

Frequently asked questions on remote working

A. What should employers consider before implementing working from home policies?

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

- a) Appropriate equipment, technology and training that are essential for staying connected to colleagues and the organization are provided.
- b) Clear expectations are set for both managers and workers on what the work and conditions should be.
- c) Time sovereignty to support productivity to give workers the ability to work in times and places that are convenient so they can be as productive as possible.
- d) Apply OSH 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.
- e) Emphasize that workers have obligations around issues and policies such as working hours, confidentiality, and safe work practices while working at home.
- f) Assess potential risks that the worker is aware of including any specific risks regarding working from home (e.g. domestic violence).
- g) Ensure workspaces are suitable.
- h) Establish means of contact between the employer and worker and pre-arrange means of communication.

B. What equipment should be provided to workers 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 should be in good condition and suitable for the work activity. Suitable equipment already available in the worker's home can be considered for temporary teleworking.

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

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

- i) Data security: The employer 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.

- j) 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 worker. Online training can be utilised to refresh skills in this area.
- k) Well-being: (i) varying work tasks to ensure that workers are not working in the same position for long periods; (ii) placing equipment to minimise twisting or over-reaching; (iii) having enough workspace for the equipment and any other materials needed to carry out the work; and (iv) encouraging workers to take regular breaks and to stand and move from time to time.

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

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

E. Employers should consider the following:

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

F. Are workers covered under workers' compensation while working from home?

Generally, if both parties agree to the work from home arrangement, the workers should be covered under the workers' compensation insurance. In this case, it would refer to a disease contracted by a worker/employee as contemplated in the Compensation of Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act which arose out of and in the course of their employment. This may include health workers who work in health facilities that a COVID-19 infected patient may seek medical attention as well as other categories of workers at risk of infection due to exposure.

All cases of occupationally acquired COVID-19 should be reported to the Compensation Commissioner at the Department of Employment and Labour in line with Circular No CF/03/2020 and the relevant documents submitted.



The Compensation Commissioner will assess impairment in such cases 3 months after diagnosis when maximum medical improvement has been reached. Temporary total disablement will be made but not exclude 30 days.

G. Are workers obliged to observe the employer's directive to work from home?

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