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CORONAVIRUS

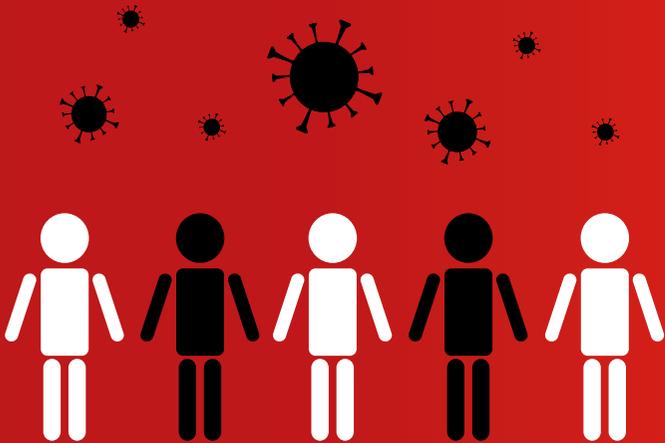


The employment survival guide

COVID-19

In this Manual

- Summary, symptoms and prevention
- Exposure
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- Designated hospitals



The COVID – 19 (or “Coronavirus”) is spreading. Employers and employees have a role to play in limiting its impact. In this alert, we answer some of the most pressing questions that have been asked over the past few days.

What is the coronavirus and what you should do if you have been exposed?

On 5 March 2020, South African Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize, confirmed the first incident of COVID-19, commonly known as the corona virus in South Africa. More information in this manual.

How does COVID-19 spread? (Coronavirus)

People can contract COVID-19 if they are standing within one meter of a person who has the illness by breathing in droplets coughed out, sneezed or exhaled by the ill person. Refer to next page for more info.

What do to do if you experience any colds or flu-like symptoms

Please stay home until you are well again. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing and be sure to wash your hands afterwards. Throw the tissue in the waste bin. Seek medical attention should you experience a fever and/or respiratory symptoms - especially if you have been abroad in the past 14 days.

Coronavirus



Summary, symptoms and prevention

How does COVID-19 spread? (Coronavirus)

A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

- The air** ----- People can contract COVID-19 if they are standing within one meter of a person who has the illness by breathing in droplets coughed out, sneezed or exhaled by the ill person;
- Close personal contact** ----- close personal contact, such as shaking hands or touching others;
- Touching** ----- touching an object or surface on which the virus is found (after an ill person coughs or exhales close to these objects or surfaces such as desks, tables or telephones), then, before washing their hands, they touch their mouth, nose or eyes; and
- Bathroom Hygiene** ----- faecal contamination.

Prevention

The following seven simple habits may provide protection against coronaviruses, flu viruses and many other pathogens that are common in South Africa and abroad:



Wash your hands often, for at least 20 seconds - even if they are not visibly dirty.



Avoid close contact with people who have acute respiratory tract infections.



Avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.



Practice cough etiquette - when you cough, maintain your distance from others. Cover your mouth and nose with clothing, or with a flexed elbow or a tissue (discard it immediately) and wash your hands immediately afterwards.



Avoid spitting.



Clean and disinfect frequently-touched objects and surfaces.



Avoid eating raw or undercooked animal products. Handle raw meat, milk or animal organs with care to avoid cross-contamination with other uncooked foods. Use different cutting boards and knives for raw meat and other foods.

Symptoms

People who contract COVID-19 may take anywhere from one to 14 days to develop symptoms. There is no medication available yet to combat the virus during the asymptomatic phase. Symptoms of COVID-19 infection include:

- Shortness of breath, & breathing difficulties
- Cough
- Muscle-pain
- Fever
- Tiredness



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Exposure



Slight symptoms

If you feel you have been exposed to COVID-19, or are showing slight symptoms, please avoid contact with other people in your community and self-isolate.



Ill but not urgent

If you feel you are ill and need non-urgent medical care, call your doctor to ask how to be tested. They will need to follow certain steps to get you the specific care you need.



Immediate care required

If you are feeling very ill and need care immediately, call your emergency services or go to the emergency department.

Drink plenty
of fluid



When seeking care, follow these steps:

- ✓ Call your healthcare facility and tell them that you have, or are being evaluated for, COVID-19.
- ✓ Put on a face mask before you enter the healthcare facility.
- ✓ Ask your healthcare professional to inform the NICD.

Health officials at Discovery Health and Centre for Communicable Diseases, in line with international guidelines, recommend that families travelling from affected areas stay away from work after returning to South Africa. **Should you develop symptoms in that period, a further 10 days at home** will likely be mandated by your health practitioner.

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Know your employment rights

The COVID – 19 (or “Coronavirus”) is spreading. Employers and employees have a role to play in limiting its impact. In this alert, we answer some of the most pressing questions that have been asked over the past few days.*

What is an employee’s sick leave entitlement?

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 (BCEA) regulates sick leave entitlement. In terms of section 22 of the BCEA, the “sick leave cycle” means the period of 36 months’ employment with the same employer immediately following an employee’s commencement of employment. During every sick leave cycle, an employee is entitled to an amount of paid sick leave equal to the number of days the employee would normally work during a period of six weeks. Usually (for an employee who works five days a week) this equates to 30 days’ sick leave per 36 months of employment.



When is an employer not required to pay sick leave?

In terms of section 23 of the BCEA, an employer is not required to pay an employee for sick leave if the employee has been absent from work for more than two consecutive days or on more than two occasions during an eight-week period and, on request by the employer, does not produce a medical certificate stating that the employee was unable to work for the duration of the employee’s absence on account of sickness or injury.



What if sick leave is exhausted?

An employer is not required to pay employees for sick leave taken when the sick leave entitlement has been exhausted. However, we recommend that authorised unpaid leave be considered. In those instances, the employee must claim illness benefits in terms of the Unemployment Insurance Act 63 of 2001 (UIA). In terms of section 20 of the UIA, a contributor is entitled to the illness benefits contemplated in the UIA for any period of illness if, inter alia, the contributor is unable to perform work on account of illness.



Must an employee be paid for sick leave?

Subject to section 23 of the BCEA, an employer must pay an employee for sick leave: a) the wage the employee would ordinarily have received for work on that day; and b) on the employee’s usual pay day.



What are the basic requirements for the medical certificate?

The medical certificate must be issued and signed by a medical practitioner or any other person who is certified to diagnose and treat patients and who is registered with a professional council.



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Know your employment rights

When can an employee be dismissed due to the Coronavirus?

In terms of Schedule 8: Code of Good Practice Dismissals, an employer must investigate the extent of the illness if the employee is temporarily unable to work. If the illness may result in a prolonged absence from work, alternatives to a dismissal must first be considered. The factors to take into account in considering alternatives to dismissal include, the seriousness of the illness, the period of absence, the nature of the employee's job and whether a temporary replacement may be secured. During this process, the ill employee should be given an opportunity to make recommendations as well. Only once all these processes have been followed and no alternative to dismissal found, may an employer consider dismissal.



May employers consider retrenchments due to the impact of the Coronavirus?

Section 189 of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 applies if an employer contemplates dismissing one or more of its employees for reasons based on its operational requirements. "Operational requirements" is defined as requirements based on the economic, technological, structural or similar needs of the employer. A retrenchment is as a result of no fault on the part of the employee. In the circumstances, it is not an opportunity for an employer to terminate the employment of ill employees. At this point, the Coronavirus is unlikely to trigger an operational need. The recommended period for recovery/isolation is 14 days – this in itself cannot trigger a need to retrench. However, should a large number of employees be infected, an operational need could possibly arise in future.



What can be done about employees who refuse to come to work?

Employees remain obligated to come to work, unless instructed otherwise by their employers. Employees who refuse to come to work must have a valid reason for their absence. The mere presence of the Coronavirus in South Africa does not constitute a valid reason to stay away from work. Employees who stay away from work without a valid reason, may face disciplinary action. We encourage employees to rather speak to their employers about their concerns before making a decision to stay at home, without authorisation.



Do employees have the right to work from home?

Employees do not have a right to work from home. Working from home may be considered by employers but should not be implemented by employees without the employer's consent. We encourage employees to rather speak to their employers about their concerns.



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Obligations

As an employer, what are my obligations?

The Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993 (OHSA), requires an employer to bring about and maintain, as far as reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risk to the health of its employees. For this reason, we recommend that employers adopt contingency plans and communicate with its employees regarding the measures it will adopt in securing the workplace. This may include:

- the prohibition of handshakes or physical contact;
- limitation on meetings;
- sufficient supply of hand sanitizer; or
- requiring employees to work from home, should they feel sick in any way.

It may also be necessary to relax the sick leave policy or to permit more flexibility in working arrangements.



May an employee's professional or personal travel plans be restricted?

Professional travel plans may be changed or prohibited. However, an employer does not have the right to dictate whether an employee may travel during his/her annual leave or weekends. Employers may, however, require their employees to disclose if they have travelled to any specific locations in order for the employer to assess the risk to other employees or customers.



May employees be required to work from home?

Yes. Working from home may be permitted in the discretion of the employer. This is not always viable but could be considered in a corporate environment. Should employers consider this option, we recommend that clear guidelines be set for employees. This may include that the working environment must be safe, the employee must have a secure telephone line and Wi-Fi connection and employees should remain within travelling distance of the office.



As an employee, what are my obligations?

The employee and the employer share the responsibility for health in the workplace. Therefore both the employee and employer must pro-actively identify dangers and develop control measures to make the workplace safe. For this reason, employees should abide by any policies adopted by the employer to curb the spread of the Coronavirus. Employees should also inform their employer if they are aware of any risk to the health of their colleagues.



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Designated Hospitals

Western Cape Tygerberg Hospital	021 938 5454
Northern Cape Kimberley Hospital	053 802 9111
North West Klerksdorp Hospital	018 406 4600
Mpumalanga Rob Ferreira Hospital	013 741 6100
Limpopo Polokwane Hospital	015 287 5000
KwaZulu-Natal Greys Hospital	033 897 3000
Gauteng Charlotte Maxeke Hospital	011 717 1000
Free State Pelonomi Hospital	051 405 1911
Eastern Cape Livingston Hospital	041 405 2255

**Call the Government's Public
Hotline for assistance.**

0800 029 999