

BEST PRACTICES

Post Confinement Back to Work Safety

The corona virus outbreak has suddenly disrupted our way of life. All segments of the Mauritian population including businesses have been affected. Our Health Authorities are at the forefront to contain the spread of the pandemic and the recent statistics are showing encouraging signs. However, we still need to remain vigilant.

In this context and with the gradual resumption of economic activities enterprises will have a very important role to play in conducting their activities and operations prudently with a view to limiting the spread of the virus so that there is no resurgence or second or successive waves of outbreak.

Employers have a statutory duty of care towards their employees' health and safety at work. As far as practicable they need to provide a safe environment at work. Business Mauritius (BM) being mindful of this general obligation of employers has prepared this document as a set of **BEST PRACTICES** on certain key issues which enterprises may need to consider and provide for whilst organising their operations in the post confinement environment.

These Best Practices will assist to:

- protect employees from contracting Covid-19 at the workplace
- stop transmission if any, prevent outbreaks and delay spread
- speed up and help access to optimised care for potentially infected employees
- minimise the impact of the epidemic on health systems, social services and national economic activity.

This document supplements any provisions or measures which companies are considering to introduce or may have already implemented at the workplace.

The attention of members is drawn to the following essential points:

- This set of Best Practices is not exhaustive and should not be considered as legal advice on any of the issues covered.
- The provisions of the Data Protection Act should be complied with while implementing the suggested guidelines.
- Government has announced that legal instruments will be enacted shortly to regulate Covid-19 related matters likely to impact on businesses and the world of work. Once these provisions come into force, certain best practices may require some necessary changes.

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1. Dedicated Response Team

Businesses are advised to set-up a Dedicated Response Team to take responsibility for assessing and managing the Impact of Covid-19 in their respective workplaces.

This Team needs to:

- (a) implement clear internal and external practices for managing risks associated with the corona virus in the workplace
- (b) set-up regular and clear communication modes with employees and other key stakeholders
- (c) develop and implement a business continuity plan

2. Access to Buildings and Premises

- (a) As far as practicable enterprises are recommended to establish effective controls at all points of entry before granting access to their premises.
- (b) In case a decontamination tunnel has been established at a single point of entry in the building all entrants will have to go through the decontamination tunnel, failing which access may be denied.
- (c) Enterprises may also put in place arrangements for checking the temperature of their employees before granting them access to the work premises.
- (d) An employee showing a temperature above 37.3 degrees Celsius (°C) would be denied access and if he/she is displaying certain symptoms of Covid-19 such as runny nose, dry cough, and/or shortness of breath the employee should be isolated and referred to Health Authorities as soon as possible for appropriate medical examination.
- (e) In the event the condition of the employee necessitates rapid transfer to a medical institution, the company will make appropriate travel arrangements for the safe evacuation of the employee taking into account physical distancing measures in the vehicle used for transporting the employee.
- (f) As far as possible, visitors will be requested to wear masks and use hand sanitizers regularly. Any person without the adequate protective equipment will not be allowed into /or will be requested to leave the building.
- (g) Visitors will also be required to fill in appropriate forms for contact tracing purposes before being granted access to buildings.
- (h) In common areas employees and visitors will have to wear masks and comply with all floor markings and demarcation instructions to ensure physical distancing.
- (i) Access control devices, if any, should be cleaned at regular intervals and employees using them should sanitize their hands immediately each time after using such equipment.

3. Use of Lifts

- (a) It is advisable to control access to lift lobbies and appropriate floor markings must be placed to guide users.
- (b) Users must sanitize their hands before entering a lift and if they have touch lift buttons inside or outside the lift.
- (c) The use of masks is essential inside a lift.
- (d) Only four or two persons depending on the type of lift will be allowed to enter a lift at any one time. The persons will occupy the corners of the lift and respect all security and physical distancing measures preferably by turning their face away from each other.

4. Use of Stairs

- (a) Persons using stairs should not walk side by side and should observe at least 1.5 metres between them.
- (b) Persons are advised not to touch the hand rails as far as possible and to disinfect their hands promptly if they do so.

5. Travelling to the Office by using Public Transportation

- (a) Employees using public transport should observe all lawful instructions of the Authorities regarding physical distancing and road safety.
- (b) Employees should wear masks whenever using public transport.
- (c) It is recommended to minimise the use of coins and notes
- (d) It is advisable that employees disinfect their hands and any personal belongings which have been touched during the trip once the public transport has been disembarked.

6. Travelling to the Office by using Common Transportation provided by the Employer

- (a) Employees using common transport provided by the employer should observe all instructions regarding physical distancing.
- (b) It is recommended to limit the number of passengers such as to respect necessary physical distancing.
- (c) Employees should wear masks whenever using such transport.
- (d) It is advisable that employees disinfect their hands and any personal belongings which have been touched during the trip once the transport has been disembarked.
- (e) Vehicles used by the outgoing group should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized before being used again.

7. Travelling to the Office by using Personal Transport

- (a) In case car-pooling is practised it is advisable that the maximum number of passengers in a car be limited to two.
- (b) The second individual should sit in the back seat on the side furthest from the driver.
- (c) It is advisable for all individuals to disinfect hands before entering and after alighting the car.

8. Work Arrangements at the Office

- (a) Enterprises must recognise that whilst they may make every effort to resume operations as smoothly as possible there may be challenges that may necessitate longer periods to be handled.
- (b) Ensuring pre-Covid-19 full attendance levels at the workplace may not be possible in the immediate future for enterprises in all sectors.
- (c) Certain enterprises may need to make reasonable workplace arrangements to observe physical distancing norms whilst others may have to consider flexible working arrangements to limit physically the size of their workforce at any point in time.
- (d) It is advisable that enterprises continue considering the use of Working from Home (WFH) which has brought promising results during the lockdown in certain sectors and positions.
- (e) Additionally, the use of rosters and other forms of flexible work arrangements are also recommended.
- (f) Employees are encouraged to conduct self-monitoring of their health. Employees displaying Covid-19 like symptoms should not report to work and should inform their superior. If need be, such employees should contact the Health Authorities as per the current health protocol.
- (g) In order to promote physical distancing, enterprises may wish to restrict the number of persons at a time in designated places.
- (h) As far as possible phone / virtual conversations should be privileged rather than face to face.
- (i) Employees should wash their hands immediately after having used office equipment which have been used by other colleagues at the workplace.
- (j) Company vehicles used should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized after the outgoing group alights and before being used by the incoming group.

9. Wearing of Masks

- (a) Enterprises are encouraged to make the use of mask compulsory at the workplace.
- (b) As far as practicable masks must be supplied at regular intervals to employees who are under an obligation to wear it as a piece of protective equipment provided by the employer while at work.
- (c) Responsible use of masks is encouraged taking into consideration that any misuse may result in shortages and disrupt the services of front line employees who are the ones most in need of masks due to the nature and specificity of their work.

10. Waste Management

- (a) Enterprises should ensure that all used personnel protective equipment such as masks, gloves etc need to be properly dispose in waste bins which remain well-covered at all times.
- (b) The Cleaning team should be properly equipped and use protective equipment when disposing refuse bags.

11. Testing of Employees

- (a) There is abundance of information regarding types of tests and testing facilities which are proposed. Enterprises are advised to follow the latest advice of the Authorities and guidelines of World Health Organisation (WHO) regarding the types of appropriate tests and when they should be carried out.
- (b) Enterprises are recommended to compile and regularly update the list of approved laboratories which are authorised to carry out tests which eventually can be contacted if the need arises.
- (c) Enterprises are encouraged to have all their employees tested within a reasonable time frame with priority of consideration for employees in front line positions.

12. Cleaning of Premises

- (a) Enterprises are advised to carry out daily and weekly cleaning and sanitizing of their office premises, using, as far as possible, disinfectants recommended by the WHO or the Authorities.
- (b) General office areas including workstations, high contact surfaces, common areas, washrooms and isolation rooms should be cleaned at regularly intervals daily.

- (c) A deep cleaning and sanitization of the office should be carried out at regular intervals to prepare for the alternate batch to work.
- (d) In the advent a person showing Covid-19 like symptoms has left the office a thorough decontamination of the areas where the person had access should be done.

13. Hand Hygiene

- (a) Health professionals consider this as a key strategy for slowing the spread of Covid-19.
- (b) Employers should ensure that adequate facilities are provided to enable employees to either wash their hands with soap and water regularly or use sanitizers in lieu of. Where it is possible, the use of hot water for washing hands is recommended.

14. Physical Distancing

- (a) Physical distancing implies putting physical distance between individuals and is recognised as one of the surest public health measures to curb the spread of Covid-19.
- (b) Enterprises should ensure that people do not assemble in groups and that a distance of 1.5 m is maintained between two individuals whenever possible.

15. Ventilation System

In order to mitigate the risk of exposure, enterprises are recommended to avoid using air conditioning and fans and instead rely on traditional ventilation airflows by keeping office doors and windows open wherever possible.

16. Air Conditioning Systems

Although there is no scientific evidence that air conditioning systems represent any risk for propagating the Covid-19 virus enterprises are advised to ensure that their air conditioning equipment including air filters are serviced at regular frequency.

17. Additional Safety Precautions applicable to Office Attendants

- (a) Office attendants must wear masks at all times while at the office or when performing dispatch duties outside the office.
- (b) Physical distancing measures must be observed when interacting with other office colleagues.
- (c) Office attendants must comply with access controls and restrictions that are in force in public and private buildings whilst performing their normal duties.

- (d) Those performing driving duties must disinfect their hands whenever entering and leaving the company vehicles.
- (e) Enterprises must ensure that all company vehicles are thoroughly cleaned after use by office attendants.

18. Special Arrangements for Front Line Workers

- (a) Front liners such as health care workers, distribution workers, customer facing workers and security personnel have played a major role in during these tough times and their commitment and dedication is recognised.
- (b) Enterprises are advised to plan reasonable rosters and shifts among front liners to ensure that these workers have adequate respite and benefit from family friendly work practices.
- (c) Specific personal protective equipment should be provided to front liners taking into account the nature of their work.

19. Persons showing Symptoms of Covid-19 at the Workplace

- (a) Enterprises are advised to set up a well-demarcated isolation room within their premises.
- (b) Despite all precautions being taken, in the unlikely event that an employee displays Covid-19 like symptoms at the workplace, immediate steps must be taken to manage the situation.
- (c) The concerned employee must be withdrawn to the designated isolation room and prompt arrangements made to have the person taken home or referred to a medical institution for testing purposes.
- (d) Management must identify all the staff who have been in contact with the concerned employee and inform them about the situation requesting them to return home, monitor their health condition and contact the Health Authorities or the company Doctor if any in case the need arises. These employees will not report to work at the Office until advised otherwise. Management may consider implementing work from home arrangements in such cases.
- (e) Management needs to ensure that the whole office is sanitized before requesting employees to resume work at the office.

20. Communication

Employers are highly encouraged to continuously maintain proper communication with their employees by:

- (a) Assuring them that necessary measures have been implemented to protect health and safety at work.
- (b) Relaying Covid-19 related Health and Safety requirements in clear and simple terms through notices displayed in entranceways, washrooms, lunchrooms, and common areas, as well as through offices intranets / corporate networks
- (c) Raising awareness among employees around Physical Distancing and the need to avoid close personal contacts.
- (d) Providing clear advice to employees about actions they should take if they display Covid-19 like symptoms.
- (e) Informing employees, who have a sick family member at home or have been in contact with anyone who is ill to notify management and remain at home as a precautionary measure until being requested to report back to work.
- (f) Providing regular update on Covid-19 to both employees who may be working from the office and those who may be working from home.

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