Preventing and Managing Coronavirus Infection at Retail Stores

This document provides guidance on the issues to address when dealing with a coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) infected worker employed in a supermarket.

The document contains two sections.

- The first section provides advice on what to do should someone in the company become infected with the coronavirus.
- The second section provides background on how the coronavirus is spread and what can be done to prevent the spread of the virus.

A. Managing Employees Infected or Possibly Infected with Coronavirus

If an employee in your company has become infected with the coronavirus then it is very important to assist that employee, as well as other employees, and re-evaluate what can be done to stop the further spread of the coronavirus, whether at the workplace or at the homes of everyone connected with the employee.

To do this effectively each of the following issues needs to be addressed:

1. Provide support to that employee and assist with isolation,
2. Support to other staff and prepare for counselling
3. Inform the Health Department that you have an employee with coronavirus infection (COVID-19)
4. Attempt to establish how that employee got infected,
5. Identify who the employee might in turn have infected,
6. Assist with contacting all these people and helping with quarantining
7. Continue to screen staff to detect signs of possible coronavirus infection
8. Take steps to prevent any further infections
9. Possible temporary closure of the shop

Each of these 9 issues is discussed below.

A.1.   Support to COVID-19 infected employee

Since he/she tested for the coronavirus your employee is likely to be in quarantine and would have been notified by a doctor or nurse that they are infected and need to be isolated for 14 days. However, sometimes there are miscommunications around this and your employee might still be at work.

If the employee is at work then:

a) Separate him/her from other employees by placing in a well-ventilated room
b) Ask him/her to wash hands thoroughly
c) Provide him/her with a surgical mask if you have one, or else a cloth mask
d) Provide supportive counselling via your health and safety representative or via a trusted colleague
e) Assist the employee to follow the advice from the health department regarding isolation required to protect their family, friends, colleagues
f) Provide suitable sick leave arrangements for the 14 days that the employee will be in isolation and hence away from work
g) If the likelihood is high that the infection was occupationally acquired (in other words it arose out of or in the course of work duties), then a workers' compensation claim needs to be completed

If the employee is at home or at a quarantine facility, then:

a) Assist the employee to follow the advice from the health department regarding isolation
b) Provide suitable sick leave arrangements for the 14 days that the employee will be away from work

A.2.   Support to other staff:

- Reassure staff that you are handling the situation following advice form the Health Department.
- Contact your organisation's employee health and wellness division and alert them to rapidly assist with providing counselling and psychological support for the staff.

A3.   Inform the Health Department

- The department of health is aware of all individuals that test positive for COVID-19 through laboratory reporting mechanisms. However, due to delays in reporting, the employee may be aware of the diagnosis before the health department
- Contact the sub-structure or district health office in your area
- After contacting the Health Department, a team will be dispatched to assist you

A.4.   Establish how that employee got infected

The employee could have been infected by fellow workers/managers, customers, or by someone within their home or social circle. Therefore, it is important to:

- Assist the employee to identify if he/she came into contact with anyone who had symptoms of a throat and chest infection. These symptoms are:
  – Fever
  – Cough
  – Sore throat
  – Shortness of breath
  – Muscle aches
  – Tiredness
  – Loss of taste or smell
  – Diarrhoea
- Similarly, it is important for management to directly identify amongst the staff and frequent visitors to the company, which people have any of the symptoms listed above. Amongst these could be the person or persons who originally infected the employee and might still be unknowingly spreading the infection amongst other staff, visitors and customers.
- Make a list of all these employees and other people who have symptoms as they would need to be assessed, to decide if they should be tested for the coronavirus. Include the name, surname, contact number and address of these individuals where possible.
- Depending on how many employees are involved it might be necessary to temporarily close the shop while these investigations are underway.

A.5.   Identify who the employee might in turn have infected

Any individuals the employee came into contact with since he/she became ill could also develop the disease and need to be separated from other employees and customers, by going into quarantine.

- Ask the employee who he/she was in close contact with or worked closely with. These could be:
  – Other employees
  – Visitors to the shop
  – Regular customers
  – Suppliers
  – People in their neighbourhood
  – People at social gatherings
  – Family members

- Similarly ask all the staff at the company whether they recall being in close contact with or worked closely with the employee since the date that he/she became ill.
- Make a list of all these employees and other contacts as they may have to be quarantined to prevent further spread. Include the name, surname, contact number and address of these individuals where possible.
- Depending on how many employees are involved it might be necessary to temporarily close the shop while these investigations are underway.

A.6.   Assist with tracing and quarantining people who might have been infected

- The health department will interview all these contacts to determine whether the level of contact is sufficient for them to have become infected, and hence whether they need to be quarantined or not.
- Please provide the list of contacts to the health department.
- Please allow the health department access to staff via a quiet room or via the telephone.
- For those staff who need to be quarantined please provide suitable special leave arrangements for the 14 days that they will be in quarantine
- Quarantine means that people who are at high risk of being infected with coronavirus are separated from other people for 14 days so that they cannot infect others.
- Depending on how many employees are involved it might be necessary to temporarily close the shop while they are in quarantine

A.7.   Continue to Screen staff to detect signs of possible coronavirus infection

It is possible that some of the people who were in contact with the employee were not identified and hence might still be working and at risk of becoming infected.

Also, some people can be infected with coronavirus and yet be completely well, only becoming ill later. It is possible that such people could still be working and that they might even be the original spreaders of the coronavirus.

- Therefore, all staff should be monitored by the company daily to identify other employees that may develop symptoms.
- If they develop symptoms they should not come to work, but should instead report this to their supervisor and to the health department, who will advise them which testing centre to attend, so that the test for coronavirus can be done.
- However, some staff might come to work even if they have symptoms and therefore supervisors need to ask all staff about any symptoms they may have, every day before they start work.

A.8.   Steps to take to prevent any future infections amongst employees

- All areas where the employee worked or visited in the shop should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and water and wiped down with a diluted bleach solution (dilute 20ml of bleach per litre of water). If the area cannot be cleaned with soap and water then wipe down the area carefully with a bleach solution, or a 70% alcohol solution.
- This includes the kitchen, staff room, canteen, toilet facilities, trolleys, baskets, doors, computers, till counters and racks.
- If large surface areas and large numbers of objects need to be cleaned and disinfected then the store might temporarily need to close while this is being done
- Strictly follow the guidelines listed below on preventing coronavirus infection.

A.9.　Possible temporary closure of the shop

The Health Department may need to advise to close the shop temporarily due to the public health risk posed by remaining open.

This will be done in consultation with the shop managers and will depend upon a number of factors including the following:

The shop may need to be temporarily closed depending on the following factors:

- If the number of employees who have symptoms is considerably large, because of the time needed to investigate and determine if they should be tested for coronavirus infection or not.
- If the number of employees who are contacts of the employee/s with coronavirus infection is large, because of the time needed to investigate and determine if they need to be in quarantine or not.
- If the area in the store and the volume of goods that need to be cleaned is large, because of the time required to complete this important task.
- If the number of employees diagnosed with coronavirus infection and therefore needing isolation is large, since there may be insufficient staff to operate the store.
- If the staff complement that are identified as contacts of the infected employee and therefore need to be placed in quarantine is large, since there may then be insufficient staff to operate the store.

Temporary closure of the shop can be prevented by:

- By rapidly cleaning and disinfecting the surfaces and goods that were contaminated.
- By not rotating staff from other stores, or shifting staff between work areas in a large shop.
- By seconding staff from elsewhere or temporarily employing suitably skilled staff to replace those placed in isolation and quarantine.
- By preventing infection of staff with coronavirus by following the prudent steps outlined below.
- By training staff on how to prevent coronavirus infection.

B. Preventing Coronavirus Infection at Retail Stores in the Workplace

B.1.　How the Coronavirus is Spread

The coronavirus can be passed on from fluid droplets when coughing, sneezing, shouting and talking. It is therefore very important to cough/sneeze into your elbow or onto a tissue and then put the tissue into a bin and wash your hands straight away. Cloth masks are useful to reduce droplet spread.

In the retail and other essential services environment, there is usually short casual contact with many people. Additionally, prolonged contact between staff members often occurs depending on the nature of the job. Each of these interactions present a potential for the coronavirus to spread from person to person. When people cough and sneeze then fluid droplets get onto their hands and the objects or surfaces around them. The coronavirus is then spread by their hands touching the hands of others and touching objects such as money, door handles and counters. When someone touches their eyes, nose and mouth after they have touched other people's hands and objects with the coronavirus on it, then they can get infected.

B.2.　Measures to Prevent Spread of Coronavirus:

1. **Preparation for Prevention**
   - Perform a risk assessment of the shop to determine likely points where people would interact with each other and for places where contact between people and objects would occur.
   - For each of these points devise practical measures to limit that contact and to disinfect after that contact.
   - Train staff on how to prevent the spread of coronavirus at the workplace and at home.

- Provide staff with at least two cloth masks so that they can wash and dry one mask while the other is being used. Train staff on how to use and care for a cloth mask. See below.
- Where practical work clothes should be left at the store and laundered in bulk using standard safety precautions during laundering.
- If it is not feasible to leave work clothes at the shop for laundering then advise staff to remove their work clothes at the workplace and place in a plastic bag. They should wash their hands after taking off the work clothes. They should then clean the work clothes by washing it in warm water at home.
- If it is not even feasible to change their clothes at work, then staff should remove their work clothes immediately when they get home and place them in a washing basket. They should wash their hands after removal of the work clothes.
- Staff would need sufficient work clothes uniforms to allow a daily change of work clothes.

2. **Physical distancing:**
- The best way to protect yourself from infection is to keep a distance of 1,5 metres (2 arm lengths) from people
- Avoid crowded areas. Avoid having staff crowded together at work.
- Rearrange work spaces so that each staff member can maintain a distance of 1,5 metres from other staff members
- Do not allow staff members to gather close together in common areas such as kitchens
- Employers should wherever possible allow staff to work from home and some staff performing administrative tasks might be able to.
- Reduce movement of regional managers and supervisors between stores where possible.
- Avoid handshakes and physical contact with people. Greet people with a smile, or a nod, or a bow, or a wave.
- When staff travel in public or designated staff vehicles such as a minibus taxi or bus they should sit as far from other passengers as possible. The vehicle should not be filled to more than 50% of its loading capacity and staff should wear cloth masks.

3. **Regular Hand-washing and hygiene measures**
- All staff should regularly wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. Or they can use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser and rub their hands for 20 seconds. Soap and alcohol-based hand sanitisers kill the coronavirus. Hand sanitisers must therefore have alcohol in it. Sanitisers without alcohol do not kill the coronavirus.
- Staff must wash their hands after they have touched people and surfaces and objects which the coronavirus could have landed on.
- Staff should not touch their mouth and nose or rub their eyes with unwashed hands.
- Ensure that facilities are available for all staff and customers to wash their hands regularly or to use alcohol based hand sanitiser frequently.
- Staff should wash their hands (for at least 20 seconds) after touching others and surfaces where nose and mouth fluid droplets frequently land (door handles, counters, money, credit card machines). Or else rub their hands for 20 seconds with an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- When staff are in a situation where they have to touch people and/or take things from them, such as money or credit cards, then they should offer them alcohol-based hand sanitiser to clean their hands before assisting them. Spray the hand sanitiser on their hands. Do not give them the hand sanitiser container.
- When customers enter and leave the supermarket they should be offered to have alcohol-based hand sanitiser sprayed on their hands.
- Clean surfaces and equipment regularly with soap and water. Or else wipe down with either an alcohol-based hand sanitiser, or a dilute solution of bleach. Dilute 5ml (1 teaspoon) of bleach per 250ml of water. Or dilute 20ml of bleach per litre of water.

- Staff and customers should cough into their elbow or a tissue and then put the tissue in a bin and wash their hands straight away.
- Staff and customers should not touch their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

B.3.　Specific advice for the Retail and Service environment

1. **Staff Training**
   - Managers must make sure that all staff are educated on the ways in which coronavirus is spread and measures to be taken to prevent infection.
   - Each category of staff must clearly understand what activities of their job poses risk of infection and which prevention measures apply specifically to them
   - Messaging should be repeated at regular intervals and supported by appropriate signage

2. **Store Entrance: Controlling the number of people in the store:**
   - Retail stores should have only one entrance/ exit open to customers
   - The number of people in the store at a time must be limited. This number will be based on the size of the store (floor space). The guidance is that the number of people allowed is the floor meterage divided by 4. So, one person per 4 square metres. This number must include the staff in the store.
   - Once this number is reached, customers can only be allowed in to the store as other customers leave.
   - At least two staff members should be placed at the door of large stores to control customers entering the store and to make sure that customers are queuing safely
   - One staff member is to control the number of people entering the store at any time.
   - The other should monitor the customers that are queuing, to make sure they are keeping a safe distance from each other (at least 1.5 metre distance from each other).
   - This distance can be clearly identified by using shopping trolleys to space customers in the queue and by using floor markings placed 1,5 metres apart.
   - Direct customers to leave a space between their trolley and the next person and direct them to stand behind the floor markings while they wait outside the shop.
   - Offer customers alcohol-based hand sanitiser to clean their hands before they enter the shop and when they leave the shop.
   - Spray the hand sanitiser on their hands. Do not give the customers the hand sanitiser container.
   - Clean the handles of shopping trolleys/baskets before returning them to the bays. This can be done by placing a staff member at the trolley bay.
   - Offer customers alcohol based sanitising wipes to clean the handles of shopping trolleys/baskets, or a staff member should spray and wipe the handles with alcohol based sanitiser before the customer uses the basket or trolley.

3. **Physical distancing in-store:**
   - In the store, a staff member should make sure that customers and staff are keeping a safe distance from each other.
   - At the tills, floor markings at 1.5 metre intervals can assist to make sure that customers queuing for the till keep a safe physical distance. There should be signage directing customers to these markings.
   - Staff should make sure that the aisles are kept clear and not blocked by boxes or other items that will make physical distancing more difficult
   - Customers can be requested to make use of shopping trolleys even if they will not require one for the number of items they need to purchase. Using the trolley will help keep a safe distance from others
   - Spread out goods in the aisles so that people do not need to be too close together
   - Make regular announcements to remind staff and customers to maintain a safe physical distance

4. **Key moments for hand washing/use of hand sanitiser:**

- Offer customers alcohol-based hand sanitiser to clean their hands before they enter the shop and when they leave the shop.
- Spray the hand sanitiser on their hands. Do not give the customers the hand sanitiser container.
- Offer customers alcohol based sanitising wipes to clean the handles of shopping trolleys/baskets, or a staff member should spray and wipe the handles with alcohol based sanitiser.
- Place sanitising wipes at other frequent touch point areas e.g. weighing scales, door handles.
- Offer customers alcohol-based hand sanitiser to clean their hands before you assist them at the till or counter
- Also offer alcohol-based hand sanitiser to customers when you are finished assisting them at the till or counter.
- Where possible, allow customers to swipe/insert their own cards into card machines, or use 'tap' or 'snap' methods to minimise passing cards back and forth.
- Then wipe the surface area, till and credit card machine with hand sanitiser after assisting each customer.
- Then rub your hands for 20 seconds with alcohol-based sanitiser after you have wiped the surface area, till and credit card machine.
- At the end of each day clean your entire work area with the cleaning products which you normally use for the various surfaces and equipment. Alternatively wipe it with a dilute solution of bleach. Dilute 5ml (1 teaspoon) of bleach per 250ml of water. Or dilute 20ml of bleach per litre of water.

5. **Use of cloth face masks:**

- Cloth face masks are recommended for use by staff and customers. Cloth face masks offer better protection than not wearing any mask.
- Each person should have 2 cloth face masks so that one is available for use while the other is being washed. If you are wearing a mask, you must still make sure to follow the other measures to prevent spread – keep a 1.5 metre distance from other people and wash your hands regularly.
- You must also make sure that you know the proper way to put on, wear and take off your mask.
- Take note of the following advice for wearing cloth face masks:
  - Wash your hands before putting on the mask
  - Place the mask with the correct side facing your nose and mouth. Make sure both are covered well.
  - Tie the strings behind your head or if the mask has elastic bands, make sure they are tight.
  - Once you have put on the cloth face mask and you are comfortable with the fit of the mask, DO NOT TOUCH YOUR FACE OR THE MASK until you take off the mask
  - Take off the mask by untying the strings or elastic bands and carefully fold the mask inside out OR hold it by the strings and place it into a container ready to be washed.
  - DO NOT TOUCH THE OUTSIDE OF THE MASK when you are taking it off
  - Do not store the mask around your neck when not in use.
  - Wash your hands thoroughly after taking off the mask.
  - Wash in warm water and iron your cloth mask everyday
  - If a staff member needs to take off their mask during the work day (e.g. during tea/lunch break) and is then required to put it on again, care must be taken to only handle the masks by the strings of the mask. The mask must be stored in a paper bag (clearly labelled with the person's name) when not in use.

6. **Use of face shields or visors:**

- There is currently no evidence to support the use of face shields in a retail environment as they are bulky and impractical and staff would probably frequently touch them and potentially contaminate their hands.

- However, they theoretically provide some protection and if staff wish to use them, then they must use them properly.
- The same precautions apply as for cloth face masks:
  - Wash your hands before putting on the visor
  - Once you have put on the visor and you are comfortable with the fit of the visor, DO NOT TOUCH YOUR FACE OR THE VISOR until you take off the visor
  - Take off the visor by the forehand band
  - DO NOT TOUCH THE OUTSIDE OF THE VISOR when you are taking it off
  - Do not store the visor flipped up on your head when not in use.
  - Wash your hands thoroughly after taking off the visor.
  - Clean the visor by wiping with alcohol based sanitiser
  - If a staff member needs to take off their visor during the work day (e.g. during tea/lunch break) and is then required to put it on again, care must be taken to only handle the visor by the headband.
  - The mask must be stored in a designated area (clearly labelled with the person's name) when not in use and should be wiped with alcohol based sanitiser before using again.

7. Use of Gloves:

Gloves are not recommended for use by retail staff. Staff should wash their hands frequently or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser instead.

Note that food handlers (e.g. staff working in the deli section) should continue to wear disposable plastic gloves as usual and should adhere to all food safety handling measures.

8. Perspex or glass guards at tills:

- Perspex or glass guards may be installed at tills to create a barrier between the cashier and the customer.
- If installed these guards must be cleaned regularly using soap, water and disinfectant.
- Signage should be present instructing staff and customers not to touch the Perspex guards

9. Ventilation:

Maximise natural ventilation in stores. This can be done, for example, by leaving a back door open with a security gate on, or opening windows, or using fans.

10. Advice for till-points:
- Maintain physical distancing at till points and ensure that customers in the queue are 1,5 metres apart. Ensure that they stand behind the 1,5 metre floor markers.
- Cashiers and packers should sanitise their hands using an alcohol based hand sanitiser prior to assisting each customer.
- Offer customers alcohol-based hand sanitiser to clean their hands before being assisted at the till or counter
- Where possible, allow customers to swipe their own loyalty and credit cards and to use payment systems that minimise contact such as "tapping" and barcode scanning systems such as Snapscan.
- Also offer alcohol-based hand sanitiser to customers when you are done assisting them at the till or counter.
- Wipe the surface area, till and credit card machine with sanitiser after assisting each customer.
- Sanitise your hands for 20 seconds with alcohol-based sanitiser after you have wiped down the surface area, till and credit card machine.
- Packer should sanitise their hands after each customer.
- At the end of each day clean the entire cashier work area with the cleaning products which you normally use for the various surfaces and equipment. Alternatively wipe it with a dilute solution of bleach. Dilute 5ml (1 teaspoon) of bleach per 250ml of water. Or dilute 20ml of bleach per litre of water.

11. Staff canteen or break room:

- Work shifts and break times should be staggered so as to minimise the number of staff in the "break room" or canteen at a time
- Where possible (depending on the specific facility and weather) encourage staff to spend their breaks outdoors and remind them to continue to practice physical distancing
- Display signage encouraging staff to wash their hands thoroughly before eating and to maintain physical distancing
- Ensure that there is a wash basin and soap available in the break room for staff to use
- Clean all surfaces thoroughly and frequently

12. Self-service food stations:

- Self-service food stations in which food items are left partially covered or uncovered so that customers can help themselves should ideally be closed where possible
- Where fresh produce is sold, signage should be displayed encouraging customers to make a selection before they touch the item, so that customers do not touch multiple items which may then spread infection.

13. Staff bathroom facilities:

- Encourage staff to wash their hands by displaying appropriate signage
- Ensure that there is water and soap available for hand washing. Contactless tap systems or taps that can be operated with elbows are preferred.
- Do not use shared towels in the bathroom. Rather make use of paper towels that can be disposed of into sealed bins (operated by a step).
- Ensure that bins are large enough to hold multiple paper towels and/or empty the bins frequently.

14. Handling of Waste:

- Waste from waste containers should be disposed of into plastic bags and sealed before discarding into the general waste for refuse collection.
- Staff handling waste must wear utility gloves when emptying the waste containers.
- Waste handlers and cleaning staff should wear closed shoes.

15. Receiving goods from suppliers:

- Drivers should remain in their vehicle as far as possible
- Physical distance should be maintained when receiving goods
- Drivers must use hand sanitiser before handing any delivery documents to staff
- Ensure regular hand washing/use of sanitiser

16. Administrative staff:

- Where possible administrative staff should work from home
- If work from home is not possible, the number of staff members in a workspace must be minimised.
- Visitors to the store site (including supervisors and managers) should be minimised wherever possible
- All visitors must be made aware of all prevention measures upon arrival at the store and expected to fully comply with all prevention measures