

## **Hazard assessments and preventive measures at workplaces in response to the risk of COVID-19 infection**

The Disease Prevention and Control Officer and the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management have declared the highest – emergency – level of civil protection – in view of the viral pandemic which causes the COVID-19 illness. Aims of the measures that have been taken by the authorities include reducing possible spread of infection and protecting those who have underlying health conditions. For further details, see the website [www.covid.is](http://www.covid.is).

### **Workplaces**

Icelandic workplaces must draw up appropriate action plans and inform employees of the precautionary measures to be taken to reduce and control the hazards posed by COVID-19. They must also have response plans in place to use in the event of employees becoming infected by the virus or being required to remain in quarantine.

### **What can be done to protect employees and others at the workplace?**

It is important to keep up to date on the latest information about COVID-19 and to follow advice so as to ensure that all measures taken will be appropriate and in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Directorate of Health and the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency. For further information, see [www.covid.is](http://www.covid.is).

### **The following general instructions apply:**

- Refer constantly to the appropriate sources of information and keep response plans and planned measures up to date as the situation changes.
- Inform employees regularly as the situation develops.
- Take the appropriate measures in consultation with employees, or their representatives, in the light of official recommendations.
- Apply these measures and make them clear to all employees. This includes giving clear instructions and guidance as to what each employee is expected to do.
- Employees should know when they are expected to be at the workplace and engaged in their normal tasks and when they are expected to work from home or to stay away from the workplace.
- It must be clear what measures are to be taken if employees fall ill and what symptoms should be taken seriously as signs of possible infection. For example, employees must be told clearly that they should not turn up for work if they have cold or flu symptoms, even if these are only mild and are not typical for COVID-19 and are not likely to be caused by the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Employees must be reminded of their duty to take responsibility for their own health and not to endanger the health and safety of other people by thoughtless conduct.

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### **Risk assessment in the workplace.**

Employers must identify potential risks in employees' jobs in order to ensure their health and safety. Risk assessment must be carried out for all types of jobs: obviously, different types of work involve different types and levels of risk as regards potential spread of infection, with a difference between "front line" jobs and others where employees are not in direct contact or proximity with customers.

We must remember that there is no "one size fits all" solution; a separate assessment must be made at each workstation.

### **Preventive measures.**

Once a hazard assessment has been made, consideration must be given to the preventive measures that are practicable to avoid the hazards identified.

#### ***General preventive measures to reduce risk of infection:***

- Ensure an appropriate distance (2 meters) between employees.
- Urge employees to wash their hands frequently.
- Have alcohol-based hand disinfectant accessible to workers throughout the workplace.
- Reduce physical contact between people, i.e. handshakes and embraces or other contact. Find other ways of greeting that do not involve skin contact.
- Remind employees to avoid touching their faces, particularly their eyes, noses and mouths.

#### ***The following measures can be taken where jobs do not involve direct contact with other employees or customers:***

- Encourage use of electronic communication and telephone calls, both between employees and between them and customers.
- Assess the need for meetings, particularly in the case of large meetings, and rely instead on teleconferences using electronic means where this can be done. If it is necessary to hold a meeting, ensure that those attending are separated by 2 metres in the meeting room.
- Encourage employees to work from home if possible.

#### ***If the nature of the work is such that face-to-face contact is essential, then various special measures can be taken to reduce the risk of infection.***

These include the following:

- ✓ Issuing employees with the appropriate protective clothing, and with information and practical training in how to use it. It must also be clear why and when they are obliged to use it.
- ✓ Ensure that employees have access to hand-washing facilities.
- ✓ Give employees the opportunity to wash their hands frequently with soap, and for at least 20 seconds each time.

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- ✓ Where water and soap are not immediately within reach, alcohol-based hand disinfectant must be accessible both to employees and to customers. For example, dispensers of disinfectant can be placed on service counters and customers encouraged to disinfect their hands before being served.
- ✓ Clean frequently used surfaces, using disinfectants.
- ✓ Ensure that it is clear to all employees what their day-to-day tasks and duties are while the virus infection lasts.
- ✓ Ensure that employees have access to hand written answers to questions asked frequently by customers.
- ✓ Ensure that, in general, there is a suitable distance between people unless physical contact is necessary (e.g., in care-giving work); in such cases, measures must be taken to ensure that employees use satisfactory protective clothing and equipment.
- ✓ Examine other possible ways of carrying out tasks that will limit physical contact or close proximity to other people.
- ✓ Put up notices reminding employees and customers not to shake hands when greeting or parting.
- ✓ Put up signs encouraging employees and customers not to cough or sneeze without covering their mouths and noses, but rather to use tissues or the crook of their elbows. Such precautions will reduce the likelihood of droplets bearing infection coming into contact with their hands.
- ✓ Give employees encouragement and opportunity to discuss their concerns, e.g. by exchanging information and chatting with their immediate superiors or colleagues on a daily basis.

### **Precautions applying in staff canteens.**

It is particularly important to reduce spread of infection in staff canteens, e.g. by requiring employees to wash their hands and disinfect them before they enter the canteen and to use disposable gloves. It is also a good idea to have the canteen staff place the food onto the plates so as to reduce employees' contact with the canteen implements, and to limit the number of employees using the canteen at any given time.

### **What to do when a suspected case of COVID-19 arises.**

There must be clear procedures in place covering what to do if a suspected case of COVID-19 arises, either in an employee or a customer.

- The health services must be contacted, either by telephone at 1700, a primary health centre (see the website [heilsugaeslan.is](https://heilsugaeslan.is)) or via the website [heilsuvera.is](https://heilsuvera.is)
- The employee's immediate superior must be informed.

Attention is also drawn to the following checklist for front-line employees, published by the Directorate of Public Health: <https://www.landlaeknir.is/utgefid-efni/skjal/item38938/>

The Administration of Occupational Safety and Health encourages employers and employees to keep up to date on new information from the Directorate of Public Health and the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management of the National Commissioner of Police on the web page [www.covid.is](https://www.covid.is).

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