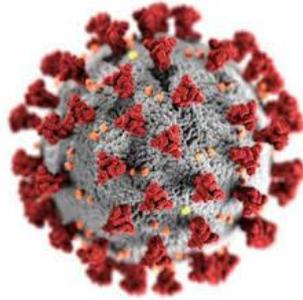


**Version 2**



**GUIDELINE ON WORK PLACE SAFETY  
DURING COVID-19  
03.07.2020**

**Health Protection Agency**  
Ministry of Health

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## ABBREVIATION

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
HPA	Health Protection Agency
IPC	Infection Prevention and Control
MOH	Ministry of Health
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
WHO	World Health Organization
WAMCO	Waste Management Corporation Limited

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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COVID-19 is a respiratory illness and the transmission route is through person-to-person contact and through direct contact with respiratory droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can be inhaled or can land on objects and surfaces around the person such as tables, doorknobs and handrails, hence people can become infected-by touching these objects or surfaces and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth (WHO, 2020).

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry cough, and tiredness. Other symptoms that may be seen less often and may affect some persons include aches and pains, nasal congestion, headache, conjunctivitis, sore throat, diarrhoea, loss of taste or smell or a rash on skin or discoloration of fingers/toes. However, a person may also be asymptomatic or may have very mild symptoms (WHO, 2020).

To prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace, it is important that all offices and work places develop or adopt and implement a clear plan to prevent the risks of transmission of COVID-19 in their workplaces. Responsibilities of the employer, employees and customers/visitors remain including physical distancing, hand wash and hygiene, respiratory hygiene, environmental hygiene, waste management and clear roles (OSHA, 2020)

The purpose of this guideline is to give a general guidance for non-health care workplace settings to ensure protective measures are followed by the employers and employees. It also gives guidance on the necessary measures for specialised workplaces with different exposure risks and specific recommendations for protection of the health and safety of all the workers.

### **Principles:**

The guideline is based on the five main safety principles that has to be followed by everyone in the work place;

1. Wear clothe masks at all times (refer to COVID19 webpage <https://covid19.health.gov.mv/>)
2. Ensure respiratory and hand hygiene etiquettes
3. Ensure physical distancing (maintain at least 3 feet gap between persons)
4. Ensure Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures including cleaning and disinfection procedures (refer to COVID19 webpage <https://covid19.health.gov.mv/>)

5. Decreasing contact between different shifts/ teams to ensure business continuity even if one employee becomes positive for Covid-19 and their contacts have to go into quarantine.

When making individual plans for different types of workplaces, the above principles should be considered and adhered to.

## 2. WORKPLACE RISK ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN

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### **Workplace Risk Assessment**

The risk of work-related exposure to COVID-19 depends on the probability of coming into close (less than 3 feet) or frequent contact with people who may be infected with COVID-19 and through contact with contaminated surfaces and objects. (WHO, 2020)

In the same work setting there may be jobs with different levels of risk or may have similar levels of exposure. Therefore, the risk assessment should be carried out for each specific work setting and each job or group of jobs considering the work environment, the processes involved in doing a task, the level of threat(if any) (e.g. for frontline staff), and resources available, such as PPE. (WHO, 2020)

The following risk levels may be useful in carrying out a workplace risk assessment for exposure to COVID-19 and planning for preventive measures in non-healthcare workplaces. (WHO, 2020)

#### **1. Low exposure risk:**

- Jobs or work tasks without frequent, close contact with the general public and other co-workers, visitors, clients or customers, or contractors, and that do not require contact with people known to be or suspected of being infected with COVID-19.
- Workers in this category have minimal occupational contact with the public and other co-workers

## **2. Medium exposure risk:**

- Jobs or work tasks with close, frequent contact with the general public, or other co-workers, visitors, clients or customers, or contractors, but that do not require contact with people known to be or suspected of being infected with COVID-19.
- In areas where COVID-19 cases continue to be reported, this risk level may be applicable to workers who have work-related frequent and close contact with the general public, visitors, or customers, etc.
- Work tasks that require close and frequent contact between co-workers.
- In areas without community transmission of COVID-19, work tasks that require frequent contact with persons returning from areas with community transmission

## **3. High exposure risk:**

- Jobs or work tasks with high potential for close contact with people who are known or suspected of having COVID-19, as well as contact with objects and surfaces possibly contaminated with the virus.
- Examples include:
  - transportation of persons known or suspected to have COVID-19 in enclosed vehicles without separation between the driver and the passenger,
  - providing domestic services or home care for people with COVID-19,
  - contact with dead bodies of persons who were known or suspected of having COVID-19 at the time of their death.

### **Plan of action:**

1. Workplaces should develop action plans for prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 as part of the business continuity plan and according to the results of the risks assessment and based on the current situation. (WHO, 2020)
2. The plan should also include measures for protecting health, safety, and security in re-opening, closing, and modifying workplaces and work arrangements. (WHO, 2020)
3. Re-opening of workplaces should be carefully planned in advance and all possible risks for health and safety should be properly assessed and controlled. (WHO, 2020)

### 3. GENERAL CONDITIONS

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1. To help with the transition, consider gradual re-opening of workplace activities (e.g. reduced number of activities) at the start of the return to work period.
2. Determine which workers should return to work first based on the needs of the organisation.
3. Consideration should be given to compliance with ongoing restrictions regarding workplace operations and compliance with health precautions such as physical distancing.
4. To limit the congestion in the workplace, flexible working hours and staggering start times, breaks or staggering days that workers are in the workplace can be considered.
5. Prepare the workplace for the return of workers, look into the workplace layout and implement changes to allow for physical distancing, put in place a plan for systematic cleaning and disinfection of workspaces, etc., and stocking up on cleaning supplies and any protective equipment that are required.
6. As the epidemiological situation changes the requirements may change rapidly and will need to be incorporated into workplace policies and practices.
7. Inform and educate all workers about COVID-19 including topics such as COVID-19 symptoms prevention measures, current restrictions (e.g. travel bans), and the rationale behind physical distancing.
8. Ensure instruction and easy to understand media and signs are placed in an easy visible manner and in Dhivehi and English and any other language as may be needed.
9. Make sure all workers are well aware of “return to work” plans and procedures.
10. Take steps to support the mental well-being of workers, taking into account the diversity of circumstances.
11. Managers and supervisor’s should repeatedly emphasise/remind the ongoing requirements for preventive and protective measures, and ensure that they are being consistently applied.
12. If possible, avoid mixing different teams of workers in the same space at the same time.

13. Encourage all workers to use 'TraceEkee' app
14. If any worker is quarantined or isolated allowances should be given for the required leaves. Allowances on working from home should be arranged to the workers who live in under monitoring homes/apartments/buildings

#### 4. PHYSICAL WORKPLACE

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##### Reception Areas

1. Recommended to install visible partition at the main reception and service counters.
2. Re-arrange seating area of the reception, customer waiting area and any similar waiting area to facilitate physical distancing and a minimum of 3 feet between persons.
3. Encourage online filling and submission of forms where possible.
4. Minimise interactions between customers and employees, such as limiting the number of customers permitted at the establishment or serving customers over phone or establishing online applications for services provided. Consider different timings for different services to reduce crowding.
5. Establish online queue system for services and encourage customers to use these services where applicable. Alternatively, move to an online appointment system if possible.
6. Encourage cashless payment methods. Establish systems for cashless transactions before opening up services.
7. Place sanitising hand rub dispensers for employees and for customers/clients. Make sure these dispensers are regularly refilled
8. Display posters, promoting preventive measures against COVID-19. Posters/ standee banners/ audio visual media to increase awareness on COVID-19 should be displayed prominently at entrances and within the workplace. Ensure that these are appropriate for the employee's/ customers language preferences.
9. Keep a record of clients who entered the premises and the staff who interacted with the client. They may be needed for contact tracing.

## Lift

1. Encourage workers to avoid using elevators whenever possible. If this is not possible, limit the number of people using the elevator at the same time. Instruct employees to keep distance as marked in the lift and to stand back to back inside the lift.
2. Lift buttons are a high touch surface that needs to be frequently cleaned and disinfected.
3. Ensure entry areas in front of lift do not get crowded.

## Workstation Areas

1. Assess how many work stations are at the work place.
2. Work stations should be arranged to accommodate minimum 3 feet physical distancing.
3. Encourage workers to clean their own workstations, used equipments, items, etc.
4. Ensure a good supply of cleaning agents are made available in office.
5. If workstations are shared, they should be cleaned at the end of every shift.

## Conference / meeting rooms

1. Arrange chairs at minimum 3 feet distance.
2. Encourage virtual communications/video meetings as much as possible.
3. Tea/ coffee making facility (if provided) must be in a manner that minimises contact .

## Toilet facilities

1. Remind all staff to wash hands with soap and water after using the toilet.
2. Respect physical distancing as much as possible, for example limiting the number of people present in the toilet area/ toilet que at the same time.
3. Ensure availability of liquid soap to wash hands and paper towels to dry hands.
4. Ensure lidded, lined bins are placed.
5. Ensure regular cleaning of toilet facilities (preferably every 4 hours, based on the frequency/number of people using the toilet) and disinfection at the end of each work day.

## Tea room

1. Minimise number of employees who use the tea room at the same time.
2. Promote regular and thorough hand washing prior to eating.

3. If there is a canteen in the work place, re-arrange the canteen area to enable physical distancing measures (i.e. place tables and chairs with recommended physical distancing, limit the number of chairs at each table).
4. Keep tea room areas clean and hygienic, especially the utensils such as cutlery, tableware, and glasses. Encourage employees to eat in their own work stations and wash the cups, plates, spoons, etc.

### Ventilation

1. In the context of COVID-19 it is advised to ensure proper ventilation in rooms/spaces of the workplace.
2. In air-conditioned workplaces, it is recommended to open the windows for some time during each shift for air circulation
3. Ensure regular airing by opening the windows even in mechanically ventilated buildings.

### Physical distancing measures

1. Introduce measures to keep minimum 3 feet distance between people and avoid direct physical contact with other persons (i.e. shaking hands, hugging, touching, etc.)
2. Strict control over external access and queue management (eg, marking on the floor, barriers, etc.).
3. Suspend workplace events/gatherings that involve close and prolonged contact among participants, including social gatherings.
4. Nominate a person to be responsible at the entrance for managing the waiting area floor to remind and keep customers / staffs in the required 3 feet distance.
5. Employees should reduce movement within the workplace and those working in one area should refrain from going into other areas.

### Measures to limit the number of high touch/high traffic areas

1. Leave some internal doorways open (bearing in mind fire doors).
2. Discourage staff from sharing common office supplies (e.g. pens, staplers) and items such as cups, plates and cutlery.
3. Remove magazines and newspapers from reception areas. Share awareness messages through display screens.

## 5. PERSONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE MEASURES

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### Environmental Hygiene measures

#### *Cleaning and disinfection of work places and facilities*

1. Establish daily cleaning protocols to ensure workplace, workstations, and facilities are clean and tidy.
2. For cleaning use soap or a detergent, water, and mechanical action (brushing, scrubbing) to remove dirt, debris, and other materials from surfaces.
3. Frequently touched surfaces/high traffic areas such as door and window handles, light switches, work surfaces, buttons of elevator doors, toilet doors and surfaces, washbasin taps, soap dispensers, kitchen and food preparation areas, etc., must be cleaned once in each shift or when visibly dirty.
4. Daily clean the toilets with detergent and water and disinfect with bleach solution.
  - a. Bleach Solution - Mix 120 ml bleach (1/3 cup) and 4000ml water. The solution must be used within 24 hours, and the bottle/container must be properly labelled with name and date and must be kept with the cleaning products. Bleach is not advised for cleaning metal products as it may corrode.
  - b. 70% alcohol based solutions (wipes or liquid) can be used to disinfect metal products.
  - c. It is not advised to SPRAY BLEACH solution or any disinfectant solution to the surfaces or areas or public spaces.
  - d. When diluting and cleaning with bleach solution the cleaning staff must ensure to wear mask and heavy duty gloves and wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser before wearing and after removal of gloves.
5. Vomitus or respiratory secretions or any other body fluids must be wiped with tissue/paper/dirty cloth (discard after cleaning), first clean with soap and water and then disinfect with bleach solution.
6. Places where large numbers of public gather regularly such as ATMs, banks, shops, eateries, airports, universities, schools, and other such places should be cleaned with detergent and water at least 2 times a day.

7. Cleaning staff (in house or outsourced) should be educated on proper procedures of putting on and removing gloves and masks, cleaning and disinfection procedures and hand washing/sanitising.
8. Spraying of people with disinfectants or disinfection by any other method is NOT RECOMMENDED under any circumstances (WHO, 2020).
9. In indoor workplaces, routine application of disinfectants to environmental surfaces via spraying or fogging or large-scale spraying or fumigation is NOT RECOMMENDED by WHO, as it is ineffective at removing contaminants outside of direct spray zones. Spraying can cause eye, respiratory, skin irritation and other toxic effects.

### *Waste management*

1. Keep adequate amounts of lined, lidded, foot operating dustbins in the workplace.
2. A separate area for waste collection should be arranged till collection from WAMCO.
3. When 2/3rd of the waste bin is full, remove and tie the bag properly.
4. Arrange to remove waste from the building daily.
5. Set up a system for disposing bin contents and disinfecting bins.

### *Personal Hygiene*

#### *Hand washing*

1. Hand hygiene is extremely important in the prevention of the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Ensure that workers have facilities to wash their hands properly and regularly with soap and water.
2. Encourage employees to wash hands frequently when in office for at least 20 seconds, especially upon arrival at work, after using toilet, after blowing their nose/coughing/sneezing, and before eating.
3. Remind employees that hands need to be washed frequently, with soap and water.
4. Place posters and signs promoting correct hand washing (bright clear infographics without too much accompanying text seem to be the most effective).
5. Provide alcohol-based hand sanitisers (containing 70% alcohol) in places where it is not possible to wash hands with soap and water.
6. Instruct workers to avoid contact with objects or surfaces used or touched by other people (e.g. door handles) and to wash hands after contact with such surfaces or objects.

### *Respiratory hygiene*

1. Promote respiratory etiquette by all people at the workplace.
2. Encourage to wear face masks and follow the procedures in line with the SOP's in COVID-19 website.
3. Remind workers about the need to cover coughs or sneezes with a tissue or elbow and to immediately discard the used tissues.
4. Place posters and signs reminding workers that they should avoid touching their nose, eyes or mouth.

## 6. MEASURES TO CONSIDER INSIDE THE WORKPLACE

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### Measures inside the workplace

1. Inform staff to minimize movements when at work.
2. Remind all staff to maintain at least 3 feet physical distance at all times.
3. Use floor markings or tapes to indicate safe walkways where applicable.
4. Consider introducing one-way traffic or priority rules on narrow stairs/corridors where people cannot keep a sufficient distance when passing each other.

### Meetings and travels

1. When possible, use alternatives to face-to-face meetings, such as video conferencing and online meetings.
2. If a face-to-face meeting is necessary, reduce the number of attendees to ensure minimum physical distance, and keep the room clean and well ventilated. Consider keeping the list and contact details of the meeting participants for at least 14 days to facilitate contact tracing if need be.
3. Consider indicating the maximum number of people that can safely stay at a time in the meeting room at the same time while ensuring physical distancing.
4. During meetings have a reminder to minimize touching surfaces and minimize the use of paper.

## 7. IMPORTANT ADVICE TO THE EMPLOYEES

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### Before leaving home:

Instruct employees to stay home if they develop any symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, any respiratory symptoms, etc).

In addition, they should be instructed to inform supervisor and visit flu clinic.

If sample for COVID-19 is taken and the employee sent home, the employee should be informed to stay home until negative results are got and to follow health care professionals advice.

### Transport to and from work

1. For short distances, encourage staff to come to work on foot or by bicycle.
2. The workers who need to travel by public transport should follow the transport guidelines published (refer to COVID19 webpage <https://covid19.health.gov.mv/>)
3. Remind staff/ workers about the importance of maintaining good hand and respiratory hygiene before, during and after travel.
4. If an employer provides transport (e.g. a van or a bus, ferry, etc) follow the guidelines published (refer to COVID19 webpage <https://covid19.health.gov.mv/>) Physical distancing must be maintained when workers are being transported.

### Leaving the workplace

1. Stagger working hours and shift changes to avoid congestion.
2. Remind staff/ workers to practice hand hygiene while leaving from workplace and practice the same upon arrival at home.

## 8. RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYER

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### Managing employee numbers with phased return

1. Managing the number of staff/ workers will be critical in protecting their health.
2. Assess and identify vulnerable groups (workers with underlying health conditions (list in Annex 1) and those above 60 years of age). They should be given opportunity to work from home or make other arrangements, till the situation returns to normal.
3. Set up ways to communicate with workers online and communicate with them daily.
4. Make arrangements for staffs to work in shifts (preferably the same group of people who work together in the same days/shifts) and then arrange shift duties to ensure physical distancing is maintained, especially in workplaces that may become crowded at times. For high risk groups arrange for work from home option where possible.
5. A long-term plan should be made to address the overcrowding at workplaces, in order to arrange workstations at 3 feet distance including workspace between each station.
6. Implement flexible sick leave policies and practices, and flexible work hours, if feasible.
7. Arrange shifts and work timings to ensure as little mixing as possible between groups of employees.
8. Also consider cross-training of employees in the most critical functions. If employer is providing accommodation, consider segregating employees who work together.

## 9. MANAGEMENT OF SICK EMPLOYEES

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Workplaces should have a plan on what should be done if a worker develops COVID-19 symptoms while at the workplace.

The following should be considered:

1. If any employee/ employees develop COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, or shortness of breath, etc) while at work he/she should be immediately isolated from others and should be advised to go to the nearest flu clinic.

2. In case of an emergency (eg; a worker has severe symptoms such as shortness of breath), call ambulance services and report to ER immediately followed by reporting to 1676.
3. Any person providing assistance to him/her should take preventive measures such as wearing a mask and gloves.
4. Clean the areas used by the affected worker in line with the guidance published (refer to COVID19 webpage <https://covid19.health.gov.mv/>)
5. Identify other workers who could be considered as being exposed as this information will be needed for contact tracing.
6. Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone sick to a healthcare facility or wherever applicable with HPA guidance.

## 10. PREVENTIVE MEASURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYEE

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1. The employee must ensure self-monitoring for fever or respiratory symptoms. If any symptoms develop stay home and report to supervisor and call 1676.
2. Be up to date with the COVID-19 related information shared by relevant authorities.
3. Physical distancing of at least 3 feet needs to be maintained at all times in the workplace and when taking breaks.
4. The employee must wear face mask at all times if tolerated (refer to COVID19 webpage <https://covid19.health.gov.mv/>)
5. Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
6. When coughing or sneezing, cover mouth and nose with tissue or cover with flexed elbow. Immediately discard the used tissue in a dustbin.
7. Wash hands frequently with soap and water (wash for at least 20 seconds) (Refer to Annex 2)
8. Employee must follow the hygiene etiquettes:
  - o Proper disposal of used tissues
  - o Used cloth masks that are reusable should be kept in a zipped cloth pouch, separate from clean masks. They should be washed before reuse.
  - o Clean the frequently touched areas in work stations.

## 11. RISK COMMUNICATION, TRAINING AND EDUCATION

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1. Increase awareness of COVID-19 among workers, promote safe individual practices at the workplace, engage workers in providing feedback on the preventive measures and their effectiveness (WHO, 2020).
2. Provide regular information about the risk of COVID-19 using information shared from HPA.
3. Special attention should be given to reaching out to engage vulnerable and marginalised groups of workers, such as migrant workers and people with disabilities.

## REFERENCE

1. (WHO 2020) Considerations for the public health and social measures in the workplace in the context of COVID-19, 10 March 2020,  
[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332050/WHO-2019-nCoV-Adjusting\\_PH\\_measures-Workplaces-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332050/WHO-2019-nCoV-Adjusting_PH_measures-Workplaces-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
2. (ILO 2020) Safe return to work: guide for employers on COVI-19 prevention  
[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---act\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_744033.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_744033.pdf)
3. (OSHA 2020) Guidance on preparing workplaces for COVID-19  
<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

## ANNEX I: HIGH RISK CATEGORIES OF UNDERLYING MEDICAL CONDITIONS FOR COVID-19

The below mentioned groups are at increased risk of developing COVID-19 related complications. The conditions need to be verified by the treating doctor.

People at increased risk of severe illness:

- A. People who are 60 years and above
- B. People of any age with underlying conditions such as:
  - a. Chronic Kidney disease (more than or equal to stage 3)
  - b. Moderate to Chronic Lung disease or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
  - c. Asthma requiring treatment or rescue therapy within the last 4 weeks
  - d. Immunocompromised state (Cancer, solid organ or bone marrow transplant, immunodeficiencies, HIV, use of high dose corticosteroids or use of other medicines causing immunodeficiency, acquired or congenital immunodeficiency or drugs causing low immunity)
  - e. Serious Heart Conditions such as heart failure, symptomatic coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies, pulmonary hypertension)
  - f. Thalassemia major and sickle cell disease
  - g. Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (uncontrolled)
  - h. Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus
  - i. Pregnancy
  - j. Advance liver disease

Note: In addition, any other condition as deemed by the treating doctor to be at high risk of complication.

# Hand Hygiene Techniques

## HOW TO HANDWASH?

with Soap and water

 Duration: 40-60 At least 20 seconds



0 Wet hands with water;



1 Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces;



2 Rub hands palm to palm;



3 Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa;



4 Palm to palm with fingers interlaced;



5 Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked;



6 Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa;



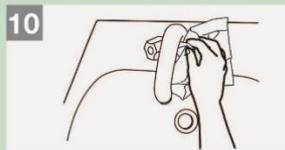
7 Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa;



8 Rub each wrist with opposite hand;



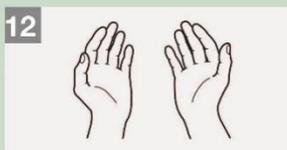
9 Rinse hands with water;



10 Use tissue to turn off faucet;



11 Dry hands thoroughly with a tissue;



12 Your hands are safe.

