

19 March 2020

## Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19

### How COVID-19 spreads

When someone who has COVID-19 coughs or exhales they release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets fall on nearby surfaces and objects, such as desks, tables or telephones. People could catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects, and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. If they are standing within 1 meter of a person with COVID-19 they can catch it by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them. In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu. Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age: people over 40 seem to be more vulnerable than those under 40. People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.

This document gives advice on:

1. Simple ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in your workplace
2. How to manage COVID-19 risks when organizing meetings and events
3. Things to consider when you and your employees travel
4. Getting your workplace ready in case COVID-19 arrives in your community.

1. Simple ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in your workplace

The low-cost measures below will help prevent the spread of infections in your workplace, such as colds, flu and stomach bugs, and protect your customers, contractors, and employees.

**Employers should start doing these things now, even if COVID-19 has not arrived in the communities where they operate.** These measures can reduce working days lost due to illness and stop or slow the spread of COVID-19 if it arrives at one of your workplaces.

- Make sure your workplaces are clean and hygienic
  - Surfaces (e.g. desks and tables) and objects (e.g. telephones, keyboards) need to be wiped with disinfectant regularly
  - Why? Because contamination on surfaces touched by employees and customers is one of the main ways that COVID-19 spreads.

- Your occupational health services, local public health authority, or other partners may have developed campaign materials to promote this message
- Make clear to employees that they will be able to count this time off as sick leave

## 2. How to manage COVID-19 risk when organizing meetings and events

### **Why do employers and organizers need to think about COVID-19?**

Organizers of meetings and events need to think about the potential risk from COVID-19 because:

- There is a risk that people attending your meeting or event might unwittingly bring the COVID-19 virus to the meeting. Others might be unknowingly exposed to COVID-19.
- Although COVID-19 is a mild disease for most people, it can make some very ill. Around 1 in every 5 people who catch COVID-19 needs hospital treatment.

### **Key considerations to prevent or reduce COVID-19 risks**

#### **BEFORE the meeting or event**

- Check the advice from the authorities in the community where you plan to hold the meeting or event. Follow their advice.
- Develop and agree a preparedness plan to prevent infection at your meeting or event.
  - Consider whether a face-to-face meeting or event is needed. Could it be replaced by a teleconference or online event?
  - Could the meeting or event be scaled down so that fewer people attend?
  - Verify information and communication channels in advance with key partners such as public health and health care authorities.
  - Pre-order sufficient supplies and materials, including tissues and hand sanitizer for all participants. Have surgical masks available to offer anyone who develops respiratory symptoms.
  - Actively monitor where COVID-19 is circulating. Advise participants in advance that if they have any symptoms or feel unwell, they should not attend.
  - Make sure all organizers, participants, caterers, and visitors at the event provide contact details: mobile telephone number, email, and address where they are staying. State



### **AFTER the meeting**

1. Retain the names and contact details of all participants for at least one month. This will help public health authorities trace people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 if one or more participants become ill shortly after the event.
2. If someone at the meeting or event was isolated as a suspected COVID-19 case, the organizer should inform participants. They should be advised to monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days and take their temperature twice a day.
3. If they develop even a mild cough or low-grade fever (i.e. a temperature of 37.3 C or more) they should stay at home and self-isolate. This means avoiding close contact (less than 1 meter) with other people, including family members. They should also call their health care provider or the local public health department, giving them details of their recent travel and symptoms.
4. Thank all the participants for their cooperation with the provisions in place.

#### 4. Getting your workplace ready in case COVID-19 arrives in your community

- Develop a plan for 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.
  - Consider how to identify persons who may be at risk, and support them, without inviting stigma and discrimination. 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).
  - Tell your local public health authority you are developing the plan and seek their input.
- Promote regular teleworking across your organization. If there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community the health authorities may advise people to avoid public transport and crowded places. Teleworking will help your business keep operating while your employees stay safe.
- 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. It may also be valid for other health emergencies.
  - 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. Emphasize key points such as the importance of staying away from work even if they have only mild symptoms or have had to take simple medications (e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen) that may mask the symptoms.
  - 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.