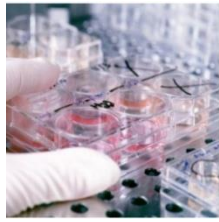




NATIONAL HEALTH
LABORATORY SERVICE



Return to work post COVID-19 illness/ Lockdown

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Brief update on covid-19 statistics in the workplace

	CASES	Deaths
Internationally	13,042,564	571,701
SA	276,242	4079
WORKPLACE		
Health	4 821	
Correctional services	3424	29
Mining	3 519	28

Major milestones

- On 11 March 2020, WHO declares coronavirus a global pandemic
- On 27 March 2020, South Africa entered a countrywide lockdown aimed at flattening the COVID-19 infection curve.
- On 23 April 2020, President Ramaphosa announces phased reopening of the economy
- Currently we on day 104 of lockdown, and on stage3 of the lockdown
- Need to continue/ keep the economic engine rolling
- Opening up timelines will differ according to the business and on where we are in terms of infection.

Who is returning to work?

- Return from remote working
- Lockdown
- Post illness/ quarantine
- Reduced workload

COVID-19 is a recognized **workplace hazard**, every employer is required:

- To provide to a safe working environment each of his employees
- Employers should reopen only when they can do so safely

Effect on the work place

- How could covid-19 affect the work place:
 - ✓ Absenteeism – sickness, caregivers
 - ✓ Interrupted supply/delivery- delayed or cancelled
 - ✓ Consumer demand increase e.g respirators, need for more workers to be at work

The decision to reopen

- Is it necessary?
- whether re-opening can be done safely.
- Determine which workers return to work first
- Update existing health and safety risk assessments in light of the need to prevent covid-19
- Develop a covid-19 specific work place preparedness and response plan (procedures for responding when an employee, customer, or other individual present in the workplace becomes ill with symptoms of COVID-19.)
- Prepare the workplace for the return of workers.
- The hierarchy of control measures should be kept in mind.
- communication is important within an organization (increase employee productivity, engagement and morale)
- Make sure workers are well aware of company “return to work” plans and procedures.

Policies, protocols and Preparedness

Agreed through collaboration between all relevant players: managers, HR, OH, workers, unions:

- Remote working policy
- hand-washing policy
- social distancing protocol
- planned response policy in place in the event of an employee testing positive for COVID-19 (contact tracing and testing cleaning and disinfecting spaces the ill person has occupied to prevent exposure to other workers)
- Isolation procedures
- Cleaning and disinfection
- Employee Screening Protocols (what should be done if a worker develops symptoms)
- Use of masks
- Leave policies
- procedures for employees returning to work after a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19
- Isolation procedures
- clean down procedures
- Establish workplace mental wellbeing support and advice

***All actions must have a responsible person allocated**

Plan

- 1. Understand how the virus is transmitted**
- 2. Make the Workplace Safe**
- 3. Establish a COVID-19 response team and a Covid-19 compliance officer**
- 4. Engage staff**
- 5. Employee education and training**
- 6. Carry out a risk assessment**
- 7. Encourage Good Hygiene**
- 8. Update Policies and Procedures-** You'll need to take a look at your current policies and procedures and update them to fit current best practices.
- 9. Prioritize screening, contact tracing, and mental health.**
- 10. Monitor, review and learn** look at all forms of controls as per the hierarchy

Approach to RTW

1. Risk assessments

- Work place assessment:
 - Social distancing feasibility assessing the risk and available controls
 - Workplace location and tasks involving public contact
 - Hygiene measures and PPE
 - Work travel
- Individual assessment
 - Pregnancy
 - Age
 - Health conditions
 - Gender

2. Training

Train workers in the appropriate language on:

- signs, symptoms and risk factors associated with COVID-19
- where, how, and to what sources of SARS-CoV-2 employees might be exposed in the workplace
- how to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2 at work.
- what the employer is doing to protect them
- wearing cloth face coverings in the workplace
- Any new employer policies related to covid-19
- workers understand their right to raise workplace safety and health concerns

3. Risk Management & Strategies

most readily implemented controls are relatively inexpensive:

- Limit business occupancy by staggering work shifts, start times, and break times
- Demarcate flooring in 1.5M zones
- Post reminder signage
- Enforcing social distancing protocols, and encouraging hand-washing
 - requiring employees to wear cloth face coverings in the workplace
 - ensure sick workers stay at home and seek medical evaluation
- Use of physical barriers
- Frequent disinfecting commonly touched surfaces
- Increasing airflow supply to occupied spaces

4. Ongoing screening

- Ensure that the symptom questionnaire is done
- Be sure employees understand the implications of the questionnaire (should they respond yes to any of the questions).
- Develop and implement procedures to check for signs and symptoms of employees daily upon arrival (? referral if symptomatic, in house OHS)
- Encourage anyone who is sick to stay home
- Plan for if an employee gets sick (transportation)
- Regularly communicate and monitor developments with local authorities and employees (new guidelines and regulation will mean a new risk assessment)

5. Mental health workplaces

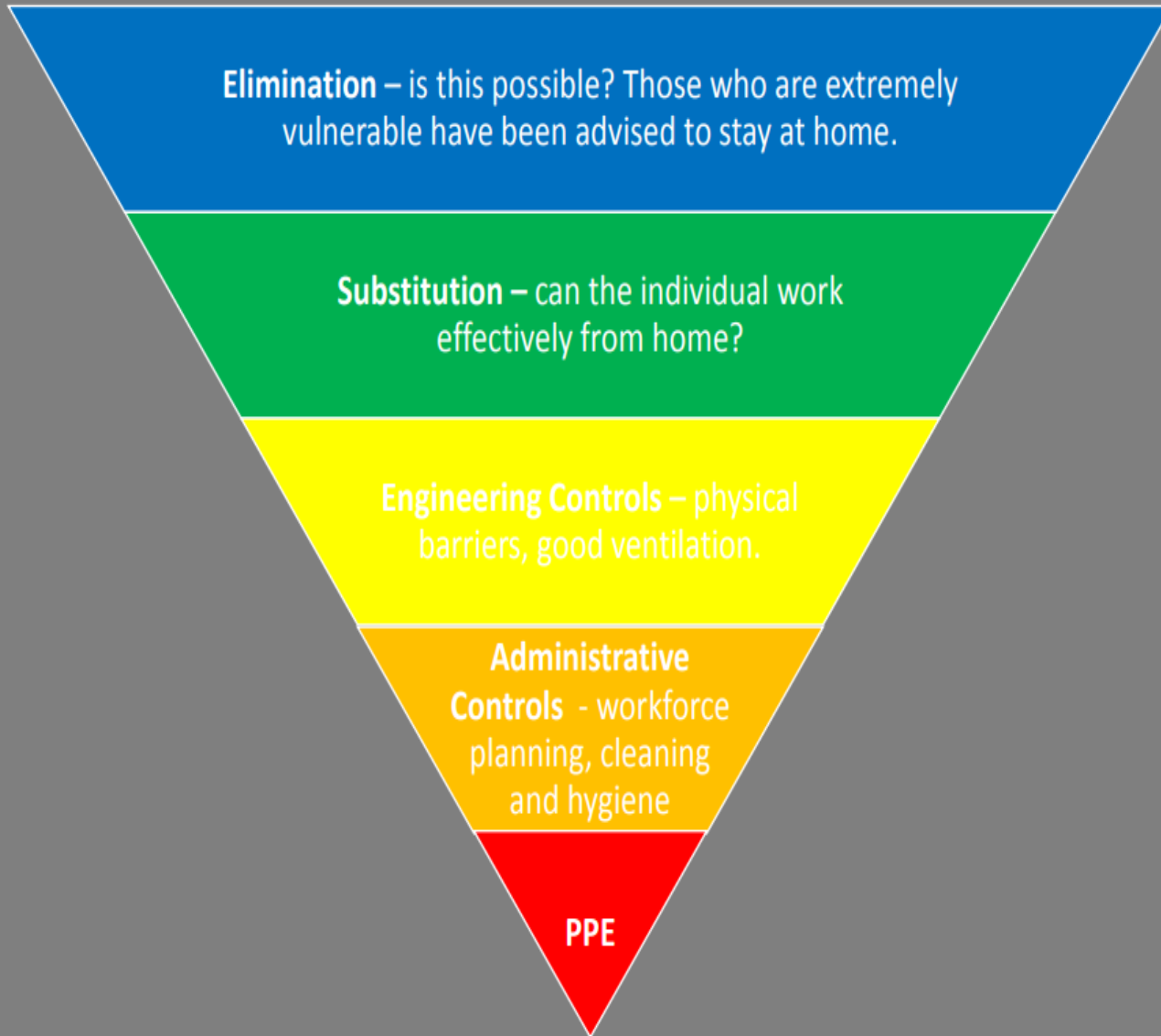
- Isolation
- Caring responsibilities.
- socially distanced at a jobsite, may result in a sense of feeling alone.
- Stigma
- Financial difficulties and debt.
- Bereavement.
- Alcohol and substance misuse to deal with the situation
- Encourage counselling
- EAPs should be easily accessible, and employees are aware of the services offered and encouraged to make use of them

Hierarchy of Controls

Most effective



Least effective



6. Supporting individuals

- Workers will still struggle at work with common health problems, irrespective of the pandemic
- They may be problems that emerged since leaving work, or pre-existing long-term conditions, or difficulties in recovering from COVID-19.
- They all need OH Support to make a sustained RTW and to maintain work ability
- Recognise struggling workers. A lot can be done in the workplace to maintain work ability in the face of illness.

Plan for when there is an infected employee

- **Provide support to other employees** Reassure staff that you are handling the situation
- **EAP** assist with counselling and psychological support for affected employees
- **Provide suitable sick leave for the 14 days** (Note that 14 days is the minimum time of isolation and that it might be longer depending on how ill the employee becomes and the treatment required)
- **If the infection was occupationally acquired, then a workers' compensation claim needs to be completed.**
- **Establish how that employee got infected** (fellow workers/managers, customers, or by someone within their home or social circle)
- **Identify who the employee might have infected and quarantining** (which people have any of the symptoms)
- **Cleaning of the contaminated area** (an employee was present at the job site within 48 hours of testing positive, not necessary if >7 days)
- **It may be necessary to temporarily close the work site while investigations are underway** (Depending on how many employees are involved)

RTW Post Covid-19 illness

- RTW after sickness, according to your workplace's absence policy for this
- Keep self isolating if any other symptoms such as high temperature, runny nose, vomiting or diarrhoea until symptoms settled.
- You do not need to repeat a test after 14 days of isolation or quarantine to RTW
- EMPLOYERS SHOULD NOT ASK EMPLOYEES FOR A NEGATIVE test to confirm they can return to work
- An employee can RTW 14 days after quarantine
- A health assessments needs to be done-
- ✓ *Symptom review*
- ✓ *Ensure that the employee has no residual effects from the cause of the disease*

If +ve and Symptomatic, return to work after:

- at least 3 days (72 hrs) have passed since recovery defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications AND improvement in respiratory symptoms (cough, SOB)
- At least 14 days have passed since symptoms first appeared

If +ve Asymptomatic return to work after:

- at least 14 days have passed since the positive laboratory test

Return to Work Practices and Work Restrictions:

- Wear a face covering if social distancing cannot be maintained in the workplace, per current CDC guidelines
- Adhere to hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette
- Self-monitor for symptoms.

Employer and employee to engage on:

- make sure the employee is ready to return to work
- talk about any work updates that happened while they were off
- look at any recommendations from the OH
- see if they need any support
- if the employee has post covid disability or is vulnerable, see if changes are needed in the workplace to remove or reduce any disadvantages ('reasonable adjustments')
- consider a referral to a medical service such as occupational health to assess for fitness for duty (when work can start)
- discuss any need for EAP, if it's available

Conclusion

- There is need for significant changes to people's daily lives and how they work
- Fear about returning to work
- The employers need to reassure their employees about appropriate risk assessments and mitigations
- Discussion of employee's ideas, concerns & expectations
- **Communication is important!**