AMOSA DRAFT

Workplace Preparedness:
COVID-19

Implementing Workplace Controls

The legislation governing workplaces in relation to COVID – 19 is the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Act 85 of 1993, as amended, read with the Hazardous Biological Agents Regulations. Section 8 (1) of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act, Act 85 of 1993, as amended, requires the employer to provide and maintain as far as is reasonably practicable a working environment that is safe and without risks to the health of employees. Specifically, section 8(2)(b) requires steps such as may be reasonably practicable to eliminate or mitigate any hazard or potential hazard before resorting to personal protective equipment (PPE). However, in the case of COVID–19, a combination of controls is required, although the main principle is to follow the hierarchy of controls.

A risk assessment should be conducted in the workplace to determine the RISK and EXPOSURE to Covid-19 and these risks communicated to all workers

With COVID-19, it may not be possible to eliminate the hazard, the most effective protection measures are (listed from most effective to least effective): engineering controls, administrative controls, safe work practices (a type of administrative control), and PPE. There are advantages and disadvantages to each type of control measure when considering the ease of implementation, effectiveness and cost.
In addition to the types of workplace controls discussed below, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) provides fact sheets that guide specific workplaces (employers and employees) in relation to recommended infection prevention strategies to implement in workplaces.

Engineering Controls
Engineering controls involve isolating employees from work-related hazards. In workplaces where they are appropriate, these types of controls reduce exposure to hazards without relying solely on worker behaviour and can be the most cost-effective solution to implement.

- Increasing ventilation rates in the work environment.
- Installing physical barriers such as face shields.

Administrative Controls
Administrative controls require action by the employee and employer. Typically, administrative controls are changes in work policy or procedures to reduce or minimize exposure to a hazard. Examples of administrative controls for SARS-CoV-2 include:

- Encouraging sick workers to stay at home
- Minimizing contact among workers, clients, and customers by replacing face-to-face meetings with virtual communications e.g. conference calls, Skype, etc.
- Minimising the number of workers on site at any given time e.g rotational or shift work
- Discontinuing non essential travel where possible.

- Developing emergency communications plans, including a task team for answering workers' concerns and WhatsApp communications, if feasible.
- Providing workers with up-to-date education and training on COVID-19 risk factors and protective behaviours (e.g. cough etiquette and care of PPE).
- Training workers who need to use protective clothing and equipment on how to put it on, use/wear it and take it off correctly, including, in the context of their current and potential duties. Training material should be easy to understand and available in the appropriate language and literacy level for all workers.

Safe Work Practices

Safe work practices are types of administrative controls that include procedures for safe and proper work used to reduce the duration, frequency, or intensity of exposure to a hazard. Examples of safe work practices for SARS-CoV-2 include:

- Providing resources and a work environment that promotes personal hygiene. For example, no-touch refuse bins, hand soap, alcohol-based hand sanitisers containing at least 70 percent alcohol, disinfectants, and disposable towels for workers to clean their hands and their work surfaces.
- Requiring regular hand washing (at least once per hour) and /or using alcohol-based hand sanitisers. Workers should always wash hands when they are visibly soiled and after removing any PPE.
- For truck drivers and crews hand sanitisers must be carried on the vehicle
- Training on the regular use of hand sanitisers must be provided
- Display handwashing signs in restrooms.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

While engineering and administrative controls are considered more effective in minimizing exposure to SARS-CoV-2, PPE may also be needed to prevent certain exposures. While correctly using PPE can help prevent some exposures, it should not take the place of other prevention strategies.

Examples of PPE include: gloves, goggles, face shields, face masks, gowns, aprons, coats, overalls, hair and shoe covers and respiratory protection, when appropriate. During an outbreak of an infectious disease, such as COVID-19, recommendations for PPE specific to occupations or job tasks may change depending on geographic location, updated risk assessments for workers, and information on PPE effectiveness in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Employers should check the NICD website regularly for updates about recommended PPE.

All types of PPE must be:

Selected based upon the hazard to the worker.

- Properly fitted (e.g. respirators and face masks)
- Consistently and properly worn when required.
- With effect from Level 4 Lockdown the use of face masks when outside your home is now required by law
- Regularly inspected, maintained, and replaced, as necessary.
- Properly removed, cleaned, and stored or disposed of, as applicable, to avoid contamination of self, others, or the environment.

Employers are obligated to provide their workers with PPE needed to keep them safe while performing their duties.

The types of PPE required during a COVID-19 outbreak will be based on the risk of being infected while working and job tasks that may lead to exposure.

Why must I use a cloth face mask when going out in public?

The main benefit of everyone wearing a face mask is to **reduce the amount of Coronavirus or Influenza virus droplets being coughed up by those with the infection**. Since some persons with the Coronavirus may not have symptoms or may not know they have it, everyone should wear a face mask.

Further Information
For more information on SARS-CoV-2 you can contact the Department of Health on:
www.health.gov.za

In the case of suspected exposure contact the coronavirus hotline in South Africa:
0800 02 9999

Other matters for consideration

Other matters for consideration by the employers are:-
Whatever the level of lockdown it is the company's responsibility to have plans in place to deal with a potentially infected employee?

- Should they go for a Covid19 test?
- Where should they go for the test?
- Who will pay for the test?
- How will the time off for the test / quarantine be accounted for?
- What is the company visitor/access control policy?
- How do we screen visitors/service providers?
- Where, how and when do people wash their hands when arriving at work?
- Whose responsibility is it to ensure workers are COVID19 free before the come (back) to work?
- Businesses are obliged to ensure staff have a safe workplace
- What does a "Covid19 Safe' workplace look like?
- What is the standard / benchmark?
- If a staff member contracts Covid-19 in your workplace, what are the legal implications, should it result in a death?