

## Practice Note: Workplace Readiness

### 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Disaster Management Regulations allow for the operation of essential services. On 23 April 2020, the President further announced the gradual and phased approach to other business operations which will differ having regard to the applicable level of lockdown as declared by Government from time to time (Levels 1 to 5).
- 1.2. Every employer will, during each of the levels of lockdown and for the foreseeable future thereafter, have to adhere to detailed occupational health and safety protocols. This means that all employers must re-examine their activities, work environment and policies in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and may need to change, adapt or enhance these in order to operate.

### 2. SCOPE AND APPLICATION

- 2.1. This document applies minimum practice guidelines for all employers operating in South Africa including all types of businesses (self-employed persons / sole proprietors, independent contractors, companies, close corporations) other organisations (non-profit organisations, trade unions, employer organisations, trusts, associations), and government (national, provincial or district level departments, entities and SOCs), and the like.
- 2.2. This practice note provides minimum requirements to be applied by employers to enable them to resume operations safely and in a manner that minimises the risk of COVID-19 transmission to workers and members of the public.
- 2.3. Each employer is unique in its activities, environment and workforce demographics, accordingly while each employer should, where reasonably practicable, apply the minimum controls herein it should consider any additional controls appropriate for its organisation, workspaces and commuting arrangements.
- 2.4. This practice note provides guidance to employers on the application of the Occupational Health and Safety Act ("OHSA") and the regulations published thereunder and Disaster Management Regulations and the Ministerial Directives published thereunder.
- 2.5. Where there is a conflict between this document and any legislation, regulation or directive published on the same matter, then the regulatory document must be followed.

### 3. OBLIGATIONS OF EMPLOYERS

**3.1.** As and when sectors are permitted to resume activities per the Disaster Management Regulations, employers in the sector will be required to provide and maintain, as reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risk to the health of workers.

**3.2.** In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this means any employer which is permitted to commence operations must develop measures to ensure that the workplace meets the standards of health protocols, adequate space for workers and physical distancing measures for the public and service providers, as required. Employers should take steps to eliminate or mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in respect of its workers and any other person directly affected by the employer's activities (e.g. customers, clients or contractors and their workers who enter their workplace or come into contact with their workers).

**3.3.** Any employer which is permitted to commence operations during lockdown must phase in the return of their workers to work to manage the return of workers from other provinces, metropolitan and district areas.

#### **4. EMPLOYER DECLARATION**

**4.1.** The head / CEO of the employer should complete a declaration confirming:

4.1.1. the employer has determined that it is permitted to operate in term provisions of the National Disaster Act regulations;

4.1.2. the location(s) of operations;

4.1.3. compliance with applicable regulations and directives;

4.1.4. that the employer has performed a risk assessment which takes into account all risk factors applicable to the workplace

4.1.5. that the employer has designed and implemented a risk response framework which includes appropriate risk control measures having regard to the risk assessment and the measures referred to in this document.

**4.2.** A sample return to work risk management plan can be found here.

**4.3.** A sample declaration for a business permitted to operate at level 4 lockdown can be found here.

#### **5. COVID-19 RISK AND RESPONSE FRAMEWORK**

##### **5.1. Appointment of compliance officer**

5.1.1. Any employer which is permitted to commence operations during lockdown must designate a COVID-19 compliance officer who will oversee the:

- a) implementation of the plan for the phased in return of workers to the workplace as contemplated in paragraph 5.2.1; and

- b) adherence to the standards of hygiene and health protocols relating to COVID-19 at the workplace.

## 5.2. Initial COVID-19 Workplace Readiness Plan

5.2.1. Before reopening operations, an employer which is permitted to commence operations during lockdown must develop a plan for the phased in return of their workers to the workplace, prior to reopening the workplace for business. This plan must correspond with risk management plan and must be retained for inspection.

5.2.2. For small businesses, the COVID-19 Workplace Readiness Plan can be simpler but should capture the following minimum information:

- a) the size of the business,
- b) which employees are permitted to work;
- c) what the plans for the phased-in return of their workers to the workplace are;
- d) what health protocols are in place to protect employees from COVID-19; and
- e) the details of the COVID-19 compliance officer;

5.2.3. For medium and larger businesses, a more detailed written plan should be developed given the larger numbers of persons at the workplace and in addition to the information in paragraph 5.2.2 should include the following additional information:

- a) the date the business will open and the hours of opening;
- b) the timetable setting out the phased return-to-work of workers, to enable appropriate measures to be taken to avoid and reduce the spread of the virus in the workplace;
- c) the steps taken to get the workplace COVID-19 ready;
- d) a list of workers:
  - i. who can work from home;
  - ii. who are 60 years or older; and
  - iii. with comorbidities who will be required to stay at home or work from home.
- e) Arrangements for staff in the establishment including:
  - i. sanitary and physical distancing measures and facilities at the entrance and exit to the workplace;
  - ii. screening facilities and systems;
  - iii. the attendance-record system and infrastructure;
  - iv. the work-area of employees;
  - v. any designated area where the public is served;
  - vi. canteen and bathroom facilities;
  - vii. testing facilities (for establishments with more than 500 employees); and

- viii. staff rotational arrangements (for establishments where fewer than 100% of employees will be permitted to work).
- f) Arrangements for customers or members of the public, including sanitation and social distancing measures.

### 5.3. On-going compliance

5.3.1. In addition to performing a workplace readiness plan before commencing business during lockdown, all employers should regularly perform a risk assessment which should be enhanced to assess the risk of transmission of COVID-19 at the workplace. The risk assessment should, at a minimum:

- a) identify health or safety hazards associated with any work which is performed at that employer (including the risk of transmission of COVID-19);
- b) analyse and evaluate each hazard and the associated health, safety and environmental risks;
- c) design and implement a control framework so that precautionary measures are taken with respect to such risks;
- d) monitor and review the effectiveness of the control framework and control measures; and
- e) design and establish strong internal and external reporting and escalation mechanisms, as appropriate.

5.4. The frequency of the risk assessment should be done at intervals appropriate for the employer but it is recommended that it be reviewed at each stage of lockdown and as new risks emerge and/or as new knowledge on the science develops on the COVID-19 virus is published.

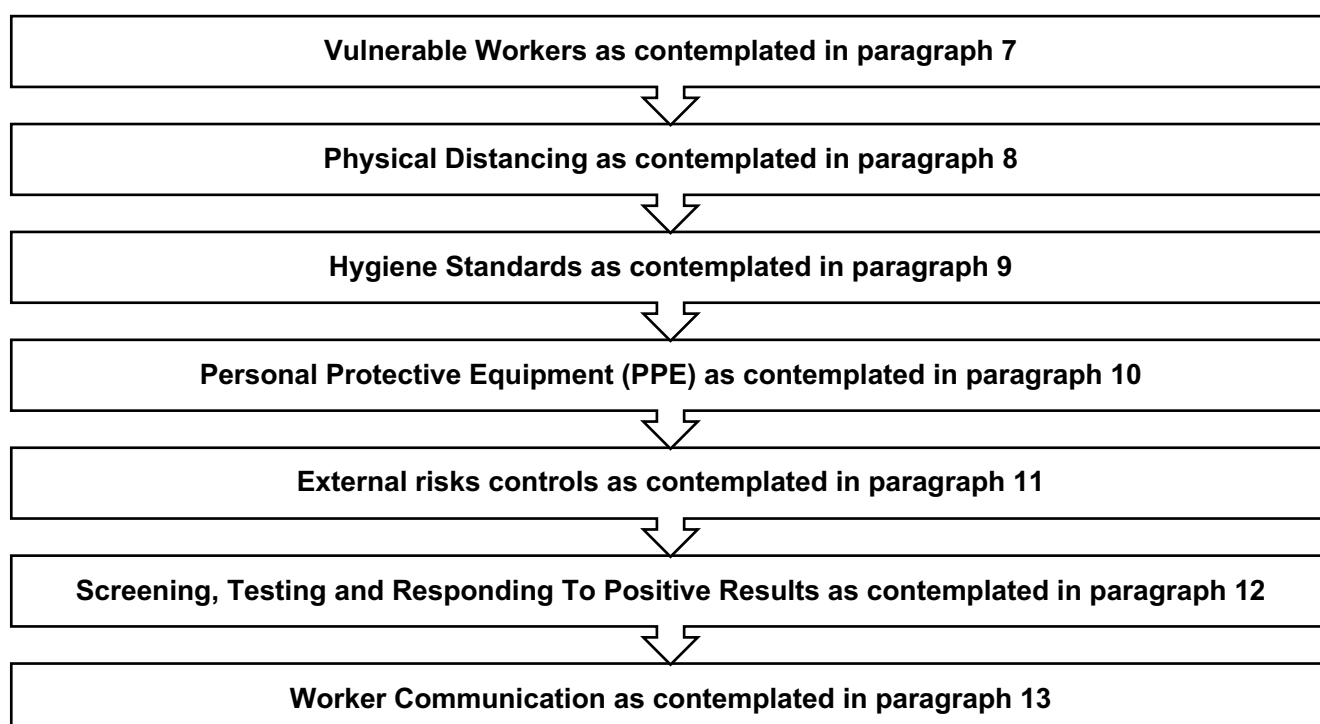
5.5. The table below can be considered when compiling a risk assessment or reviewing it to include COVID-19 risk controls. A sample Risk Assessment Report can be found here.

Planning	Identify Hazards	Analyse Risks	Evaluate Risks	Control Risks	Monitor and Review
<p>Establish team to do risk assessment.</p> <p>List all the activities or tasks in the workplace.</p> <p>Resources needed while conducting risk assessment.</p> <p>Develop training awareness and communication to</p>	<p>Categorise activities to determine exposure. (e.g. direct contact, indirect contact).</p> <p>Identify hazards from all activities and classify (e.g. biological hazards, environmental hazards).</p> <p>Identify exposure</p>	<p>Examine identified hazards to determine risk and the impact.</p> <p>Classify risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High risk</li> <li>- Medium risk</li> <li>- Low risk</li> </ul> <p>Assess risk impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health (COVID 19)</li> <li>- Safety</li> <li>- Environmental</li> </ul> <p>Consider risk of vulnerable workers. (age, medical conditions, etc.)</p>	<p>Determine whether the activity is normal, abnormal or an emergency activity.</p> <p>Establish the methodology to evaluate risk.</p> <p>Different criteria can be used such as below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Severity</li> <li>- Probability</li> <li>- Exposure</li> </ul>	<p>Hierarchy of controls.</p> <p>Eliminate: change in process to have zero risk.</p> <p>Substitute: modify process to reduce the risk.</p> <p>Engineering controls: limit the hazard at its source.</p> <p>Administrative controls: work instructions or working procedures.</p>	<p>Monitor and evaluate if the implemented control measures are effective. If not take corrective measures.</p> <p>Review the risk assessment.</p>

be done to ensure workers are informed.	From community, visitors or contractors Occupationally acquired			Personal protective equipment (PPE): reduces risk by protecting individual and to be considered as last resort.	
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## 6. MINIMUM RISK CONTROL MEASURES

Every employer should implement the reasonable minimum controls having regard to the nature of their activities as it pertains to:



## 7. VULNERABLE WORKERS

### 7.1. Identification of vulnerable workers

7.1.1. COVID-19 is a new disease and there is limited information regarding risk factors for severe disease. Based on information and clinical expertise available at the date of this Practice Note, older adults and people of any age who have certain underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Based on information available at the time of this Practice Note, those at higher-risk for developing severe illness from COVID-19 include people:

- a) 65 years and older;
- b) who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility; and/or
- c) of any age with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including people with one of or a combination of the following:
  - i. chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma;
  - ii. diabetes;

- iii. serious heart conditions;
- iv. severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher);
- v. chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis;
- vi. liver disease; and
- vii. those who are immunocompromised. In this regard many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications

7.1.2. Employers should implement a process to identify both workers who:

- a) are, themselves, at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19; and
- b) reside with or care for persons that are at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 (including family members, aged parents etc.).

(hereinafter collectively referred to as “**Vulnerable Workers**”)

## **7.2. Additional measures to protect Vulnerable Workers**

7.2.1. Employers should consider what additional risk control measures would be appropriate in respect of Vulnerable Workers and develop policies and procedures to give effect to those measures.

7.2.2. In this regard employers should supplement and enhance the risk control measures mentioned in paragraph 8 to 11 with additional measures to protect Vulnerable Workers. These measures would need to take into account the tailored to the circumstances of the Vulnerable Worker and their work environment and activities.

7.2.3. Employers are strongly encouraged to allow Vulnerable Workers that can work from home to do so.

7.2.4. In respect of Vulnerable Workers whose current roles and responsibilities do not allow for remote working should consult with Vulnerable Workers to determine if additional risk control measures could be implemented to mitigate the transmission risk to Vulnerable Workers including:

- a) whether the Vulnerable Worker can fulfil a different role and responsibility which has a lower risk for COVID-19 transmission;
- b) whether the Vulnerable Worker’s environment can be adapted or improved to lower the risk for COVID-19 transmission (i.e. by stricter physical distancing protocols or additional hygiene measures);
- c) whether the Vulnerable Worker can be provided with additional hygiene enablement tools (such as providing the worker with their own hand sanitiser);

- d) whether the Vulnerable Worker can be provided with specific PPE appropriate to the risk identified in the risk assessment;
- e) whether external risks can be mitigated further (for example reducing interaction with visitors or the use of public transport); and
- f) allowing the Vulnerable Worker to utilise his/her annual leave or sick leave during different levels of the lockdown.

## **8. PHYSICAL DISTANCING**

### **8.1. Reduce worker concentration**

8.1.1. Reducing face-to-face contact is an important measure to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Employers should, as far as practicable, minimise the number of workers at the workplace at any given time through rotation, staggered working hours, shift systems, remote working arrangements or similar measures in order to achieve social distancing.

8.1.2. Workers that can work from home should work from home particularly where they are Vulnerable Workers. Employers should develop a directive or guidance on working from home to provide clear advice to all workers working from home. (frequently asked questions about remote working can be found here).

8.1.3. Every employer should arrange the workplace to ensure minimal contact between workers and as far as practicable ensure that there is a minimum of one and a half metres between workers. A bigger distance may be required depending on the outcome of the risk assessment.

8.1.4. If it is not practicable to arrange a worker's workstation(s) to be spaced at least one and a half metres apart, the employer should:

- a) arrange physical barriers to be placed between workers' working places or erected on workers' desks to form a solid, physical barrier between workers while they are working; or
- b) if necessary, supply the worker free of charge with appropriate PPE based on a risk assessment of the working place.

### **8.2. Common areas**

8.2.1. Every employer should ensure that social distancing measures are implemented through supervision both in the workplace and in the common areas outside the immediate workplace through queue control or within the workplace such as canteens, coffee shops and lavatories.

8.2.2. At a canteen and workplace coffee shops these measures may include:

- a) dividing the workforce into groups or staggering break-times to avoid the concentration of workers in common areas such as the canteen.
- b) prohibiting sit down food and only take away.

- c) encouraging workers to bring their own lunches.
- d) arranging for food to be delivered to workers' offices/desks to avoid having to go to the canteen.
- e) closing of common areas to reduce pedestrian traffic.
- f) staggering start / finish / break times to reduce traffic in common areas.
- g) changing area layouts to create more space for movement.
- h) minimising handling of cash and encourage contactless payments only.
- i) markings on the floor / ground to define queueing quadrants to indicate minimum social distancing requirements.
- j) providing for outside, well-spaced eating areas.

8.2.3. In other common areas these measures may include:

- a) prohibiting "hot desking" (i.e. workers should have dedicated desks).
- b) markings on the floor / ground to define routes and indicate minimum social distancing requirements.
- c) leaving doors open (where appropriate) at busy times to speed up the flow of pedestrian traffic (and to avoid workers touching door handles).
- d) disabling vending machines.
- e) disabling of biometric systems where possible (introduce card systems).
- f) Ongoing sanitation of door handles, lift buttons and furniture; Social distancing to be applied in elevators.
- g) designating coffee cups and other crockery as far as possible.

8.2.4. Providing dedicated lockers for the storage of their personal belongings, cell-phones and clothing such that there is no mixing and sharing of such facilities

### **8.3. Workplace meetings and gatherings**

8.3.1. Where workplace meetings can be held via an online collaboration platform, it is strongly encouraged.

8.3.2. Where workplace meetings cannot be conducted virtually, strict protocols should be implemented in respect to in-person meetings:

- a) the maximum occupancy of the workplace meeting room should be determined having regard to social distancing principles above and excess seats should be removed from the room;
- b) the layout of workplace meeting rooms should conform with social distancing principles in so far as possible;
- c) the number of attendees that may attend a workplace meeting should be limited to the prescribed occupancy requirements of the room;
- d) the number of workplace meetings and the duration of workplace meetings should be reduced;



- e) attendees should avoid social niceties such as shaking of hands and hugging;
- f) all attendees should wear a face mask with nose and mouth covered;
- g) all attendees should wash hands / hand sanitizer before entering and exiting the workplace meeting room;
- h) doors to be left open during and between workplace meetings to avoid touching handles;
- i) desks / equipment / seat handles in meeting room should be sanitised immediately before and after meetings;
- j) meeting refreshments are permitted where the coffee cups are disposable, beverages are sealed and food is wrapped.

## 9. HYGIENE REQUIREMENTS

### 9.1. Hygiene enablement

9.1.1. The employer should ensure that:

- a) there are adequate facilities for the washing of hands with soap and clean water;
- b) only paper towels are provided to dry hands after washing (fabric towelling must not be used);
- c) surfaces that workers and members of the public come into contact, including reception desks, are routinely cleaned and disinfected and industrially sanitised, where appropriate;
- d) common areas and ablution facilities are sanitised more regularly;
- e) workers are provided with the necessary tools and equipment required to perform their job to avoid sharing of workers' tools and equipment, insofar as it is reasonable and practicable to do so;
- f) there are sufficient quantities of hand sanitizer (with at least 70% alcohol content) having regard to the number of workers or other persons who access the workplace at the entrance of, and in, the workplace which the workers or other persons are required to use;
- g) every worker who works away from the workplace, other than at home, should be provided with an adequate supply of hand sanitizer;
- h) if a worker interacts with the public, the employer should provide the worker with sufficient supplies of hand-sanitizer at that worker's workstation for both the worker and the person with whom the worker is interacting; and
- i) the workplace is sufficiently ventilated.

## 10. PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

### 10.1. Types of PPE

10.1.1. The type of PPE to be used will vary according to the setting and work activity, medical risk factors in relation to Vulnerable Workers and should follow from the employer's risk assessment.. For example, the PPE required for those caring for COVID-19 patients will differ to workers in an office or industrial environment. Further guidance on the types of PPE as well as the application of appropriate PPE use be found here

10.1.2. The general requirement for workers to wear masks does not take away from the fact that, where a risk assessment indicates that PPE is required, those categories of workers should be provided with the accredited PPE in accordance with National Department of Health guidelines.

10.1.3. There may be specific regulations or standards which prescribe the minimum PPE requirements applicable for that industry.

### 10.2. Cloth masks for workers

10.2.1. To ensure that N95 masks, surgical masks and other medical masks are secured for those workers who have the highest health risk such as health care workers, persons with respiratory symptoms or those caring for COVID-19 patients at home, employers should ensure all other workers do not use medical grade masks without good cause.

10.2.2. Employers should ensure provision of cloth masks to every worker in their workplace. This is in the interests of health and safety of workers in the workplace and as a support to the public health measures. These masks should be provided free of charge and an employer may not require a worker to pay the employer or any other person for a cloth mask or make a deduction from the worker's remuneration.

10.2.3. Every employer should provide each worker with a minimum of two cloth masks, as recommended by the National Department of Health, for the worker to wear while at work and while commuting to and from work. The number of cloth masks that should be provided to a worker may increase having regard to the worker's conditions of work, in particular, where these may result in the mask becoming wet or soiled and in accordance with any sectoral guidelines.

10.2.4. An employer should make appropriate arrangements for the washing, drying, ironing and disposal of cloth masks in accordance with the Department of Employment and Labour Directive or, if not reasonably practicable, provide facilities for the worker to wash and dry the cloth masks at the workplace.

### 10.3. Training on the use and care of cloth masks

10.3.1. Every employer should ensure that workers are informed, instructed, trained and instructed as to the correct use of both PPE as well as cloth masks.

10.3.2. In respect of cloth masks, training should explain:

- a) hands should be washed before and after donning or removing the cloth mask;
- b) that cloth masks should cover the nose and mouth completely;
- c) cloth masks should not be lowered when speaking, coughing or sneezing;
- d) cloth masks should never be touched except to put on and remove (fidgeting with the mask repeatedly is strongly discouraged);
- e) cloth masks should be washed with warm soapy water and iron when dry. Ironing assists with decontamination;
- f) cloth masks should be changed when wet or visibly soiled; and
- g) The cloth mask should not be promoted as the primary prevention strategy and should never be promoted separately from hand-washing and social distancing.

#### **10.4. Health worker PPE**

10.4.1. Health workers in a health setting should use PPE based on a documented risk assessment and should meet the minimum recommendations without using excess PPE for the setting / task. PPE for a health worker may include:

- a) disposable gloves;
- b) disposable plastic apron;
- c) closed shoes, non-slip soles and shoe covers;
- d) eye protection (goggles/face shield or visors); and
- e) respiratory protection (FFP2/N95 or more sophisticated respirators) for high risk situations (e.g. aerosol-generating procedures), and surgical masks for infectious persons.

10.4.2. Employers should ensure that PPE must be available in the appropriate sizes.

10.4.3. Health workers should be trained on the donning and doffing of PPE appropriate to the tasks being performed.

10.4.4. Employers should ensure that PPE is consistently and properly worn when required. Further information on the use of PPE when caring for patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 can be found here. According to the National Institute of Health this applies to all medical staff, including those that are occupationally based, in the context of caring for people who have confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

## 11. EXTERNAL RISK CONTROLS

### 11.1. Visitors

11.1.1. Employers are strongly advised to place an ongoing restriction on visitors to a workplace. However, in the event where an employer-critical visitor, supplier, customer, or delivery service may need to attend a site, a controlled access process should be in place including adherence to sanitisation processes and full personal contact details (e.g. telephone number, last place visited should be collected to assist with contact tracing).

11.1.2. Where practicable, employers should avoid workers from attending client or supplier premises. However, in the event where such attendances are critical to the employer operations, a controlled risk mitigation process should be in place.

### 11.2. Public transport

11.2.1. Employers are encouraged to arrange transport for their workers during the lockdown period.

11.2.2. Employers should ensure that safe transport arrangements are made, including:

- a) sanitisers for workers
- b) surgical masks for taxi drivers
- c) social distancing and capacity arrangements.

11.2.3. Employers should train workers who rely on public transport or who utilise employer arranged transport on the safety protocols to be followed. An example of minibus taxi guidelines can be found [here](#).

## 12. SCREENING, TESTING AND RESPONDING TO POSITIVE RESULTS

### 12.1 Definitions

12.1.1. **Surveillance:** systematic programme of monitoring the health of a worker based on symptoms and clinical signs that may detect the emergence of an underlying coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection that causes COVID-19 disease when monitored over a period of time.

12.1.2. **Symptom screening:** active programme of action undertaken by the workplace to detect the presence of COVID-19 related symptoms in workers who may otherwise be healthy when they present to work or reported by the worker prior to presenting at work.

12.1.3.           **Testing:**           e collection of biological samples by trained health professionals from the passages of the nose and throat to detect for the presence of coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) using standardised and currently validated and well accepted laboratory tests called polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests.

12.1.4.           **Isolation:**           cording to the WHO's International Health Regulations, (2005) it is defined as the separation of ill or contaminated persons from others in such a manner as to prevent the spread of infection or contamination. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, isolation may include, amongst others:

- a) isolation at a person's home – self-isolation;
- b) isolation in a health facility; or
- c) isolation at a designated facility.

12.1.5.           **Quarantine:**           cording to the WHO's International Health Regulations, (2005) it is defined as the restriction of activities and/or separation from others of suspect persons who are not ill in such a manner as to prevent the possible spread of infection or contamination. The purpose of quarantine is to prevent the transmission of diseases. Quarantine will be applied to:

- a) An individual or to a group of persons who were exposed to the coronavirus;
- b) Persons believed to have been exposed on a conveyance during international travel; or
- c) A wider population- or geographic-level basis.

## 12.2 Testing and screening

12.2.1       Employers should have measures in place to ascertain whether any worker, when arriving at work, has any observable symptoms common with COVID-19 (fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, etc).

12.2.2       Furthermore, employers should require every worker to report whether they suffer from symptoms such as body aches, redness of eyes, loss of smell, loss of taste, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fatigue, weakness or tiredness.

12.2.3       Employers should require workers to immediately inform the employer if they experience

symptoms associated with COVID-19.

- 12.2.4 Employers should know where to refer workers for testing if presenting with the above symptoms. and keep a listing of the testing centres closest to their workplace. The current procedure is to notify the National Department of Health through their helpline (0800 029 999) to obtain further directions.

### 12.3 Responding to a worker with positive results

12.3.1 If a worker presents or reports typical COVID-19 related symptoms:

- a) do not permit the worker to enter the workplace or report for work;
- b) if the worker is already at work, immediately isolate the worker, provide a surgical mask to the worker, and arrange for the worker to be transported in a manner that does not place other workers or members of the public at risk, for a medical examination, for testing or to be self-isolated;
- c) if the employee does not need hospital admission and is sent home, ensure that the employee undergoes self-isolation at home if appropriate, or at a designated isolation accommodation identified by the employer, in line with National Department of Health guidelines;
- d) provide prompt counselling and support to the employee as per institution's guidelines/standard operating procedures (SOPs);
- e) immediately assess the risk of transmission and if appropriate, may require temporary closure to disinfect the area and workstation;
- f) refer other workers who may also be at risk for symptom screening;
- g) place the worker on paid sick leave, or if sick leave is exhausted, make application for illness benefits from the UIF in terms of the Directive issued on 25 March 2020; and
- h) ensure that the worker is not discriminated against on grounds of having tested positive for COVID-19.

12.3.2 The employer should report all alleged, presumed and confirmed cases of COVID-19 related occupational disease to the Compensation Commissioner in the prescribed format using the relevant documentation as required in terms of the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act 130 of 1993 (COIDA) in order to facilitate procedures for all worker's compensation benefits available to employees, including:

- a) leave for temporary disability;
- b) assessment by an occupational medicine specialist in cases of complex disease that may result in permanent disability;

- c) cover of medical expenses for the treatment and testing, as well as permanent disability assessments; and
- d) compensation to dependents in case of death.

#### **12.4 Returning to work after testing positive for COVID-19**

12.4.1 If a worker has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and isolated in accordance with the Department of Health Guidelines, the worker may only return to work if:

- a) the worker has undergone a medical examination confirming that s/he has been tested negative for COVID-19 after at least 14 days isolation;
- b) the worker wears the minimum of a surgical mask at all times for the remaining period of 21 days from the date of initial testing;
- c) the employer ensures that the worker adheres to social distancing, hygiene and cough etiquette; and
- d) the employer closely monitors the worker for symptoms on return to work.

### **13. WORKER EDUCATION, ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION**

#### **13.1. Training and awareness**

13.1.1. Every employer should implement a suitable training and awareness campaign in respect of:

- a) the dangers of COVID-19 disease;
- b) the manner of its transmission;
- c) the measures to prevent transmission such as social distancing, personal hygiene practices, PPE requirements and utilisation (including cloth masks), social etiquette (including cough etiquette, greetings, respiratory hygiene);
- d) safe transport to and from work; and
- e) symptom monitoring, screening and confirmatory testing.

13.1.2. Employers are encouraged to put up appropriate signage on their premises and communicate and educate workers on the National Department of Health recommendations to prevent COVID-19 related disease. (An example for employers to consider can be found here).

13.1.3. Worker hygiene practices are important to prevent and contain the spread of the coronavirus, employers should provide workers with information that raises awareness in any form or manner, including where reasonably practicable leaflets and notices (an example of handwashing awareness materials can be found here).

### **13.2. Prevent stigma and discrimination**

13.2.1. Social stigma may be created in labelling, stereotyping, discriminating, and/ or experiencing loss of status because of a perceived link with the COVID-19 disease. Stigma can undermine social cohesion, workplace stability and prompt social isolation of groups, which might contribute to a situation where the virus is more, not less, likely to spread. This can result in more severe health problems and difficulties controlling a disease outbreak. Stigma can:

- a) drive workers to hide the illness to avoid stigma and/or discrimination;
- b) prevent workers from seeking health care immediately; and/or
- c) discourage workers from adopting healthy behaviours.

13.2.2. Employers should make every effort to ensure that its training and awareness campaigns, policies and responses to COVID-19 do not foster social stigma in respect of workers with symptoms of COVID-19. The manner that employers communicate about COVID-19 and its policies and response to manage COVID-19 virus transmission is critical to combat the disease and to avoid fuelling fear and stigma.

13.2.3. Employers should use their best efforts to create an environment in which COVID-19 can be discussed and addressed openly, honestly, and effectively. When communicating about COVID-19 and the employer's responses thereto they should carefully consider the use of words and language which may have a negative meaning for workers and may fuel stigmatizing/discriminatory attitudes.

### **13.3. Create safe worker engagement platforms**

13.3.1. Workers are often best placed to give input on practical risks mitigation interventions for particular work areas.

13.3.2. Employers are encouraged to engage with workers, through their normal workplace engagement mechanism, or additional engagement platforms specifically designed for COVID-19 purposes, in order to implement customised and practical arrangements to ensure the minimisation of workplace risks.

13.3.3. Safe engagement platforms should be considered for worker engagement.

### **13.4. Address worker concerns and psycho-social support**

13.4.1. Be aware of workers' concerns about pay, leave, safety, health, and other issues that may arise during the COVID-19 pandemic. Provide adequate, usable, and appropriate training, education, and informational material about employer-essential job functions and worker health and safety, including proper hygiene practices and the use of any workplace controls (including PPE). Informed workers who feel safe at work are less likely to be unnecessarily absent.

13.4.2. Where possible, employers should provide access to psycho-social support professionals and councillors for those working, and not working.