

Guidance for offices and workspaces

Business continuity

Success in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic depends on the full cooperation of all sectors of society – including businesses and employers – who play an essential role in curbing the spread of this disease, whilst continuing to provide their services to the community. Public Health Authorities will support business continuity while coordinating action in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recognising that business continuity in respect of COVID-19 should be founded in expert health advice and constructive dialogue, the following principles shall apply:

- ✓ All workers, regardless of their occupation or how they are engaged, have the right to a healthy and safe working environment.
- ✓ The COVID-19 pandemic requires a uniquely focused approach to work health and safety as it applies to businesses, workers and others in the workplace such as clients, suppliers and service providers.
- ✓ To keep workplaces healthy and safe, businesses must, in consultation with workers, assess the way they work to identify, understand and quantify risks and to implement and review control measures to address those risks.
- ✓ Businesses and workers must work together to adapt and promote safe work practices, consistent with advice from health authorities, to ensure that staff are wearing masks or visors and that workplaces respect social distancing, exemplary hygiene and preventive measures that are important public health measures required to address the pandemic.
- ✓ Businesses and workers must continue to respond for the eventuality of COVID-19 in the workplace and to respond immediately, appropriately, effectively and efficiently, and consistent with specific recommendations from health authorities.
- ✓ Offices and workspaces are obliged to adhere to public health legislation concerning the mandatory wearing of masks or visors in indoor places as well as respecting social distancing measures and providing hygiene standards so that businesses can work safely and conduct trading, thus lessening the impact on business viability and on the economy in general.
- ✓ Public Health authorities continue to encourage work from home where this is possible. A substantial number of businesses were able to take advantage of teleworking. It is recognised that for many other office-based businesses teleworking is neither a sustainable nor an achievable way to work in the

medium and longer term. Due to particular business constraints, some businesses need to continue to implement measures to ensure that employees can stay safe while attending for duties in the workplace.

How COVID-19 spreads

The virus which causes COVID-19 disease can be spread through droplets from a sick person or on contact (by touch). COVID-19 disease often presents with coughing or sneezing which release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets can fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as desks, tables, machinery, equipment, floors, walls, clothes or telephones. People can catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Being less than two metres away from a person with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time, one can catch the disease by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them.

In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu. Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. The most common symptoms of coronavirus include cough, fever, shortness of breath, tiredness, sore throat, runny / blocked nose, headache, muscle pain, loss of smell, loss of taste, diarrhoea or vomiting. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age. People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.

Persons who develop any of these symptoms, even if mild, are to stay at home, contact their doctor and contact the Public Health team on (+356) 111 for further advice and guidance. For more information, seek guidance on www.covid19health.gov.mt

Guidance on the use of medical or cloth masks or visors in offices and workplaces

Legal Notice 402 of 2020 prescribes that persons shall wear a mask or visor in a proper manner covering the nose, mouth and chin of the person outside their residence, both when going to an indoor place and outdoors. The mandatory use of medical or cloth masks or visors also applies to offices and workplaces.

All staff shall use medical or cloth masks or visors at all times. Where tolerated, masks (or masks together with visors) are preferred to visors alone. Masks or visors are to be invariably worn on entering or exiting buildings or workplaces

and in all parts of offices and workplaces at all times including open plan office areas and outdoor spaces.

Keeping offices and workplaces safe and limiting the spread of COVID-19

Employers should be doing the following at their workplace:

- ✓ ensure physical distancing by keeping a distance of at least 2 metres between people where possible.
- ✓ ensure that the guidance on the use of masks or visors is adhered to at all times. They shall assess and obtain advice where the use of masks or visors can pose health and safety risks to either workers or workplaces or both (e.g. the presence of open fires in close proximity).
- ✓ encourage all staff to frequently wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or by using an 70% alcohol-based hand sanitiser and to practise good personal hygiene.
- ✓ be aware and educate staff about COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny/blocked nose, headaches, tiredness, muscle pain, loss of taste, loss of smell, vomiting and diarrhoea) and make sure they do not come to work if they are unwell. Workers should be instructed to carry out a daily self-diagnosis against this checklist of symptoms before reporting to work each day. It should be made clear to them that they should not attend work if they are experiencing any of the listed symptoms, even if their symptoms are mild, and that they should contact 111 to organise a swab test.
- ✓ ensure that offices and workplaces are regularly cleaned and disinfected
- ✓ have signs and posters around the workplace to remind staff and others visiting offices or workplaces of the risks of COVID-19 and the measures necessary to stop its spread.

Specific general hygiene practices

- ✓ Staff need to pay special attention to hand hygiene and it is recommended that all staff wash or sanitize hands frequently. It is recommended that staff carry hand-sanitizer to use frequently, especially after touching common surfaces in cars, public transport, organised transport, at the workplace, before and after meals, before and after going to the restroom, and before and after cigarette breaks.
- ✓ Hand-sanitising units and antibacterial wipe dispensers are easy installations and will be essential in combatting the spread of infection.

- ✓ Frequent cleaning and disinfection of common surfaces further reduces risk of surface contamination infecting healthy persons.
- ✓ Sufficient supplies of hand sanitizer, soap, tissues, paper towels and cleaning materials are the responsibility of the employer.
- ✓ Maintaining distance between individuals and the use of masks or visors reduces the risk for healthy persons to inhale infected droplets. Where tolerated, masks (or masks together with visors) are preferred to visors alone.
- ✓ Bins should be provided for safe disposal of tissues, used PPE and other waste. Ideally these should have a 'no-touch' mechanism (e.g. using pedals or similar).
- ✓ Use signs and posters to build awareness of appropriate use of masks or visors, good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing, respiratory etiquette and the importance of staying home when sick – these can be downloaded from www.covid19health.gov.mt

Distancing measures and limitations of group sizes

- ✓ Maintaining distance between individuals reduces the risk for healthy persons to inhale infected droplets.
- ✓ Maximum efforts need to be made to have at least four (4) square metres per staff member within the office or workspace and a minimum of two (2) metres between staff members. When this is not possible, acrylic or tempered glass screens or other partitions (see below) should be considered.
- ✓ Masks or visors are to be worn at all times.
- ✓ Staff members should maintain social distancing not only when within the workplace but also outside the premises (e.g. while awaiting temperature checks/screening to come in to work, in smoking areas). This can be facilitated by using floor markers or other visual reminders.
- ✓ Desks should be safely spaced and divided respecting distancing measures.
- ✓ All staff members should ideally have a personal working space. The practice of 'hot-desking' (where workers do not have their own workspace but utilise available workspaces on a rota system) should be avoided if possible. If hot-desking cannot be avoided, then employees should be instructed and provided with necessary materials to disinfect their workspace including desks, phones, tools and other equipment before starting and on finishing their workday/shift. Workspaces should be kept free of clutter and unnecessary items to facilitate thorough disinfection.

- ✓ In larger, open plan environments consider one-way systems in walkways, to create circulation within the workspace.
- ✓ Remote working should continue to be encouraged where possible to reduce contact.
- ✓ The number of staff in the office at any one time should be kept to the minimum required. Teams grouped by varying skillset which do not meet will allow for easy isolation should virus symptoms be present and allow for continuity.
- ✓ Any work-related events that involve close/prolonged contact between employees should be cancelled or postponed (including social gatherings outside the place of work).
- ✓ Work which includes visits to individuals who qualify as persons who are at a higher risk of developing complications if infected with the COVID19 virus¹ should be evaluated on the priority of such work and if carried out, employees providing a service should wear a mask and visor and avoid close contact.
- ✓ Regularly updated records of contact details of all staff are to be kept at offices and workplaces. Accurate records of attendance at work, work arrangements and rosters and lists of attendees at face-to-face meetings (where these are unavoidable) are of paramount importance to facilitate contact tracing by the public health authorities should a case of COVID-19 be confirmed at the workplace.
- ✓ Staff are to be encouraged to download the COVID Alert Malta application to help facilitate the contact tracing process in case they develop COVID-19 or have been in close contact with someone known to have COVID-19. Instructions for downloading the application can be found at <https://covidalert.gov.mt>

Cleaning Procedures

- ✓ Cleaning and disinfection will need to be increased as standard, with regular disinfecting of shared areas. The additional workload created by enhanced cleaning and disinfection may require additional staff to be assigned to assist with these tasks. All staff should keep their workspace tidy and free from

¹ As defined in the Guidance for the protection of persons who are at a higher risk of developing complications if infected with the COVID19 virus which can be accessed here:

https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Guidance%20for%20Persons_at_Risk_of_Complications_Final.pdf

clutter to facilitate cleaning and disinfection. Discourage desk toys and minimise paperwork.

- ✓ High traffic contact zones, such as handles, bathrooms, desks and chairs, lift buttons, palm readers, shared printers and copiers will need frequent cleaning and disinfection throughout the day.

Actions to Make Offices and Workspaces Safer

Offices and workspaces require increased levels of hygiene which are regularly maintained in order to protect staff and visitors from infection. Hygiene measures have a direct impact on the requirements for a safe office and workplace environment, all of which need to be regularly implemented.

Remove absorbent furniture and fabrics

- ✓ Unless they are bleach friendly, soft furnishings such as curtains and carpets are hard to keep clean. Instead, where possible choose office furniture and screening that is functional and easy to wipe down.
- ✓ Install hand sanitising dispensing units.

Allow 2 metres between all seating

- ✓ 2 metres should be granted between all workspaces as a minimum where possible.
- ✓ If this is not possible when at full occupancy, consider shift patterns or part-remote working to reduce the overall number of staff in the office at any one time.
- ✓ Seating in reception and common areas should either be spaced out to respect 2 metre social distancing or, if this is not possible, some of the chairs should be draped with fabric or tape so they cannot be used. Face-to-face seating arrangements should be avoided.
- ✓ Masks or visors are also to be worn at all times by both staff and visitors.
- ✓ Installing screening between workspaces and public areas is a quick and effective way to increase protection your staff and, if applicable, the general public from the risk of cross contamination.

Integrate effective prevention practices into your culture

- ✓ Create policies to support prevention measures and ensure that staff are kept fully updated.
- ✓ In the event of sickness, staff should stay at home. Employers should as far as possible address disincentives to taking sick leave that may result in staff reporting for work when they are ill. Work modalities and policies should be

flexible and non-punitive and work from home should be considered where possible. Employers should be aware that employees may need to stay home to care for family members who are ill.

- ✓ In the case of staff who qualify as persons who are at a higher risk of developing complications if infected with the COVID19 virus, remote working should be considered as an option based on a case-by-case assessment.

Designing a Safe Office Layout

There are many steps that can be taken to adapt your workplace to prevent the spread of infection and minimise impact of a further outbreak in the future.

- ✓ Where possible, staff who can safely carry out their tasks alone should be isolated (such as by making use of spare offices, meeting rooms, staff rooms and canteens as workspaces).
- ✓ Desks and workspaces should be reconfigured to allow at least 2 metres between employees.
- ✓ Desks should also be reconfigured to create back-to-back or side-to-side working arrangements whenever possible.
- ✓ Installation of partitioning should be considered to allow staff to work while minimising the risk of cross contamination. These partitions should provide an impervious barrier and are recommended to be placed between all workers sharing an enclosed space, especially if they are unable to maintain a distance of 2m from each other. The partition can be purpose-made, such as acrylic or tempered glass screens, or storage units or mobile drawers. However, items with gaps (such as a trolley) or items that create additional risks (such as tripping hazards) are not suitable for this purpose. If a barrier cannot be placed, additional space between workers should be allowed (e.g. empty desks).
- ✓ Shared spaces such as kitchens and meeting rooms should be redesigned to allow for appropriate distancing measures to be carried out, including floor markers and signage to help guide and remind staff to maintain safe distances between themselves.
- ✓ Where feasible, measures should be taken to decrease noise at the workplace so that workers do not need to shout to communicate (shouting increases dispersal of potentially infected droplets).

Open Plan Office Design

Open plan offices should be divided using screening so that employees can work while minimizing the risk of infection and working spaces should be configured to allow for back-to-back working. Masks or visors are to be worn at all times.

Working hours may need to be adjusted, where viable, to avoid full occupancy within the office.

In larger, open plan spaces, one-way traffic systems should be considered to help support social distancing in walkways. Floor stickers, signage or painted visual aids should be installed to enable safe working distances to be adhered to. Installing additional break-out zones will reduce congregation of people during breaks, as will staggering break-times and lunches.

Safe Work Planning

Where possible the minimum number of staff should be in the workplace at one time. These core members should wear masks or visors and practice social distancing, from each other and the general public, supported by screening and/or other physical distancing measures. Where the nature of the work is amenable, telework should be encouraged to minimise the number of staff that are physically present at the workplace at any one time. Telework is particularly advisable for staff members who qualify as persons who are at a higher risk of developing complications if infected with the COVID19 virus or who have household members who are at a higher risk of developing complications.

Dividing the workforce into shifts is the best way to ensure business continuity. Where physical distancing is not viable, work teams or groups should be established, made up of varying skillsets. It is recommended that different teams or groups keep contact between them, both at and away from the office, including breaks, to an absolute minimum. In this way, should there be the possibility of an outbreak of infection within one team, it is relatively easy to isolate the case to one section of your business – allowing work to continue and minimising the risk of spreading the infection.

Face-to-face meetings such as handovers between shifts should be replaced by communication through digital means where possible (e.g. online or on the phone). When unavoidable, face-to-face meetings should be held in well ventilated rooms or even better, when the weather permits, outside, and should be kept as short as possible, ideally shorter than 15 minutes. Physical contact between workers should be minimised as far as possible. Records should be kept of attendance at work and at face-to-face meetings (where these are unavoidable) to facilitate contact tracing by the public health authorities should a case of COVID-19 be confirmed at the workplace.

Other procedures to reduce risk of COVID-19 spread in offices and workspaces

Occupational safety and worker's rights

- ✓ Businesses shall designate someone responsible for safety at work, whom the staff may contact.
- ✓ The employer is responsible for providing information and guidelines on occupational safety and the health and well-being of all members of staff. Information should be provided for employees in a language and literacy level they can understand.
- ✓ At a minimum, the occupational health and safety measures in accordance with these recommendations that relate to general occupational safety must be communicated to all those involved.
- ✓ Staff shall be informed of the rules on sick leave. Individuals displaying fever (37.2°C or more), flu-like symptoms or other COVID-19 symptoms must remain at home until they have been cleared by a medical professional before they can return to work.
- ✓ Persons suffering from COVID-19 infections or their contacts must be cleared by the public health authorities.
- ✓ Protocols should be in place for actions to be taken in case a member of staff or any other person present at the workplace develops coronavirus symptoms while on the premises, including availability of full details of all staff in contact and an arrangement for appropriate cleaning and disinfection. Basic guidance on dealing with such a situation is provided in the relevant section below, which every workplace should develop further into a protocol specific to their own situation.

Travel to and from work

- ✓ Where feasible workers should be offered incentives to travel to work in ways that minimise contact with persons outside their household (e.g. walking, cycling, personal car). If this is not possible, smaller vehicles should be used in preference to mass transit (e.g. carpooling instead of private coaches). Workers who have no alternative but to commute using public transport should where possible be allowed to shift their hours to avoid commuting at peak hours. Staff should be encouraged to wash their hands as soon as possible after their trip when using public transport or shared vehicles.
- ✓ If travel to and from work is by means of public transport, private rental vehicle or shared means provided by the employer, a mask or visor should be worn. While masks or visors are not required (by law) in private vehicles,

they are strongly recommended whenever occupying a vehicle with persons not from one's own household.

- ✓ All non-private vehicles used must be compliant with the Standards for Transport Service Providers and for Passengers using Transport Services published by the Public Health Authorities.²
- ✓ Company vehicles must additionally be equipped with hand hygiene and disinfection products, paper towels and waste bags. For necessary work-related trips, wherever possible, the same vehicles should not be used by multiple employees. The group of employees who share a vehicle – simultaneously or consecutively – must also be kept as small as possible, for example by assigning a vehicle to three (3) persons as a fixed team. The interiors of company vehicles must be regularly cleaned, especially if they are used by multiple employees.
- ✓ Work-related travel abroad should be minimised as far as possible. Where this is unavoidable, those travelling should contact public health authorities for advice regarding whether quarantine or any other measures will be required on their return. Returning travellers should self-monitor for 14 days and not attend work if they develop any symptoms of COVID-19. For conditions related to travel, please refer to <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Pages/travel.aspx>.

Specific measures in offices and workplaces

- ✓ Each morning all staff members must have their body temperature checked before entering the workplace. Individuals displaying fever (37.2°C or more) shall not be allowed to enter.
- ✓ Restrooms must be sanitized frequently. Special attention must be given to common surfaces such as light-switches, doorknobs and locking mechanisms, taps, flushing mechanisms, toilet seats etc. Restrooms and changing rooms should only be used by one person at a time. A sign can be placed on the door to the restrooms and changing rooms indicating when they are in use to avoid more than one person entering at a time.
- ✓ Breakrooms, kitchens and dining areas should be spacious enough to allow the safety distance of 2 metres between all staff members and if this is not possible these areas should be kept closed. Eating meals outdoors is preferred. It may be necessary to make schedules for such facilities to be used by more people than can be accommodated at one time. If multiple

² [https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Standards%20for%20Passenger%20Transport%20Services_%20Aug%202020%20\(003\).pdf](https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Standards%20for%20Passenger%20Transport%20Services_%20Aug%202020%20(003).pdf)

groups must use the same facilities in sequence they should be sanitized between groups.

- ✓ Face masks or visors are to be worn at all times.
- ✓ High-touch communal items such as kettles and shared snacks should be replaced with alternatives such as single-serving packaged food items. Employees should be encouraged to bring their own water to minimise use of water fountains or, alternatively, no-touch activation water fountains could be used.
- ✓ Hygiene of workspaces, break rooms and other shared spaces as well as equipment is to be maintained throughout the day.
- ✓ Doors and windows must be kept open, air-conditioning/ventilation systems adjusted for more ventilation and recirculated air-conditioning avoided. Airconditioning flaps should be directed towards the ceiling. Filters should be cleaned well and maintained properly. Extractors are recommended to improve air circulation. These must be thoroughly cleaned every week. Detailed guidance on Air-conditioning and ventilation systems issued by the Public Health Authorities should be consulted.³

Special Considerations

Computers and work equipment

Computers and work equipment must be individually assigned. Where this is not possible, regular cleaning must be provided for, especially before handing over to another employee.

Lifts and escalators

- ✓ Stairs should be used in preference to lifts where possible, especially if only for a few flights. Where feasible different flights of stairs should be designated as 'Up' and 'Down' (or alternatively different sides of the same flight of stairs) to improve social distancing.
- ✓ Floor markings should be placed in front of lifts and at the entrance to escalators to encourage social distancing.
- ✓ Signs can be affixed at the entrance to escalators informing users of the number of steps that should be left empty between passengers to maintain social distancing.
- ✓ Workers and visitors should be advised to minimise touching of surfaces, to wash their hands after touching lift buttons or escalator handrails and not to touch their face till they have done so.

³ https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Guidance_Air-conditioning-and-ventilation-systems_23Jun20.pdf

- ✓ The number of persons allowed to enter the lift at any one time should be limited to ensure social distancing can be respected.
- ✓ Face masks or visors should be worn at all times inside the lift and lift passengers should be discouraged from talking while inside the lift.

Organisation of working times and breaks

When creating shift schedules, care must be taken to assign the same employees to shared shifts where possible in order to reduce the number of different contacts at work. Suitable organisational measures must be taken to prevent gatherings of employees at the beginning and end of working hours (such as at entrance/exit into the workplace, restrooms and breakrooms). Stagger arrival and departure times at work as well as break times. Organisation of shifts should take into account the time required for cleaning and sanitation tasks. Reduce congestion by having more entry points into the office or workspace if possible. Organised events such as entertainment activities in groups at workplace and after work should be avoided.

Staff canteens and sale of refreshments

- ✓ In workplaces where employees have the possibility of eating at their desk /workstation without being in breach of workplace health and safety practices, canteen or café facilities are to operate only take-away services within the respective applicable guidelines.
- ✓ In workplaces where employees cannot safely eat at their desk/workstation or carry out their work mainly standing up, canteen/café facilities are allowed to continue to serve food/refreshment provided that all mitigation measures below are strictly adhered to, break times are staggered and organised to avoid crowding at the canteen/cafeteria and records are kept of how employees are seated during their break (to facilitate contact tracing should the need arise).

Strict social distancing and hygiene precautions to be followed when selling refreshments:

- Markers two metres apart should be installed to facilitate social distancing while queuing to purchase refreshments.
- All employees are to be seated whilst consuming food and drink
- Seating arrangements should respect social distancing at all times.
- Canteen staff and employees are to wear masks at all times except whilst consuming food or drink.

- No buffet, communal food and beverage service or self-service items are allowed. Employees are not to be allowed to serve themselves or help themselves to items such as straws, stirrers or condiments from a container that can be touched by others, instead they should have such items handed to them by staff from behind the counter.
- If canteen or café facilities wish to sell 'Pick and Mix' items, implements required to serve these should be handled solely by staff.
- Contactless payment or, if not possible, exact payment is preferable. The same person who handles food and beverage items should ideally not be responsible for handling cash from customers, or, if such an arrangement is not feasible, should ensure that they sanitise their hands with soap and water or alcohol hand rub after each instance of handling cash.
- Any canteen / café staff handling food/beverage items should adhere to strict hygiene principles. These include frequent hand washing and use of gloves when handling such items, or, where possible, use of an implement (such as tongs) to eliminate direct contact with the items being sold to employees. Any canteen / café worker required to use gloves is advised to consult the advice on handwashing and the use of gloves published by the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate to ensure that gloves are used in an appropriate and hygienic manner (visit covid19health.gov.mt)
- Bins should be available for employees to be able to safely dispose of any packaging waste.
- If vending machines are available on the premises, hand sanitiser should be easily available beside the vending machine, with signage affixed to the vending machine indicating that employees should sanitise their hands before and after using the vending machine. Vending machines should be Included In the list of high-touch surfaces prioritised for frequent cleaning (see 'Cleaning and Disinfection measures' below).

Preventing stigma

Everyone has a role to play in preventing stigma related to COVID19. Employers should provide information (covid19health.gov.mt) about virus transmission in order to prevent stigma related to COVID19 in the workplace. Diseases including COVID19 can make anyone sick, regardless of their age, race or ethnicity. Someone who has completed his quarantine is not a source of infection to other people.

Support an employee who is COVID19 positive and in quarantine. Keep in regular contact with the employee and address fears and concerns. Maintain social contact through phone calls and video chats. Arrange for food or essential supplies to be delivered to them if necessary.

Common areas

Work collaboratively with landlords and other tenants in multi-tenant buildings to ensure safety in common areas, receptions, lifts and staircases

Getting ready to operate with community spread of COVID-19

- ✓ Develop a contingency and continuity plan for an outbreak. The plan will help prepare for the possibility of an outbreak of COVID- 19.
- ✓ The plan should address how to keep the office running if a significant number of employees, contractors and suppliers cannot come to your place of business - either because they are on obligatory quarantine or because they are ill. If a high rate of absence requires your workplace to rely on interim staff, make sure to inform them about workplace risks and mitigation measures being applied, and to provide them with any necessary training.
- ✓ Communicate with your employees and contractors about the business continuity plan. Make sure they are aware of what they need to do – or not do – under the plan. Emphasize key points such as the importance of staying away from work even if they have only mild symptoms.
- ✓ Be sure your plan addresses the mental health and social consequences of a case of COVID-19 and the psychosocial stresses workers may be facing in the pandemic situation and offer information and support.

Other personal protective equipment (PPE)

Apart from the mandatory use of masks or visors at all times in offices and workplaces, the use of additional personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required to prevent certain exposures, despite other controls and preventive measures. PPE use should serve as an adjunct and not a replacement for other prevention strategies. PPE used should be based on the hazard to the worker. Recommendations for PPE use depend on risk assessment, evolving evidence on PPE effectiveness in prevention COVID-19 transmission and the local epidemiological situation. Employers should keep abreast of updated recommendations issued by the public health authorities.

Common additional PPE that can be used to protect against COVID-19 include gloves, eye protection, and screens according to exposure risk. Eye protection, in the form of safety glasses, goggles or a face shield, can be used as PPE for protecting against the risks of COVID-19. Eye protection can assist to act as a physical barrier from droplet spray and prevent unintentional rubbing of eyes between hand washing. Eye protection may be necessary for workers who are in close proximity to droplet spray. For many workplaces, eye protection will not be a required control measure. Good hygiene practices should be followed if eye protection is used.

Any PPE used should be:

- ✓ Properly fitted and regularly refitted, where applicable,
- ✓ Worn consistently and appropriately when needed
- ✓ Inspect regularly, kept well-maintained and replaced as necessary
- ✓ Carefully cleaned, stored or disposed of to avoid contaminating the individual wearing it, other persons or the surroundings

Employers are required to provide all workers with the PPE necessary to keep them safe while carrying out their work as well as adequate facilities to safely dispose of used PPE. Staff must be trained in the proper use, fit, removal and disposal of PPE. Be aware of risks that may arise as a result of staff using and wearing PPE inappropriately.

Gloves will not normally be necessary for most work tasks, apart from staff handling food and beverages, handling/disposing of garbage and for cleaning (see below). If employers choose to supply or use gloves, they should make sure the gloves are suitable for the intended tasks.

Clients and contractors attending the office

- ✓ Non-essential visits to the office or workplace should not be allowed. Family members of staff, particularly children, should not be allowed inside the office / workplace.
- ✓ Minimise the number of workers attending to clients, deliveries and contractors as much as possible.
- ✓ Clients and other visitors to the workplace should be given clear instructions of requirements while they are in the office.
- ✓ Clients, contractors and other visitors should wear a mask or visor in accordance with LN 402 of 2020 which states *'Any person shall, outside his residence, both when going to an indoor place and outdoors, wear a medical*

or cloth mask or visor in a proper manner covering the nose, mouth and chin of the person.’.

- ✓ Consider implementing set-ups such as virtual support or drive-through windows for customer service, where feasible, to further decrease contact between staff and clients. Where this is not possible, acrylic or tempered glass screens should separate staff from clients.
- ✓ Contractors who need to provide maintenance or repair services or perform other essential activities, should be given clear instructions of requirements while they are in the office or workplace.
- ✓ Ensure hand washing facilities, or if not possible, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, is readily available for staff, particularly after socially interacting with clients or handling deliveries.
- ✓ Use, and ask clients, delivery persons and contractors to use, electronic paperwork where possible, to minimise social interaction.
- ✓ Where possible, set up alternatives to requiring signatures. If a pen or other utensil is required for signature, ask that the pen or utensil is cleaned or sanitised before use or use your own.

Dealing with potential cases of COVID-19 among staff or visitors to the workplace

If someone develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19 while at the office or workplace, especially if they may have had contact with a COVID-19 case, they should immediately be isolated in an area at least 2m away from other people, ideally behind a closed door. Open a window for ventilation in the room where they are isolating, if possible. The individual affected should call the public health helpline on 111 for advice, unless they are seriously ill, in which case another person should call 112 (emergency services) on their behalf and explain the situation.

While the individual is awaiting advice/emergency services they should remain isolated and avoid touching other persons, surfaces and objects. Any tissues they utilise while awaiting advice should be placed into a bag or pocket and then thrown straight into the bin. Alternatively, they should be advised to cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow. Once the individual suspected of having COVID-19 has left the workplace, cleaning and disinfection of areas they have utilised is required (see section below entitled ‘Cleaning workspaces and public areas used by suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19’).

Cleaning and disinfecting measures

A combination of cleaning and disinfection will be most effective in removing any contamination on the virus responsible for causing COVID-19. Offices must be cleaned at least daily. Cleaning with detergent and water is sufficient. Once clean, surfaces can be disinfected. When and how often the office or workspace should be disinfected will depend on the likelihood of contaminated material being present. Alternatively, cleaners may be able to do a 2-in-1 clean and disinfection by using a combined detergent and disinfectant.

How to clean and disinfect

Cleaning means to physically remove germs (bacteria and viruses), dirt and grime from surfaces using a detergent and water solution. A detergent is designed to break up oil and grease with the use of water. Anything labelled as a detergent will work. Cleaning should start with the cleanest surface first, progressively moving towards the dirtiest surface. When surfaces are cleaned, they should be left as dry as possible to reduce the risk of slips and falls, as well as spreading of viruses and bacteria through droplets.

Disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. It is important to clean before disinfecting because dirt and grime can reduce the ability of disinfectants to kill germs. Disinfectants containing $\geq 70\%$ alcohol, ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach are suitable for use on hard surfaces (surfaces where liquids pool, and do not soak in). The packaging or manufacturer's instructions will outline the correct way to use disinfectant. Disinfectants require time to be effective at killing viruses. If no time is specified, the disinfectant should be left for ten minutes before removing.

Which areas should be cleaned and disinfected, and how often?

Any surfaces that are frequently touched should be prioritised for cleaning, e.g. door handles, counters, switches phones, computers, printers, equipment, drinking fountains, acrylic or tempered glass screens or other forms of partitioning (if installed) and sanitary facilities (such as toilets). Any surfaces that are visibly dirty, or have a spill, should be cleaned as soon as they are identified, regardless of when they were last cleaned.

Certain areas within offices and workplaces may need to be cleaned and disinfected every day. Those sections that have many clients entering each day (reception, waiting areas, delivery bays), more frequent disinfection is recommended. On the other hand, for a work environment (e.g. a warehouse) that is only attended by the same small work crew each day and involves little

interaction with other people, routine disinfection in addition to daily cleaning may not be needed.

What should cleaners wear?

In most circumstances, it will not be necessary for cleaners to wear protective clothing to clean the workplace. However, workers should use personal protective equipment that is necessary for the products they are using. Gloves and a disposable apron are the minimum requirements. Medical masks should be used if cleaning an area impacted by a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case. Uniforms or personal clothes that can be washed afterwards are suitable.

Cleaning workspaces and public areas used by suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

All surfaces that the suspected/confirmed case came into contact with once they were symptomatic need to be cleaned including:

- ✓ All surfaces and objects visibly contaminated with body fluids
- ✓ All high-touch areas that are potentially contaminated (such as toilets, telephones, door handles, switches etc)

Public spaces (such as corridors) that the symptomatic individual has passed through but spent minimal time in and has not visibly contaminated with body fluids do not require special cleaning and disinfection.

If the suspected/confirmed case was spent time in a shared space while symptomatic, the area should be cleaned using disposable cloths and usual detergents. Measures should be taken to protect cleaners (including those described above). Any waste that has been in contact with the individual, such as used tissues and masks, should be placed in a plastic garbage bag which is tied and then placed in a second bag. This bag should be stored in a safe place until the result is available. If the individual is negative, the bag can be disposed of with normal waste (mixed waste stream). If the individual tests positive, public health authorities will provide advice on disposal.