



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS

EPIDEMIOLOGY SERVICES UNIT

SUBJECT : GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH A PROBABLE OR CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASE IN THE WORKPLACE

This guidance is intended to assist workplaces to respond in the event of an employee suspected or confirmed case, of COVID-19. In all instances, the contact tracing team of the Department of Health will contact the workplace of the confirmed case to provide the necessary guidance.

Employees should notify their employer if they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and attended the workplace whilst infected. This means workplaces will be made aware of a confirmed case linked to their workplace.

Employees should also notify their workplace if they develop symptoms whilst at work or home and/or if they are awaiting a COVID-19 test result. This communication must always-maintain the confidentiality and protect the privacy of the employee(s).

This information would limit further potential exposures to other staff and contain any workplace outbreaks should they occur.

Once the workplace is notified of a confirmed case, they may be required to undertake certain actions. These may include:

1. Conducting a risk assessment to inform what actions must be taken.
2. Identifying close contacts of a confirmed case.

Initial Response

If an employee notifies an employer that they have symptoms of COVID-19 or are a confirmed case, the employer, should enquire as to when the employee first developed symptoms and determine whether they attended work during this period. The **infectious period** is taken to be from 48 hours prior to symptom onset up until the point at which the person isolates. This allows for the identification of the possible contacts of the confirmed case.

Requirements for Suspected Cases

A single suspected case

A person is a suspected case when they have symptoms compatible with COVID-19 in the absence of an alternative diagnosis. Symptoms include:

- sore throat
- sneezing and runny nose
- temporary loss of smell or taste
- fever of $\geq 37.5^{\circ}\text{C}$
- coughing
- difficulty breathing.

When there is a single suspected case at a workplace:

- The employee should be asked to leave work to get tested and go home. They should travel by private transport, where possible, or by taxi. A facemask should be worn covering their nose and mouth.
- If they are unable to leave immediately, they should be supported to isolate at work, preferably in a separate room. They must wear a facemask covering their nose and mouth and remain 2 meters from others at all times.
- The employer can advise the employee to take a COVID-19 test and self-isolate until the test result is known.
- Where the suspected case was present at the workplace in the period commencing 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms, it is possible that they were infectious while at work. Employers must take all practicable steps to manage the risks posed by the suspected case, including appropriate cleaning.
- The employer should ensure cleaning of their personal workspace and any areas in the work premises frequently used by the worker, including high-touch surfaces likely to have been frequented by the suspected case.
- Employers should advise all workers to be vigilant about the onset of symptoms of COVID-19 and advise all workers to be tested and self-isolate if they become symptomatic.
- Employers must ensure materials, logs and records are in order to support contact tracing, particularly from the period of 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms in the suspected case.

It is not necessary to vacate the site (in part or completely) in response to suspected cases.

In the event that the suspected case(s) test negative to COVID-19, The Department of Health (DOH) will not need to be involved and no further action is required on behalf of the employer or workplace.

Requirements for an Employee with a Negative Test Result

If the initial test result is negative, the following is recommended:

- The employee will still need to complete the full 14-days quarantine period if they have had close contact with a probable or confirmed case of Covid-19. Retesting will occur at day 7 post contact with the confirmed case.
- If they are still sick with the same illness at the end of the 14-day isolation period, they will need to stay in isolation until they have been symptom-free for 48 hours.
- If the employee has not had close contact with a confirmed or probable case of Covid-19, and if they are well, and have been symptom free for 48 hours, they can return to normal activity.
- If they are still unwell, then the employee should not return to work.

Requirements for Confirmed Cases

A confirmed case is defined as a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 disease.

- Employees must disclose to their employer as soon as practicable, after they receive notification that they have tested positive for COVID-19 and if they attended the workplace during the infectious period.
- Employers must undertake any further steps required to assure the safety of the employees and the workplace as soon as practicable. This includes:
 - Removing the employee from the work premises if required.
 - Cleaning and disinfecting the workspace used by the infected employee.
 - Identification and notification of workplace close contacts and provision of close contact details to Department of Health.
 - Putting in place appropriate control measures.
 - Insist on adherence to protocols and measures for reduction of the transmission of COVID19 by employees.

- Penalize persons for not adhering to the protocols.
- Employers must:
 - Inform all staff at the workplace to be vigilant about the onset of COVID-19 symptoms and at symptom onset to self-isolate and be tested.
 - Undertake a risk assessment to decide on closure and cleaning requirements (in whole or in part).
 - Undertake a comprehensive cleaning of the workplace, in whole or part, based on the risk assessment.
 - Identify workplace close contacts associated with the confirmed employee's attendance at work.
 - Notify those close contacts that quarantine is for 14 days.
 - Notify the DOH, provide close contact details, temperature logs, records and comply with any further directions from the DOH.
- In the event of closure of a workplace, reopening can only occur:
 - Once all obligations under the directions of the DOH have been complied with; and
 - On the authority of the DOH.

Contact Tracing

The Public Health Officers (PHO) of the Department of Health, the Contact Tracing Team (CTT), will undertake contact tracing. They will determine potential exposure to employees, customers and visitors to the workplace. A confirmed case is notified by a member of the CTT within 24 hours of receipt of a laboratory confirmation. The individual is asked to inform his/her workplace of their status. The confirmed case is required to provide the PHO with a list of persons at work, with whom they would have had contact 48 hours prior to their symptom, onset until the day of isolation or removal from work. The contact tracer will interview each contact listed and based on the risk assessment advise on whether there is requirement for testing. Contacts on this list may be defined as close-work contacts or casual-work contacts.

• Identifying Close-Work Contacts

Contact information, including home contacts for all staff should be current and the areas of work that each staff member works in should be recorded.

The Department of Health defines a 'Close Contact' as any person with the following exposure to a suspect, confirmed, or probable case during the person's infectious period, without appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

In terms of a workplace, the following are examples of what might be considered close contacts:

- face-to-face contact in any setting within two meters of a case for 15 minutes or more (e.g. people working opposite each other, sitting opposite each other during a break)
- having been in a closed environment within 2 meters of a case for 15 minutes or more

Or in a higher risk closed environment for 15 minutes or more as determined by the local Public Officer of Health. The local PHO will determine whether an environment is higher risk. Considerations include the nature of the gathering, the level of contact between individuals and the ability to observe physical distancing/hygiene measures.

- **Casual Contact Definition**

A casual contact is defined as someone who has had contact with a person while they were infectious with COVID-19, but does not meet the criteria for a close contact.

Casual contacts of a confirmed (or probable) case do not routinely need to be tested or self-isolate if asymptomatic. They should be advised to monitor their health for 14 days and to isolate themselves immediately if any symptoms develop or contact their GP to arrange to be tested.

For casual contacts with no symptoms, there are no restrictions on movements (aside from any that already apply due to the current Government alert level). However, there are situations where a PHO may advise casual contacts to isolate and get tested in the absence of symptoms, and only come out of self-isolation once they have a negative test result. This will be contingent on consideration by public health officials.

Casual contacts who are at higher risk of severe illness (e.g., the immunocompromised, people with co-morbidities) do not require additional public health follow-up.

All employees requiring testing will be guided to the appropriate Respiratory Clinic for testing. All contacts who are determined to be close contacts will be tested and quarantined for 14 days. The quarantined employees will be issued sick leave with an appropriate diagnosis and the date to resume work as determined by the contact tracer. This sick leave will be presented to the employer and will justify the time absent from work.

The CTT will also reach out to the workplace and guide on how to deal with a confirmed case in the workplace. The period of absenteeism from work by the confirmed case will be covered by the appropriate sick leave outlining the

diagnosis and date of resumption at work. Employees should not return to work until they have met the criteria to [discontinue home isolation](#) as advised by the PHO or clinical management team.

Employers should not require sick employees to provide a COVID-19 test result or healthcare provider's note to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or return to work. Healthcare provider offices and medical facilities are extremely busy and would not be able to provide such documentation in a timely manner.

The contact tracing process involves information gathering, which could include interviews, CCTV, checking of rosters, and assessing cleaning procedures that had occurred whilst/after-the confirmed case was on site.

Communication with Employees

The PHO will work with the employer to inform employees of the situation and what interventions will need to be followed such as contact tracing, COVID-19 testing, quarantine and cleaning. This could include:

- Having Ministry of Health guidance readily available for employees; and
- Any support available to employees, through the business or government.

Communication with Customers and the media

The PHO will work closely with the employer to guide in informing their customers of the current situation, and what actions will be taken. Ensure that customers' minds are at ease, by being proactive with your communication. This could include:

- Signage at the front of the store to inform customers of a confirmed case and any information from health officials;
- Notifying customers via media platform (newsletter, Facebook etc.) of a confirmed case and any information from health officials; and
- Having the Ministry of Health guidance readily available for customers.

Sick Leave Eligibility

Employees qualify for Sick Leave if they:

- are sick with COVID-19 and must self-isolate until a doctor tells them they can leave isolation
- are identified as someone who has or may have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19 and must self-isolate for a period, for example

- a close contact who has been told to self-isolate by a health official through the contact tracing process,
- Are someone with COVID-like symptoms who meets the Ministry of Health's Higher Index of Suspicion criteria and has been told by a doctor to self-isolate, or casual contacts who have been told to self-isolate by a health official through the contact tracing process
- Are the parent or caregiver of a dependent who has been told to self-isolate for a period and the dependent needs support to do so safely
- are sick with COVID-19 like symptoms and been told to self-isolate while awaiting a test or test result,

Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member or take care of children due to school and childcare closures

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Definitions

Cleaning

Cleaning removes dirt, dust, crumbs, and germs from surfaces or objects. When you clean, you will likely use soap (or detergent) and water to physically clean off the surfaces and objects. This may not necessarily kill the germs.

Disinfecting

Disinfecting uses chemicals (disinfectants) to kill germs on surfaces and objects. Some common disinfectants are bleach and alcohol solutions. You usually need to leave the disinfectant on the surfaces and objects for a certain period of time to kill the germs.

Companies do not necessarily need to close operations, if they can close off affected areas.

- **Close off areas** used by the employee who is sick.
- **Open outside doors and windows** to increase air circulation in the area.
- Clean and disinfect **all areas used by the person who is sick**, such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines.

- Once the area has been **appropriately disinfected**, it **can be opened for use**.
 - **Workers without close contact** with the person who is sick can return to work immediately after disinfection.
- If **more than 7 days** since the person who is sick visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary.
 - Continue routine cleaning and disinfection. This includes everyday practices that businesses and communities normally use to maintain a healthy environment.

Safety of Persons engaged in Disinfecting

- The risk when cleaning is not the same as the risk when face to face with a sick person who may be coughing or sneezing.
- Cleaning staff should be informed to avoid touching their face, especially their mouth, nose, and eyes when cleaning.
- Cleaning staff should wear impermeable disposable gloves and a surgical mask plus eye protection or a face shield while cleaning.
- Cleaners should use alcohol-based sanitizer (70% and above), rub hands thoroughly before putting on and after removing gloves. Alcohol-based sanitizer should also be used before and after removing the surgical mask and eye protection.
- The disinfectant used should be one for which the manufacturer claims antiviral activity, meaning it can kill the virus (such as chlorine or alcohol based disinfectants).
- If there is visible contamination with respiratory secretions or other body fluid, the cleaners should wear a full length disposable gown in addition to the surgical mask, eye protection and gloves. Advice should be sought from your work health and safety consultants on correct procedures for wearing PPE and use of disinfection.

Cleaning Agents

- Use freshly made bleach solution and follow manufacturer's instructions for appropriate dilution and use. Wipe the area with bleach solution using disposable paper towels or a disposable cloth. Dispose of gloves and mask in a leak proof plastic bag.
- Preparation of disinfectant solution; Gloves should be worn when handling and preparing bleach solutions. Protective eye wear should be worn in case of splashing. Bleach solution should be: made up daily used mainly on hard, non-porous surfaces (it can damage textiles and metals). Sufficient time is required to kill the virus, i.e., at least 10 minutes contact time.

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- Use alcohol-based disinfectant with at least 70% alcohol to wipe down contaminated surfaces.

- Wash hands well using soap and water. Dry with disposable paper or single-use cloth towel. If water is unavailable, clean hands with alcohol-based sanitizer and hand rub for at least 20 seconds.

Equipment used for Cleaning

- Electrostatic guns
- Sprayers
- Micro fibre cloths (for the wiping of frequently touched points)

Maintain Healthy Business Operations

- **Determine how you will operate if absenteeism spikes** from increases in sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who must stay home to watch their children.
 - Plan to monitor and respond to absenteeism at the workplace.
 - Implement plans to continue your essential business functions in case you experience higher-than-usual absenteeism.
 - Prepare to institute flexible workplace and leave policies.
 - Cross-train employees to perform essential functions so the workplace can operate even if key employees are absent.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles.
- Provide soap and water in the workplace. If soap and water are not readily available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. If hands are visibly dirty, soap and water should be chosen over hand sanitizer.
- Place hand sanitizer in multiple locations to encourage good hand hygiene practices.
- Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, the importance of hand hygiene, and coughing and sneezing etiquette, at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where employees are likely to see them.
- Discourage handshaking

References

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/general-business-faq.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>