

Novel coronavirus implementations in the workplace

By Emily Nathi

According to the [regulations](#) as published by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs under the Disaster Management Act, 2002 on the 25th March 2020 it is mandated that all persons are to remain in their places of residence and shall stay there from the 26th of March up until the 16th of April 2020 at 24:00. Within these regulations however, the exception is that only person's responsible for providing an essential service shall be permitted to travel to and from work provided that they possess permits of such a case. It is further indicated in the regulations all businesses are to close and only those responsible for providing an essential service shall be in operation during the lockdown, the regulations of such businesses have been previously published to members in the past week.

The [coronavirus](#) is a viral infection of the upper respiratory system which manifests itself as flu-like symptoms ranging from mild fever, dry cough, runny nose, sneezing to moderate and severe symptoms like productive cough, high fever, shortness of breath and general malaise. The symptoms may last two days to as long as 14 days after exposure. The virus may be spread from person-to-person or animal to person, and this may occur through close contact with a person who has the virus or droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, which is why it is so important to cough or sneeze in a tissue or a flexed elbow. A person may also contract the virus by touching contaminated surfaces or objects and possibly touching their eyes, nose, or mouth hence it is advised that people refrain from touching their face.

Here are a few things that employers may do to prevent the [spread](#) of the virus within their workplace:

- Make sure that the work space is clean and hygienic.
- Impose stringent rules regarding social distancing of 2 meters as opposed to the 1.5 meters and avoid standing face-to-face.
- Insist that anyone who has been identified as a close contact of a probable or confirmed case, to rather self-quarantine and not come to work for 14 days.
- Advise employees who are sick not to come to work.

What do to when your employee is indeed infected by the virus? It may a scary thing to deal with at that moment but for the safety of others, it must be done. The first step would be to contact the coronavirus hotline in South Africa on 0800 02 999 and to obey the instructions given. Such a person may be [removed](#) from the office, ask them whom they have been in contact with in the building within the last 10 days. Do not reveal or disclose such a person's identity. Require those individuals to work from home for a period of 14 days, and encourage those that may be exposed to go and get tested. Close the unit that may have been exposed for a minimum period of 48 hours so that the space may be properly cleaned with disinfectants. Inform other staff members that an individual within the building has been confirmed to have the Covid-19 virus (if they have been confirmed) and if not just indicate that there is suspicion of an individual to have the virus, remembering not to reveal their identity. Describe the steps taken by the company in response to such a discovery, for instance that staff members have been required to work from home, the building has been evacuated and the that the building is being deep cleaned.

In the case where such an individual is suspected to have been exposed to the virus, such a case should be treated with precaution. The employer should rather contact the coronavirus hotline in South Africa on 0800 02 999.

Employers should discourage their employees from [using](#) other employees' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment. Make sure that the surfaces within the work space area are sufficiently and regularly cleaned with disinfectants that are approved by the health department. Encourage sick employees to stay at home and make provision of flexible sick leave policies and ensure that employees are aware of these policies. Minimise contact among employees by establishing alternative days at work in that a specified number of workers are to be at work on certain days. Educate employees on the use of personal protective equipment such as face masks, gloves, goggles and respiratory protection. Make sure that your employees know how to use the personal protective equipment, for instance how to put it on, use it and to take it off and dispose of it correctly. Advise employees on the use of bathroom facilities, that they are to be accessed by at least one person at a time.

Should an employee reside with someone who has been quarantined, they should not be allowed at work at all. Such a person should rather be sent home to self-isolate and to work from home if the nature of their work allows this. Employers who may have some of their employees using public transport should inform them of the requirements contained in the regulations published by The Department of Transportation. Within these [regulations](#) there are measures set out to prevent and combat the spread of the Covid-19 in the public transport services, and these include amongst others:

- Use of hygienic disinfectant equipment like hand sanitizers and dispensers for washing hands;
- Directives on the process for embarkation of passengers in the public transport vehicles;
- All drivers are directed to wear a mask;
- Number of passengers allowed in a public transport vehicle, which is now reduced significantly; and
- The operational hours of these public transportation services, which is essentially from 05:00 to 10:00 and again from 16:00 to 20:00. A grace period has also been published in that public transport providers can travel to the pick-up spot an hour before 05:00 and must finish dropping off all passengers by 21:00.

Employers are also advised to provide transportation of their own liking should they wish their own employees not to make use of the public transport, at costs which can be negotiated between the employer and employees.