where reasonably practicable, provide and maintain a safe, healthy work environment that is without risk to employees.

- If an employee contracts Covid-19, an employer must grant an employee sick leave in accordance with its sick leave policy. If an employee does not have sick leave, or has used all his / her sick leave, the employee must be placed on unpaid leave, as would be the case with any normal illness.

- An employer may require the affected employee to work from home until such time as they are cleared to return to work. Healthy employees may also be requested to self-isolate and work from home to minimize the risk of infection.

- If it is impossible for healthy employees to work from home due to the nature of their work, an employer may not deduct the period of quarantine as sick leave or annual leave if the quarantine or sick leave was made compulsory by the employer.

- Due to the nature of the illness, an employee that has been diagnosed with Covid-19 should not be permitted to return to work until that employee is tested by a medical practitioner and cleared to return to work. In this regard an employer shall be entitled to request that a medical certificate be produced by a physician whereby the employee is cleared to return to work.

What should employers consider regarding working from home policies?

Before going ahead with a work-from-home arrangement, employers must decide if the work activity is suitable for remote working. If yes, then employers should discuss with their staff to make sure:

- Appropriate equipment, technology and training that are essential for staying connected to colleagues and the organization are provided

- Clear expectations are set for both managers and employees on what the work and conditions should be

- Time sovereignty to support productivity to give employees the ability to work in times and places that are convenient so they can be as productive as possible

- Apply OHS standards to the work area at home by assessing (I) if it involves manual tasks, (ii) hazards and risk, (iii) electrical safety, and (iv) the general environment like noise, security first aid or fire exit, etc.

- Emphasize that employees have obligations around issues and policies such as working hours, confidentiality, and safe work practices while working at home

- Assess potential risks that the employee is aware of including any specific risks regarding working from home (e.g. domestic violence)

- Ensure workspaces are suitable

- Establish means of contact between the employer and employee and pre-arrange means of communication

What equipment should be provided to employees to enable them to work from home (teleworking)?

Equipment already in use in the workplace e.g., laptop, mouse, monitor, keyboard, and headsets, could be used for teleworking. If the employer provides any equipment, it must be in good condition and suitable for the work activity.

Suitable equipment already available in the employee's home can be considered for temporary teleworking.

What precautions should be taken if the employees are using computers and digital technology while working from home?

Employers should give information to employees on issues associated with the work to be undertaken at home. For teleworking the following should be considered:

- Data security: The company needs to ensure that data security is maintained where the staff is working from their own homes. Where remote working involves the transmission of confidential data outside of the workplace, the employer will need to ensure that its systems are designed to enable the safe transmission of such data.
- Skills: Having a robust IT system in place with the necessary safeguards is essential, and so too is the skills and awareness of the remote employee. Online training can be utilised to refresh skills in this area.
- Well-being: (i) varying work tasks to ensure that employees are not working in the same position for long periods; (ii) placing equipment to minimise twisting or overreaching; (iii) having enough workspace for the equipment and any other materials needed to carry out the work; and (iv) encouraging employees to take regular breaks and to stand and move from time to time.

What other general supports and means of communication should be put in place for employees working from home?

Working from home can result in employees feeling isolated, working longer hours, and blurring the lines between work and family life. It is important that employees know they always have support during working hours.

Employers should consider the following:

- Ensuring all contact details for employees are on file and agree on means of contact
- Arranging regular updates via phone, web, or email with each employee
- Providing employees with emergency contact numbers
- Arranging IT support in the event of technical problems where relevant
- Providing employees with information detailing when they need to contact their employer
- Making sure work is organised in such a way that the employee takes regular breaks and can separate his/her work life and daily life
- Providing employees with regular feedback on their work
- Encouraging employees to maintain contact with colleagues

Further recommendation to ensure the physical well-being of Work from Home personnel:

- All staff are required to call in to their line manager before 08h30 every morning with the following information:
- Confirm if working from home or at the office based on company rotation roster (if applicable);
- In the event of working from home provide line manager with the following information:
- A general health update (symptoms related to infection?)
- Report whether they suffer from symptoms such as body aches, loss of smell, loss of taste, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fatigue, weakness or tiredness.
- Any possible exposure to a person suspected of being infected with COVID-19 virus?
- If answer to the above is yes?
- Have you been tested?
- Results?
- Are you in quarantine?

2. Provide this information into the relevant department within the organisation.

3. Develop a company health status report for review by the CEO to ensure that all measures are taken to flatten the curve.

11.   ESTABLISHING COMMITTEE

11.1 Committees & Responsibilities

It is recommended that employers establish dedicated crisis committees that will meet at regular intervals, no less than once a week, to coordinate activities and communicate between office-based staff and operational personnel on a regular basis.

These committees and it's representatives should be tasked to, among other aspects, compile relevant business risk assessments, conduct daily screening of all personnel that return to work and also compile all reports required for management of business activities and eliminate the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace as far as is reasonably practicable.

Communication of the Department of Health:

- ▪ Call Centre Number: **0800 029 999**
- ▪ WhatsApp Number: **0600 12 3456**

11.2 Company vehicles and transportation of staff

- The concept and exercise of social distancing needs to be communicated to all staff prior to transportation to ensure all staff members do not stand within proximity to one another.
- All company vehicles need to be disinfected before employees may enter the vehicle, records of this must be kept

- Employers shall ensure that adequate controls are in place, as per relevant risk assessment strategies to ensure the safe transport of employees and mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
- This may include, but not be limited to, signage and infographics as below, toolbox talks, training and awareness.

11.3 Managing COVID-19 outside plant

Outside Plant may include but is not limited to:

1. Optic fibre network construction and maintenance;

2. Tower construction and maintenance;

3. Datacentre construction and maintenance;

4. RF equipment installation and maintenance;

5. Power services including generator deployments and maintenance

Over and above the standard Health and Safety requirements, the following items always need to be available on site:

Clean water for washing hands	Soap for washing hands
Hand sanitiser	Spare Face masks (N95) (Or based on risk assessment)
A non-contact Thermometer	Disinfectant Spray along with paper towels
Dustbin (with a bin bag) for used masks, paper towels etc Dustbin must be marked as Biohazard Waste	Company permit along with all necessary documentation

Over and above ensuring relevant Health and Safety requirements on site is met, employers will also, based on their robust risk analysis, prior to the commencement of any construction activities relating to the installation and maintenance of telecommunication services, ensure that the following aspects are addressed. The following list of actions and / or activities, should however not be exhaustive:

- Toolbox Talks
- Working Safely
- Public Safety
- Allowance for breaks and staggering of working hours
- Staggering of teams
- Ablution Facilities
- Dustbins and Handling of Waste
- Handling of Material
- Disinfection of tools and equipment
- Make arrangements for administering first aid
- Handling of Documentation
- Detection of underground services
- Customer and stakeholder relations
- Access arrangements for sites and landlords
- Procedures for end of shift including transport to and from site
- Handling of cases
- Specialised Contractors / Service
- Continuity & Contingency Plan
- Ongoing Communication

12. PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) – (Selection, Issue and Disposal).

12.1 Cloth masks for employees

- The National Department of Health instructed that all people moving around outside of their own households, should wear cloth masks in public to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The main benefit of everyone wearing a cloth mask is to reduce the amount of virus droplets being coughed up by those with the infection and transmitted to others and to surfaces that others may touch. Since some persons with the virus may not have symptoms or may not know they have it, the Department of Health recommends that all persons wear cloth masks when in a public place.

- Employers must provide each worker with a minimum of two cloth masks, as recommended by the National Department of Health, in order for the worker to wear one and wash one, HOWEVER, the number of cloth masks that must be provided to a worker must be determined in the light of

the worker's conditions of work where these may result in the mask becoming wet or soiled and in accordance the requirements of the specific employee.

- Every employer must ensure that workers are informed, instructed, and trained as to the correct use of cloth masks.
- An employer must make appropriate arrangements for the washing, drying, ironing and disposal of cloth masks in accordance with the National Department of Health recommendations or, if not reasonably practicable, provide facilities for the worker to wash and dry the cloth masks at the workplace.
- The general requirement for workers to wear masks does not derogate from the fact that, where a risk assessment indicates that PPE is required, those categories of employees must be provided with the accredited PPE in accordance with Department of Health guidelines.

12.2 Additional information for Employers on Masks

- To ensure that N95 masks and surgical masks are secured for employees who really need them, we would like to recommend that the cloth face mask should be used by the general population.
- The NICD is satisfied that there is enough scientific evidence to show that the cloth face mask significantly reduces the amount of virus that can be emitted.
- It is nevertheless important to observe basic rules of the use of cloth face masks to ensure that they are safe for use:
  - o The face mask must cover the nose and mouth completely.
  - o Face masks should not be lowered when speaking, coughing or sneezing.
  - o Face masks should never be touched – fidgeting with the mask repeatedly is strongly discouraged as it is important to avoid touching the face with hands. The inner side of the mask should not be touched by hands.
  - o Wash hands before and after donning or removing the face mask.
  - o Wash cloth face masks with warm soapy water and iron when dry; ironing assists with decontamination.
  - o Change your cloth face mask if it is wet or visibly soiled.

13. INCIDENT REPORTING

Generally, if both parties agree to the work from home arrangement, the employees should be covered under the employees' compensation insurance. However, employers are advised to refer to the applicable national employees' compensation legislation to verify who is responsible for the employees' safety and health in case the employee sustains an injury in the course of their work while at home.

Employees are under a legal obligation to cooperate with the employer to secure a safe and healthy working environment in support of relevant statutory provisions, collective agreements, or company policies. It is important to reiterate that this applies despite the informal surroundings, such as a person's home. Employees need to take reasonable care to protect their own safety and follow the advice of their general practitioner, health care providers, and employers.

In the event that an employee is diagnosed with occupationally acquired Novel Coronavirus Disease, such incidents shall be reported in the manner prescribed in the directive received from the DoEL as signed and dated by the Compensation Commissioner on 20 March 2020, which incidents shall be reported to the Compensation Fund by:

- Completing and Employers Report of an Occupational Disease (W.CL.1)
- Notice of Occupational Disease and Claim for Compensation (W.CL.14)
- Exposure and Medical Questionnaire.
- First Medical Report (W.CL.22) indicating U07.1 as the ICD-10 code.
- Exposure History (W.CL.110) and / or any other employment history declaration.
- A medical report stating the Employee's symptoms.
- Progress report (W.CL.26) for each consultation.
- Final Medical Report (W.CL.26) when the Employee's condition reached MMI.
- An affidavit by the employee if Employer cannot be traced.

What should an employer do if a field employee tests positive for covid19?

Require employees to immediately inform the employer if they experience symptoms associated with COVID-19.
- If a worker presents with typical COVID-19 symptoms:

- o do not permit the worker to enter the workplace or report for work;

- o if the worker is already at work, immediately isolate the worker, arrange for the worker to be transported in a manner that does not place other workers or members of the public at risk, either to be self-isolated or for a medical examination;

- o immediately assess the risk of transmission and if necessary, disinfect the area and workstation.

- o refer employees who may be at risk for screening.

- o ensure that the employee who presents with symptoms is referred to an identified testing site

- o place the employee on paid sick leave, or if sick leave is exhausted, make application for illness benefits from the UIF in terms of the Directive issued on 25 March 2020.

- o ensure that the employee is not discriminated against on grounds of having tested positive for COVID-19.

- After a worker has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and isolated in accordance with the Department of Health Guidelines, the worker may only return to work if:

  - o the worker has undergone a medical examination confirming that s/he has been tested negative for COVID-19.

  - o the worker always wears the minimum of a FFP1 surgical mask for the remaining period of 21 days from the date of initial diagnosis.

  - o the employer ensures that the worker adheres to social distancing, hygiene and cough etiquette.

  - o the employer closely monitors the worker for symptoms on return to work.

14. MONITORING AND REVIEW

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).

- 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 on 0800 029 999.

- 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).

- Develop a contingency and business continuity plan for an outbreak in the communities (geographical location) 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. 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 the company plan and make sure they are aware of what they need to do –or not do –under the plan. Be sure your plan addresses the mental health and social consequences of a case of COVID-19 in the workplace or in the community and offer information and support.

- Establish a detailed plan of what to do if someone suspects or becomes ill with suspected COVID-19 at one of your workplaces. The plan should include:
    - 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
    - contacting the local health authorities and
    - return to work protocols of infected employee.

- 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. 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. Be sure your plan addresses the mental health and social consequences of a case of COVID-19 in the workplace or in the community and offer information and support.

Prevent social stigma relating to COVID-19

Social stigma in the context of health is the negative association between a person or group of people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease. In an outbreak, this may mean that people are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and/ or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with the disease.

What is Social Stigma

The level of stigma associated with COVID-19 is based on 3 main factors:

1) It is a disease that's new and for which there are still many unknowns.
2) We are often afraid of the unknown; and
3) It is easy to associate that fear with others.

The impact of stigma

Stigma can undermine social cohesion and prompt social isolation of groups, which might contribute to a situation where the virus is more, not less, likely to spread. This can result in more severe health problems and difficulties controlling a disease outbreak.

Stigma can:

1) Drive people to hide the illness to avoid discrimination
2) Prevent people from seeking health care immediately
3) Discourage them from adopting healthy behaviours

How to address social stigma:

How we communicate about COVID-19 is critical in supporting people to take effective action to help combat the disease and to avoid fuelling fear and stigma. Employers need to create an environment in which the disease can be discussed and addressed openly, honestly, and effectively. When talking about the coronavirus disease, certain words and language may have a negative meaning for people and fuel

stigmatizing attitudes (i.e. suspect, case, isolation). They can perpetuate existing negative stereotypes and assumptions, strengthen false associations between the disease and other factors, create widespread fear, or dehumanise those who have the disease. This can ultimately drive people away from getting screened, tested, and quarantined. It is recommended that inclusive language is adopted that empowers people.

Employee concerns

Be aware of employees' concerns about pay, leave, safety, health, and other issues that may arise during the COVID19 pandemic. Provide adequate, usable, and appropriate training, education, and informational material about business-essential job functions and employee health and safety, including proper hygiene practices and the use of any workplace controls (including PPE). Informed employees who feel safe at work are less likely to be unnecessarily absent.

15. UPDATE CONTRACTS OF EMPLOYMENT TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Please note that existing contracts: cannot be changed unless by agreement.

Proposed Checklist for Workplace Readiness

PRACTICAL STEPS TO BE TAKEN BY EMPLOYERS

Facilities	- Disable biometric systems - Cleaning supplies and Hand Sanitisers & wipes to be always kept in stock - Display guidelines of preventative measures and Hand hygiene guidelines - Bathrooms to have soap and paper towels - Changing area layouts to create more space for movement - Leave doors open (where appropriate) at busy times to speed up pedestrian traffic - Meeting Register to be kept for all meetings

	● Random testing to be performed on staff

Reception / Mail	● Controlled access for visitors
	● Screening of visitors
	    o Adherence to sanitisation processes
	    o Full contact details
	    o Telephone number
	    o Last Places visited

Employee Workspaces	● 1 Metre workspaces or blocked off workspace ● Staggered start/finish break times to reduce traffic in common areas ● Minimum 2 Cloth Mask for employees ● Hand Sanitisers & Wipes ● Doors to meeting rooms to be kept open where ● No hotdesking allowed ● Work from home where possible
Work from Home	● Laptop ● Mouse ● Monitor ● Keyboard ● Headset ● Internet Connectivity ● Work from Home Guidelines ● Online Collaboration Platform
Beverage / Kitchenettes / Canteen areas	● Designated coffee cups and other crockery ● Canteen - Takeaway only or deliver food to desks ● Stagger Lunch Breaks ● Minimise handling of cash ● Wash hand before and after eating
Cleaning Services	● Sanitise of offices daily ● Wiping of Door Handles ● Wiping of Lift Buttons ● Wiping of other common areas and furniture

Sources:

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK144054/

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331215/WHO-2019-nCov-IPCPPE_use-2020.1-eng.pdf