



COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS GUIDE

FOR WORKPLACES AND WORKERS IN
LIBERIA



MINISTRY OF LABOR
REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

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Chapter 1: Scope of the Guide

In keeping with the Ministry of Health March 21, 2020 Covid-19 Declaration of National Health Emergency and consonance with Chapter 24 of the Decent Work Act, the Occupational Safety and Health provisions, the Ministry of Labor hereby mandates all employers, workers and actors in the workplace to take steps to reduce the impact of COVID-19 outbreak conditions at the workplace. For employers who have an existing plan for infectious disease outbreak involving many staff members, planning for COVID-19 may involve updating plans to address the specific exposure, mode of transmission, and other unique characteristics of COVID-19.

For expediency, employers, businesses and their workers are requested to implement this COVID-19 workplace preparedness guide to provide advice to staff covered by the Decent Work Act on:

- the novel coronavirus, COVID-19
- how to help prevent spread of COVID-19
- what to do if someone is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 in the workplace
- advice on travel and meetings
- further information and resources

Persons in fields related to the pandemic response may be subject to separate protocols in addition to this guide. Meanwhile, additional guidance may be issued by the Ministry of Labor as COVID-19 outbreak conditions change. Use only bulletins from the Ministry of Health, NPHIL and MICAT to update plans for continued compliance.

Chapter 2: The novel coronavirus, COVID-19 Pandemic

2.1 Information about the virus

Three confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been recorded in the Liberia as of March 23rd, 2020. WHO has declared corona virus as a global pandemic. COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China in January 2020.

Currently, the incubation period of COVID-19 is assessed to be between 2 and 14 days. This means that if a person remains well 14 days after contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus, they have not been infected.

Regularly updated information on COVID-19 in Liberia is on the website of the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL) www.nationalphil.org. The Ministry of Labor will also provide relevant information to employers, workers and other actors on its website www.labour.gov.lr.

2.1.1 Signs and Symptoms of COVID-19

The following symptoms may develop within the 14 days after exposure to someone who has COVID-19 infection: cough, difficulty in breathing and fever.

Generally, these infections can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and

those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

2.1.2 How COVID-19 is spread

From what we know about other coronaviruses, the spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (6 feet or less) with an infected person. It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

Droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes containing the virus are the main mode of transmission.

It is also possible that someone may become infected by touching a surface, object or the hand of an infected person that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes (such as touching door knob or shaking hands then touching own face)

There is currently little evidence that people who are without symptoms are infectious to others.

2.1.3 How long the virus can survive outside an infected person

How long any respiratory virus survives will depend on a number of factors, for example:

- what surface the virus is on
- whether it is exposed to sunlight
- differences in temperature and humidity
- exposure to cleaning products

Under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to decrease significantly over 72 hours.

We know that similar viruses are transferred to and by people's hands. Therefore, regular hand hygiene and cleaning of frequently touched surfaces will help to reduce the risk of infection.

Chapter 3: How to help prevent the spread of COVID-19

3.1 Prevention Overview

There is currently no vaccine to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus. Prevention measures such as those described below should be taken now, even if COVID-19 has not arrived in your workplace. The measures should be included in the workplace risk assessment that covers all risks within your occupational safety and Health policy as prescribed in Chapter 24 of the Decent Work Act (DWA).

Employers should:

1. Minimize the risks of congestion of workers on site through rotational or shift work without effecting

workers' salaries. Attention should be given to persons of advanced age or underlying health conditions, if there is a possibility of persons working from home

2. Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, and hand hygiene at the entrance to the workplace and in other areas where they will be seen.
3. Provide employees with tissues and waste bins lined with a plastic bag so that they can be emptied without contacting the contents.
4. Instruct employees to clean their hands frequently, using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
5. Provide soap and water in the workplace, and alcohol-based hand rubs in cases where soap and water may not be feasible (Ex. Electricity producing installations or some chemical plants). Adequate supplies should be maintained and placed in multiple locations, including common areas to encourage hand hygiene.
6. Continue routine environmental cleaning and consider additional measures as described later in this document.
7. Brief the employees, contractors and customers that, if there is any case of COVID-19 in your workplace, anyone with even a mild cough or low-grade fever (37.3

C or more) needs to stay at home. They should also stay home (or work from home) if they have had to take simple medications, such as paracetamol/acetaminophen, ibuprofen or aspirin, which may mask symptoms of fever and/or infection.

8. Any employee who develops flu-like symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath, fever) should go home immediately and contact the Ministry of Health/NPHIL. If there is any other reason to suspect that they may have been in contact with COVID-19, then inform the Ministry of Health/NPHIL.
9. Industrial actions and potentially controversial issues such as strikes and lockouts elections should be discouraged through good faith by all parties.
10. Elections of new leaderships are not to be carried out except otherwise noted, due to the likelihood of campaign gatherings that would exceed the threshold established by health authorities.

3.2 Routine environmental cleaning

1. Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and door handles. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.

2. No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
3. Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

3.3 Guidance on facemasks

Generally, employees are not recommended to wear facemasks (also known as surgical masks or respirators) to protect against the virus. Other than healthcare workers, facemasks are only recommended for symptomatic individuals to reduce the risk of transmitting the infection to other people.

The best way to reduce any risk of infection is good hygiene and avoiding direct or close contact (closer than 6 feet) with any potentially infected person. Any worker who deals with members of the public from behind a screen should be protected from airborne particles.

Chapter 4: What to do if someone is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 in the workplace

Follow the advice of the Ministry of Health/NPHIL to identify those that may have been exposed.

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace and there is reason to suspect that they may have come into contact with COVID-19 (e.g. has travelled to China, Europe, the United States or other heavily affected locations), contact the Ministry of Health/NPHIL for advice. The Hotline for this purpose is 4455 on all networks and is free.

Whilst waiting for advice from the Ministry of Health/NPHIL, the affected person should remain at least 6 feet from other people. They should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and should cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in a bag or pocket then throw the tissue in the bin. If they do not have any tissues available, they should cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow.

If they need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting for medical assistance, they should use a separate bathroom if available.

Consider identifying persons who have conditions that put them at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. diabetes, heart and lung disease, older age) and advising them to take additional precautions, such as staying at home. Employee who will be asked to stay home should be covered under personal leave as described by the Decent Work Act (DWA).

4.1 When individuals in the workplace have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19

If a confirmed case is identified in your workplace, the Ministry of Health/NPHIL will provide advice to:

- any employee that has been in close face-to-face or touching contact
- anyone talking with or being coughed on for any length of time while the employee was symptomatic
- anyone who has cleaned up any bodily fluids
- close friendship groups or workgroups
- any employee living in the same household as a confirmed case

Contacts are not considered cases and if they are feeling well, they are very unlikely to have spread the infection to others but might likely be quarantine for 14 days from the last time they had contact with the confirmed case and actively followed up by the Ministry of Health/NPHIL. Employee who will be quarantined should be covered under personal leave as described by the DWA.

A confirmed case of COVID-19 in the workplace will cause anxiety among co-workers and some may become stressed. Managers should be supportive and understanding and as far as possible flexible on working arrangements.

4.2 Cleaning offices and public spaces where there are suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Coronavirus symptoms are similar to a flu-like illness and include cough, fever, or shortness of breath. Once symptomatic, all surfaces that the person has come into contact with must be cleaned including all surfaces and objects which are visibly contaminated with body fluids such as toilets, door handles, telephones and corridors.

If a person becomes ill in a shared space, these should be cleaned using disposable cloths and household detergents. Precautionary measures should be taken to protect cleaners.

All wastes that have been in contact with the individual, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full. The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied. It should be put in a safe place and marked for storage until the result is available. If the individual tests negative, this can be put in the normal waste. Should the individual test positive, you will be instructed what to do with the waste by the Ministry of Health/NPHIL.

Chapter 5: Advice on travel and meetings

5.1 Returning from travel to affected areas

People who have returned from affected countries and any area under containment measures in the last 14 days

identified by the Ministry of Health, NPHIL or MICAT should avoid attending work. They should call the Ministry of Health/NPHIL for advice and self-isolate.

All other staff should continue to attend work, unless otherwise advised by the Government or employer.

5.2 Advice for staff returning from travel anywhere else within the last 14 days

These staff can continue to attend work unless they have been informed that they have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19. If individuals are aware that they have had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 they should contact their employer and the Ministry of Health/NPHIL for further advice.

5.3 Organizing meetings or events

Organizers of meetings and events need to think about the potential risk from COVID-19 because:

- There is a risk that people attending your meeting or event might be unwittingly bringing the COVID-19 virus to the meeting.
- Others might be unknowingly exposed to COVID-19.

5.3.3 BEFORE the meeting or event

1. Consider whether the meeting or event is imperative, or whether it could be postponed or replaced with a tele or video conference. Can it be scaled down so that fewer people attend?
2. Check and follow the Ministry of Health March 21, 2020 Covid-19 Declaration of National Health Emergency and any other subsequently issued directive of health authorities.
3. Develop and agree a preparedness plan to prevent infection at your meeting or event
 - Ensure and verify information and communication channels in advance with key partners such as the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health /NPHIL.
 - Pre-order sufficient supplies and materials, including tissues and hand sanitizer for all participants.
 - Actively monitor where COVID-19 is circulating. Advise participants in advance that if they have any symptoms or feel unwell, they should not attend.
 - Make sure all organizers, participants, caterers and visitors at the event provide contact details: mobile telephone number, email and address where they are staying. State clearly that their details will be shared with

local public health authorities if any participant becomes ill with a suspected infectious disease. If they will not agree to this, they cannot attend the event or meeting

4. Develop and agree on a response plan in case someone at the meeting becomes ill with symptoms of COVID-19.

5. 3. 3 DURING the meeting or event

1. Provide information or a briefing, preferably both orally and in writing, on COVID-19 and the measures that organizers are taking to make this event safe for participants:
 - Build trust. For example, as an icebreaker, practice ways to say hello without touching.
 - Encourage regular hand-washing or use of an alcohol rub by all participants at the meeting or event
 - Encourage participants to cover their face with the bend of their elbow or a tissue if they cough or sneeze. Supply tissues and closed bins to dispose of them in.
 - Provide contact details or a health hotline number that participants can call for advice or to give information.
2. Display dispensers of alcohol-based hand rub prominently around the venue.
3. If there is space, arrange seats so that participants are at least one metre apart.

4. Open windows and doors whenever possible to make sure the venue is well ventilated.
5. If anyone starts to feel unwell, follow your preparedness plan.

5.3.4 AFTER the meeting

1. Retain the names and contact details of all participants for at least one month. This will help public health authorities trace people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 if one or more participants become ill shortly after the event.
2. If someone at the meeting or event was isolated as a suspected COVID-19 case, the organizer should let all participants know this. They should be advised to monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days. If they start to feel unwell they should stay at home and contact the relevant public health authority.

Chapter 6: Further information

6.1 Certifying absence from work

In relation to COVID-19, the employer should:

- Use discretion on the need for medical evidence for a period of absence where an employee is advised to self-isolate due to suspected COVID-19 and follow advice provided by the national authorities.

- Ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
- Talk with companies that provide subcontracted or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- Not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with flu-like symptoms to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick or dependent family member, as more employees might need to do this than is usual.

6.2 Handling post, packages or food from affected areas

Employees should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of work. There is no perceived increase in risk for handling post or freight from specified areas.

6.3 Layoff

There should be no employees' layoff except in the case of redundancy where the law remains fully applicable. Employers wishing to reduce staff not classified under redundancy must pay the staff full salary in accordance with the usual pay periods provided for in their contract of employment.

Resources

- Ministry of Health website <http://moh.gov.lr/>
- National Public Health Institute of Liberia website www.nationalphil.org
- OSH wiki article: Epidemic and the workplace https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Epidemics_and_the_Workplace
- Questions and answers on Coronavirus-WHO <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>
- ILO website <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm>
- Decent Work Act (DWA) http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_isn=100329

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Hon. Moses Y. Kollie

MINISTER



MINISTRY OF LABOR

P.O BOX 10-9040 - MINISTERIAL COMPLEX – CONGO TOWN, MONROVIA

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