COVID-19 preparedness & prevention in the workplace

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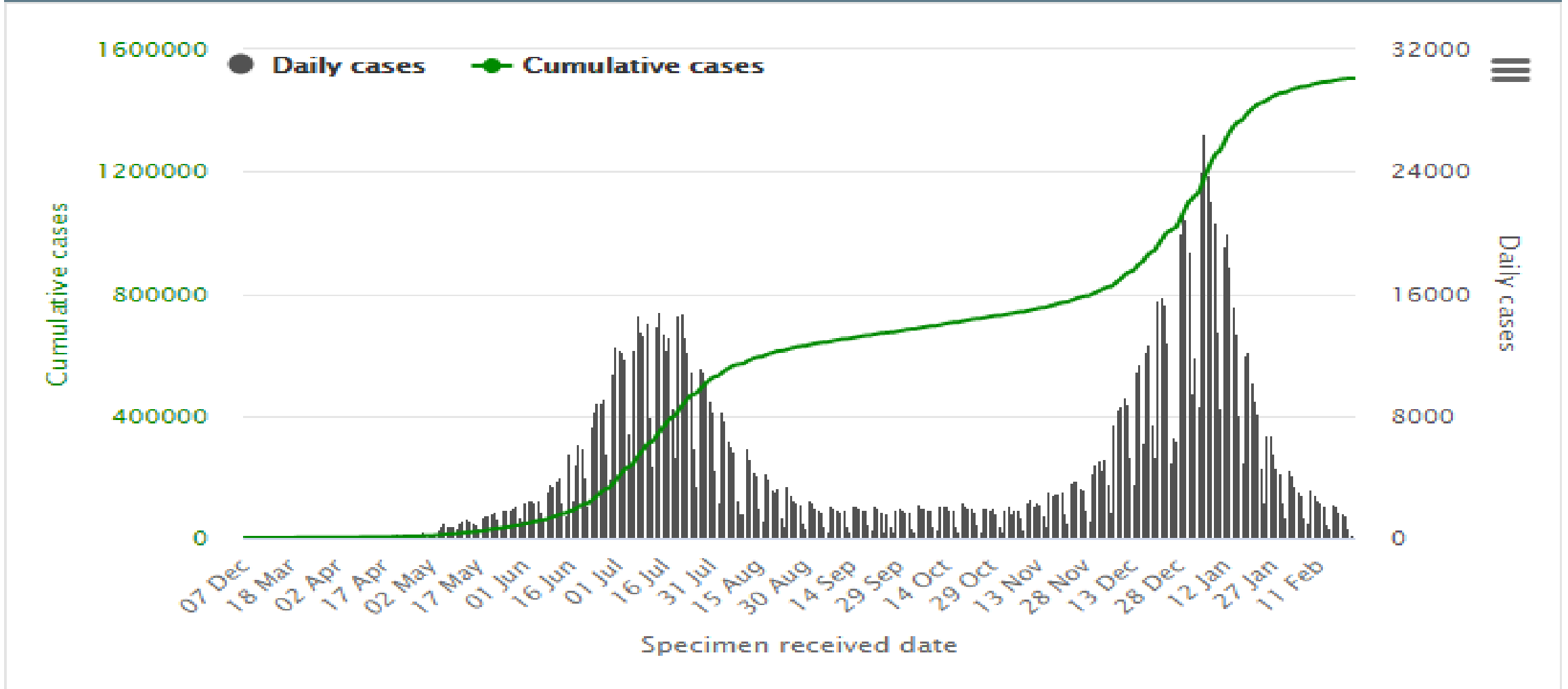Website: http://www.nhls.ac.za; http://www.nioh.ac.za; http://www.nicd.ac.za
(With thanks to Drs Odette Volmink & Mpume Ndaba, Occupational Medicine Specialists, NIOH)

24 February 2021

Try and stay informed

- Almost 1 year into COVID-19

- New information (COVID-19 Vaccine, new variant (501Y.V2), etc.)

- Somethings stay the same (Precautions – masking, social distancing, etc.)

Epidemic curve by day

Daily cases ● — Cumulative cases

Specimen received date

Epidemic curve by day (7-day moving average)

World Health Organization

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GOVERNMENT NOTICE

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR

CONSOLIDATED DIRECTIONS ON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES IN CERTAIN WORKPLACES

2020

No. R.

DIRECTION ISSUED IN TERMS OF REGULATION 4(10) OF THE REGULATIONS MADE UNDER SECTION 27(2) OF THE DISASTER MANAGEMENT ACT, 2002: MEASURES TO ADDRESS, PREVENT AND COMBAT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN CERTAIN WORKPLACES IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

I, Thembelani Waltermade Nxesi, the Minister of Employment and Labour, in terms of Regulation 4(10) of the Regulations, as published under Government Notice No. R.480 of 29 April 2020 and amended by Regulations published under Government Notices No. R.608 of 28 May 2020, R.714 of 25 June 2020, R.763 of 12 July, R.846 of 31 July 2020, R.891 of 17 August 2020, R.999 of 18 September 2020 and R.1011 of 20 September 2020 in terms of section 27(2) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002), hereby issue the Consolidated Directions on Occupational Health and Safety Measures in certain workplaces as set out in the Schedule.

MR TW NXESI, MP
MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR
DATE: 28/09/2020

health
Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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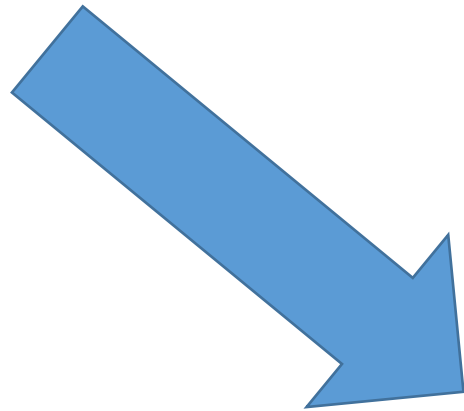COVID-19: Occupational Health Surveillance System (OHSS)

Business Registration Portal
Have you registered your business?

Click here for more info

IT support queries: ohssupport@nioh.ac.za
General queries: OHSworkplace@nioh.ac.za
CALL US ON: 0723215503 | 0713981169

Hierarchy of Controls
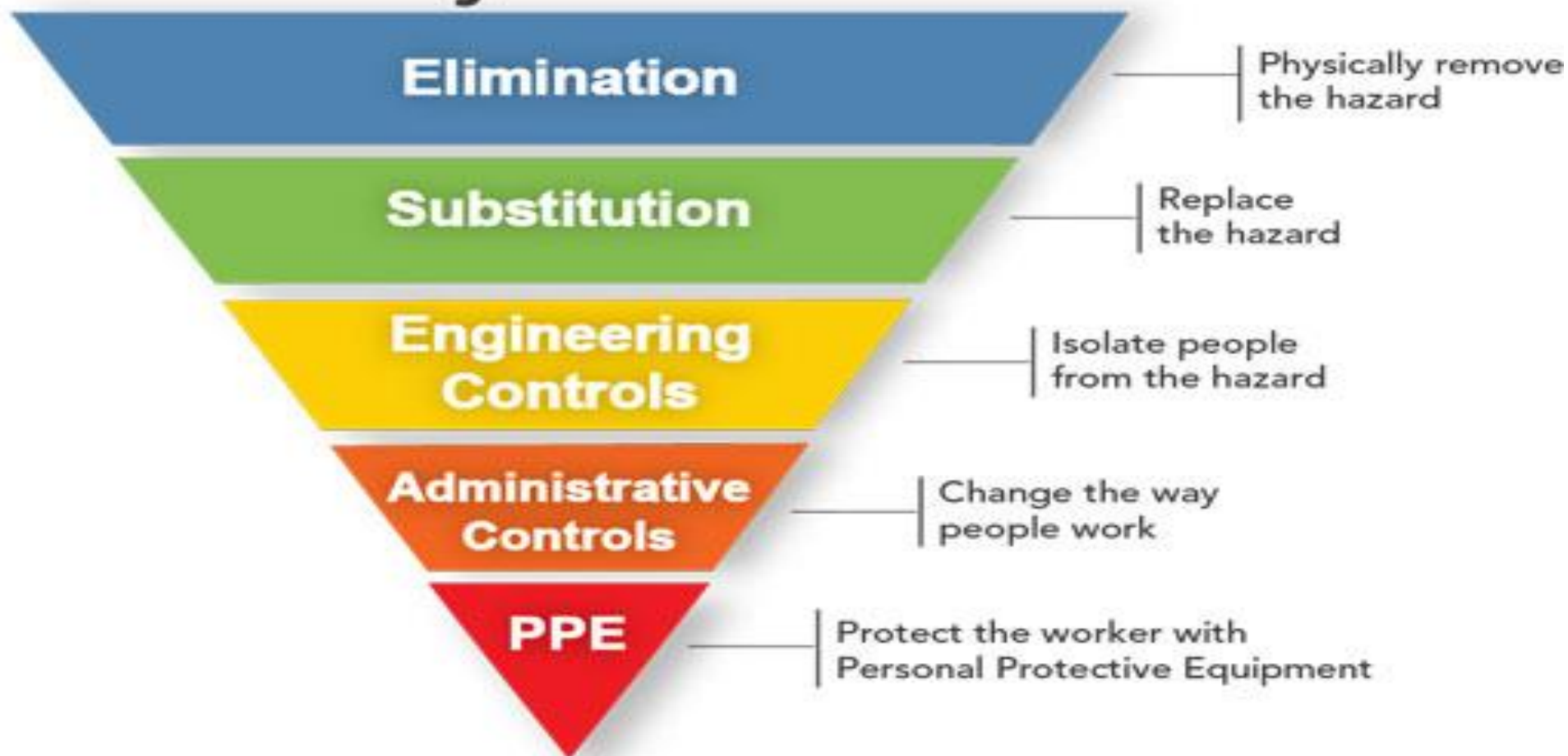
Most effective

Least effective

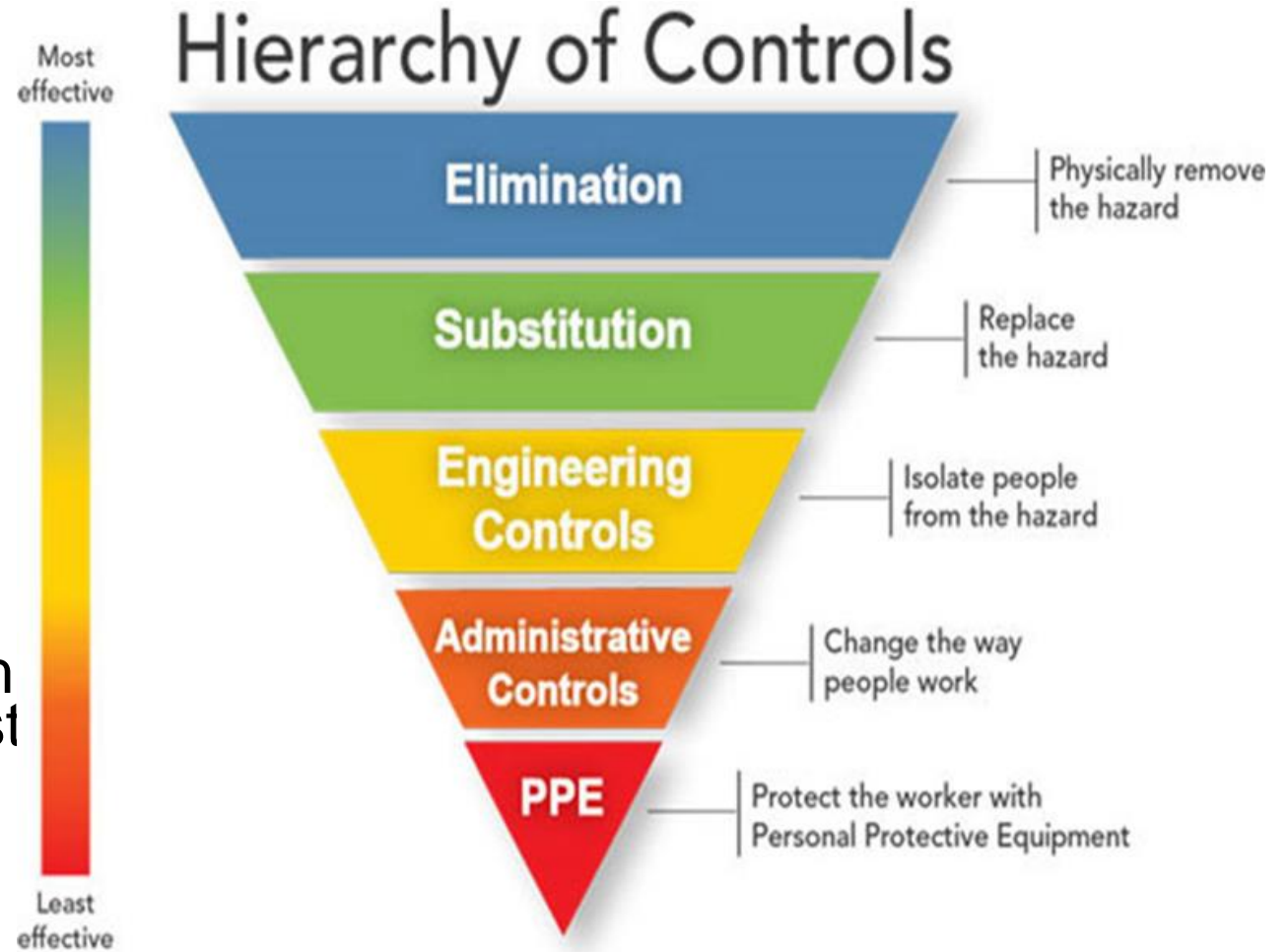|	
Elimination	Physically remove the hazard
Substitution	Replace the hazard
Engineering Controls	Isolate people from the hazard
Administrative Controls	Change the way people work
PPE	Protect the worker with Personal Protective Equipment

Hierarchy of controls

- Reduce or eliminate worker exposure to the hazard

- Key principle in the workplace: to use a combination of strategies starting with the most effective

- Hierarchy of controls: an approach moving from most effective to least effective protective measures

Hierarchy of Controls

Most effective

Least effective

Elimination	Physically remove the hazard
Substitution	Replace the hazard
Engineering Controls	Isolate people from the hazard
Administrative Controls	Change the way people work
PPE	Protect the worker with Personal Protective Equipment

Engineering controls
Modifying or installing equipment to reduce exposure

Engineering controls: increasing ventilation, Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other
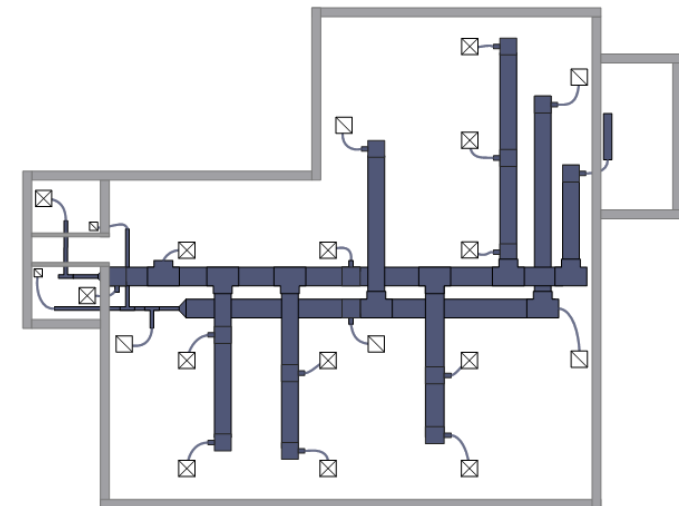
Administrative controls:
A workplace plan of action (policy and procedures)

- Develop a **contingency** and **business continuity plan**

  - Prepare your organisation for the **possibility of an outbreak of COVID-19 in the workplaces**.

  - **How to keep your business running even if a significant number of workers**, contractors and suppliers cannot come

  - **Engage with your workers and their representatives as well as your contractors** about the plan

  - **Building an organizational health and safety culture**

  - Balance between business operations, worker accommodation, **sick/leave arrangements**, management protocols of infected/exposed, **mental health** and **social consequences** of a case of COVID-19 in the workplace

  - For **small and medium-sized businesses** without in-house occupational health support, consult the information available **public health and labour authorities in advance of any emergency. Consult any guidance given by your sectoral organisations** (employers' associations, chambers of commerce, sectoral social services).

Other administrative controls

- Clear **infection prevention and control** and standard precautions
- **Occupational health policies**
- **Controlled access** to the workplace- screening procedures
- Ensure **proper signage** (awareness & warning)
  - Social distancing
  - Hand washing & sanitation , etc.
- **Cleaning procedures for the workplace**
- **Ensure safe waste management** practices and procedures
- Strengthen **Health and Safety Committees**
- Establish **public health reporting procedures**
- COVID-19 Vaccination **OH program**
- **Appropriate and updated travel policies to ensure safety of staff**
- Establish and ensure workers have access to **employee assistance programmes** for **mental health support**

Vaccines

- Are a valuable public health intervention – they reduce mortality and morbidity
- They have the ability to irradiate disease from a population
- It induces immunity in persons through controlled exposure
- Well studied and researched
- There are adverse effects but these can be managed
- Vaccines save lives – and in the context of the workplace: "We can get on with things"

Educate and inform employees (risk communication)

- Give people facts about how the disease is transmitted

- Infection prevention and control including hand and respiratory hygiene practices, mask wearing, social distancing, etc.

- Correct donning and doffing and disposal of PPE & hygiene of such equipment

- Advise workers on self-assessment, symptom reporting and sick leave policies if exposed

- Understand travel risks and make informed decisions re risk-benefit of travelling

- Make management policies clear and available
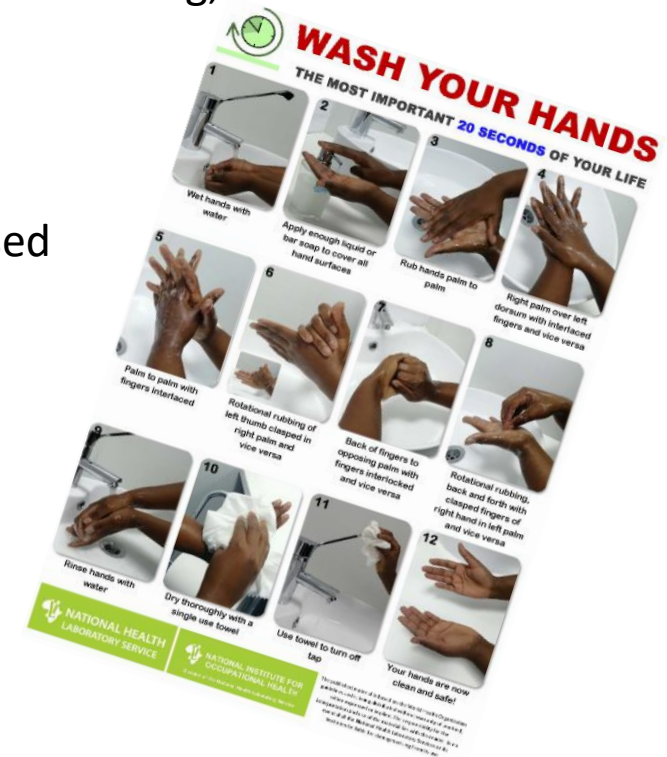
Vulnerable workers

Protecting people at increased risk for severe COVID-19 disease

- Age greater than 60
- Cancer on treatment
- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes mellitus
- Chronic respiratory disease
- Chronic renal disease
- Obesity
- Pregnant workers
- Employees on immunosuppressive therapy i.e. systemic corticosteroids
- HIV diagnosed HCWs who are virally unsuppressed

health
Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Guidance on vulnerable employees and workplace accommodation
in relation to COVID-19 (V4: 25 May 2020)

(Document prepared by Academic Group within the Occupational Health and Safety Workstream
of the National Department of Health – Covid-19 Response)

Social distancing in the workplace

- Should have a **policy** for the workplace
- Employees should be **trained** regarding this
- Plan for the **minimum number of people to be on site** to operate safely and effectively
- Arrange the workplace to ensure **minimal contact between employees**
- Reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using '**fixed teams or partnering**' (so each person works with only a few others).
- Don't forget the **common areas**
  - outside the immediate workplace – entrances and exits
  - within the workplace such as canteens, break rooms and lavatories.
  - groups or staggering break-times to avoid the concentration of workers in common
- This can also be done by workers **changing shift arrangements- staggering break times** and **starting times.**

Business travel

- Minimize person to person contact during deliveries to other sites
- Maintain **consistent pairing** when 2 person delivery is essential
- Minimize contact during **payments or document exchange-** do this electronically
- Ensure **hand sanitizers** are available
- **Clean vehicles** regularly
- Revising **pick-up and drop-off collection points, procedures, signage** and **markings**.

Hand washing and toileting facilities

- Allow **regular breaks** to wash hands
- Provide **additional hand washing facilities** (e.g. pop ups) to the usual facilities, particularly on a large spread out site or where there are significant numbers of personnel on site, including plant operators
- Ensure **adequate supplies of soap and fresh water** are readily available and kept topped up at all times
- Provide **hand sanitiser** (minimum 70% alcohol based) where hand washing facilities are unavailable
- **Restrict the number of people using toilet facilities at any one time** (use signage, such as floor markings, to ensure 2 metre distance is maintained between people when queuing)
- **Wash or sanitise hands before** and **after** using the toileting facilities
- Regularly **clean the hand washing facilities** & Enhance the cleaning regimes for **toilet facilities**, particularly door handles, locks and the toilet flush
- Portable toilets should be avoided wherever possible, but where in use these should be cleaned and emptied more frequently
- Provide suitable and **sufficient rubbish bins for hand towels** with regular removal and disposal

Site Access points

- **Stop all non-essential visitors**

- Consider introducing **staggered start and finish times** to reduce congestion and contact at all times

- **Plan site access points** to enable social distancing – you may need to change the number of access points, either increase to reduce congestion or decrease to enable monitoring, including in the case of emergencies

- Allow **plenty of space between people waiting** to enter site

- Use **signage**:
  - such as **floor markings**, to ensure 1.5m distance is maintained between people when queuing
  - reminding workers not to attend if they have **symptoms of Coronavirus** (COVID-19) and to follow guidelines

- **Screening** visitors and workers for symptoms of COVID-19 on arrival at work

- **Remove or disable entry systems that require skin contact** (e.g. fingerprint scanners) unless they are cleaned between each individual use

- Require all workers to **wash their hands for 20 seconds using soap and water when entering and leaving** the site

- Regularly **clean common contact surfaces** in reception, office, access control and delivery areas e.g. scanners, turnstiles, screens, telephone handsets and desks, particularly during peak flow times

- Where **loading and offloading** arrangements on site will allow it, **drivers should remain in their vehicles**.

- Where drivers are required to exit their vehicle, they should **wash or sanitise their hands** before handling any materials

- Consider arrangements for **monitoring compliance**.

On site

- **Reducing movement** by discouraging non-essential trips within buildings and sites. -encouraging use of telephones where permitted, and cleaning them between use.

- **Reducing job rotation and equipment rotation**, for example, single tasks for the day.

- Implementing **one-way systems** where possible on walkways around the workplace.

- Using **signage** such as **ground markings** or being creative with other objects to mark out 1.5m to allow controlled flows of people

- **Reducing occupancy of vehicles** used for onsite travel

- Separating sites into **working zones** to keep different groups of workers physically separated as much as practical.

- Reducing the number of people in attendance at **site inductions** and **consider holding them outdoors** wherever possible with social distancing.

- **Regulating use of high traffic areas** including corridors, lifts, turnstiles and walkways to maintain social distancing.

- Changing layouts to allow people to work further apart from each other.
    - Only where it is not possible to move workstations further apart
    - arranging people to work **side by side or facing away from each other** rather than face-to-face
    - **screens to separate** people from each other
    - Using a **consistent pairing system** if people have to work in close proximity

Meetings

- Use other methods to avoid face to face contact
- Only absolutely necessary participants should attend a meeting
- Avoid sharing pens and other objects
- Provide hand sanitizer in meeting rooms
- Hold meetings outdoors or in well ventilated rooms
- Use floor signage to ensure 1.5m distancing is maintained

Canteens and rest areas

- Workers should be encouraged to **bring their own food**.

- Workers should be encouraged to **stay on site once they have entered it** and avoid using local shops.

- Where there are no practical alternatives, workplace canteens may remain open to provide food to staff with appropriate adjustments for social distancing.

- **Takeaway service** providing pre-prepared and wrapped food only.

- Consider **increasing the number** or **size of facilities** available on site if possible

- The **capacity of each canteen or rest area should be clearly identified at the entry** to each facility

- **Break times should be staggered** to reduce congestion and contact at all times

- **Frequently clean surfaces that are touched regularly**, using standard cleaning products e.g. kettles, refrigerators, microwaves

- **Hand cleaning facilities or hand sanitiser** should be available at the entrance to any room where people eat and should be used by workers when entering and leaving the area

- All **rubbish should be put straight in the bin** and not left for someone else to clear up

- **Crockery, eating utensils, cups** etc. should not be used unless they are **disposable** or are **washed and dried between use**

- **Payments** should be taken by **contactless card** wherever possible

- **Canteen staff should wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food**

- Consider arrangements for **monitoring compliance.**

- Using **safe outdoor areas** for breaks.

- Reconfiguring seating and tables to maintain spacing and reduce face-to-face interactions.

Cleaning of workplaces

- Enhanced cleaning procedures should be in place across the site, particularly in communal areas and at **frequently touch points** including:
    - Taps and washing facilities
    - Toilet flush and seats
    - Door handles and push plates
    - Hand rails on staircases and corridors
    - Lift and hoist controls

- Machinery and equipment controls
    - buckets
    - site equipment
    - control panels

- Telephone equipment

- Key boards, photocopiers and other office equipment

- Rubbish collection and storage points should be increased and emptied regularly throughout and at the end of each day

- Consider placing hand sanitising stations at frequently touch objects

Masks

- Avoid touching your face or cloth mask , as you could contaminate them with germs from your hands;

- Continue to wash your hands regularly;

- Should cover the nose and mouth completely;

- Should not be lowered when speaking, coughing or sneezing;

- Change, wash and iron your cloth mask daily;

- If the material is washable, wash in line with manufacturer's instructions. If it's not washable, dispose of it carefully in through the general waste stream;

- Mask wearing is only one of many precautions that must be practiced simultaneously (social distancing, limit contact for prolonged periods)

Necessary steps to follow in the workplace when a worker is diagnosed with COVID-19

Workplace

A worker with a confirmed/positive COVID-19 test

Ensure reporting is done

DOH

Department of Employment and Labour (Inspectorate and Compensation Commissioner if appropriate)

Isolate the employee

Provide a surgical mask for the worker

Assist the employee with access to medical care if necessary

Ensure the employee has mental health support

Sick leave polices and procedures

At the workplace

Do a workplace investigation

Ensure contact tracing is done

Ensure appropriate cleaning of the workplace is carried out

On recovery

Mild cases: 10 days isolation after symptom onset or if asymptomatic, after test.

Severe cases 10 days after clinically stability (No symptoms or stopping of critical medical interventions)
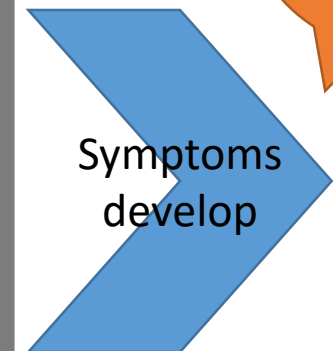
Out of the workplace

Workers exposed in the workplace

close contact
within 1 metre
for >15 minutes
without PPE /
failure of PPE /
direct contact
with respiratory
secretions

Refer for testing

Symptoms develop

- Workplace investigation done and exposure assessed
- Close contact exposures non-health workers must quarantine for 10 days (DEL)
- Self symptom monitoring while in quarantine
- Ensure mental health support

- Cleaning initiated
- Workplace investigation if necessary
- Reporting

Worker exposed to low risk in the workplace

Workplace investigation done and exposure assessed as low risk

Continues to work but self monitors temperature and symptoms daily for at least 10 days

Symptomatic

Refer for testing

Mental Health support
(Employee assistance program)

- Ongoing mental health risk
  - increased demands at home due to caring responsibilities
  - concerns about finances and job security
  - changing workload and work location
  - bereavement
  - anxiety related to the fear of COVID-19 itself.
- A whole systems approach will be key and will need to focus on:
  - Support
  - Maintenance
  - Prevention
- There is a close link between workforce wellbeing and organisational resilience and productivity.

Personal protective equipment
Directed by the risk assessment

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- PPE is an effective measure within a **complete package of mitigation and control strategies**

- Appropriate PPE should be informed by the **risk assessment** - safety helmets, gloves, eye protection, high-visibility clothing, safety footwear and safety harnesses

- Ensure adequate and **appropriate** PPE is available.

- Used PPE should be **considered contaminated and must be discarded in accordance with safe practice**

- **Surgical masks** should be available for workers who develop COVID-19 **symptoms while at work – to protect others**

- PPE should be used by one person only and not shared.

- Need to align with the regulations of the country

Minimise risks of transmission in the workplace – MUST BE SAID AGAIN!

- Communication and awareness important- tool box talks

- Review the HRA and the hierarchy of controls

- Minimise risks in the workplace.

  - Social distancing

  - Mask wearing

  - Promote regular and thorough handwashing and sanitizing by employees, contractors and customers

  - Respiratory hygiene

  - Avoid touching your face, especially while working.

- Clean frequently handled surfaces such as amenities, plant, equipment, tools, materials which may be, or have been touched by others.

- Advise workers on self-assessment, symptom reporting and HR management policies

- Screening and identification of potentially affected employees, limit contact and movement and appropriate referral for testing promptly

- Encourage / insist that symptomatic persons stay away / self isolate

- Have occupational health input to manage the program internally

References:

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