

# SAFCEC Guideline: Protection of the Workforce during COVID-19

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## 1. Introduction

Construction sites operating during the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic need to ensure they are protecting their workforce and minimising the risk of spread of infection. This guidance is intended to introduce consistent measures on construction sites of all sizes in line with the Government's recommendations on social distancing when conducting their workplace risk assessments. These are exceptional circumstances and the industry must always comply with the latest Government advice on Coronavirus including compliance with the **Occupational Health and Safety Act No.85 of 1993 and the Disaster Management Act, of 2002, and the subsequent regulations.**

Given the nature of the construction industry and its strict health and safety regulatory environment in which we have always and continue to operate, we are an industry that is able to deal with such an unprecedented global pandemic. With trained health and safety practitioners within organisations - driven by existing health, safety, environment, risk and quality policies and procedures - already exist within the construction industry, all of which is prescribed by the **Occupational Health and Safety Act No.85 of 1993** and in particular, Section 8 of the Act that places the onus on employers to provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risk to the health of their employees. The **Construction Health and Safety Accord** signed by Government, Organised Labour and Organised Business further reinforces these considerations.

This document is for the purpose of a coordinated approach and common action to deal with identifying COVID-19 cases and risks within the construction industry and communities.

## 2. Responsibilities

To ensure and maintain a safe and healthy working environment for employees and members of the public, it is advised that all the construction companies should assess the workplace risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, giving due consideration to the response measures announced in the president's speech. Companies should therefore **determine mitigation measures to minimize risk as far as reasonably practicable, allowing work to continue safely and without harm to all relevant stakeholders, including clients, employees, contractors, suppliers, manufacturers and all interested and affected parties.**

### COVID-19 Symptom Screening

Recognising that the public health system will not be able to respond to every possible COVID-19 incident identified in the workplace, employers should have the following in place:

- Adequately train (directly or indirectly) identified company personnel to perform daily workplace COVID-19 symptom screening.
- Provide compulsory medical screening equipment
- Provide prescribed personal protective equipment (PPE) to those assigned to perform the screening.
- Companies should keep record of all such screening, and should an employee show any positive symptoms related to COVID-19, then such an employee will be quarantined, and the **Department of Health Hotline 0800 029 999** immediately contacted.

Contractors will furthermore ensure a healthy working environment by:

- As far as reasonably practicable educating employees, subcontractors and their employees and all visitors to our sites and offices as to the preventive measures to avoid infection.
- Ensuring the workplace, ablution facilities, eating facilities are clean and hygienic.
- Providing sanitising and/or hand wash facilities as required.
- Promoting regular hand washing by employees and sub-contractors.
- Reducing meetings and gatherings that bring individuals within 2 meters of each other for extended durations.
- Providing PPE when close contact work is required.
- The separation of individuals wherever practicably possible.
- Promoting good respiratory hygiene by employees and sub-contractors.
- Keeping employees and sub-contractors informed on developments related to COVID-19.
- Each site and or Company is to open and maintain a COVID-19 register and will update the information daily.

Employers to obtain relevant information, recommendations and topics regarding the COVID-19 pandemic from the World Health Organization's (WHO) website ([www.who.int](http://www.who.int)) for use in the education of employees, and to display the information in prominent areas within every workplace. Such information should also be included in health and safety briefings both on project sites as well as offices. Detailed information on symptoms and protection can be found on the Corona Virus Q&A section of the WHO website (direct link: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses#>).

Employers to acknowledge the associated risks of the virus, act accordingly, and to put into place extraordinary health and safety measures. Employers are further advised to avoid disinformation in social media and to reference the following sources for official, accurate information and updates:

- |   |  |                       |
|---|--|-----------------------|
| ▪ The World Health Organisation                   | <a href="http://www.who.int">www.who.int</a>             | Twitter @who          |
| ▪ The National Institute of Communicable Diseases | <a href="http://www.nicd.co.za">www.nicd.co.za</a>       | Twitter @nicd_sa      |
| ▪ National Department of Health                   | <a href="http://www.health.gov.za">www.health.gov.za</a> | Twitter @HealthZA     |
| ▪ The Presidency                                  |  | Twitter @PresidencyZA |

### 3. Who should not report for duty?

Anyone who meets one of the following criteria should **not** report for duty / be present on site:

- Has a high temperature or a new persistent cough.
- Is a vulnerable person as identified by an Occupational Health Practitioner (by virtue of their age, underlying health condition, clinical condition or is pregnant).
- Is living with someone in self-isolation.

#### 4. Procedure if employee displays symptoms

If a worker develops a high temperature or a persistent cough while at work, they should:

- Return home immediately.
- Avoid touching anything.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and put it in a bin, or if they do not have tissues, cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow.

Thereafter, they must arrange to be tested and follow the government's requirements in terms of isolation and or quarantine and report this to the Department of Health.

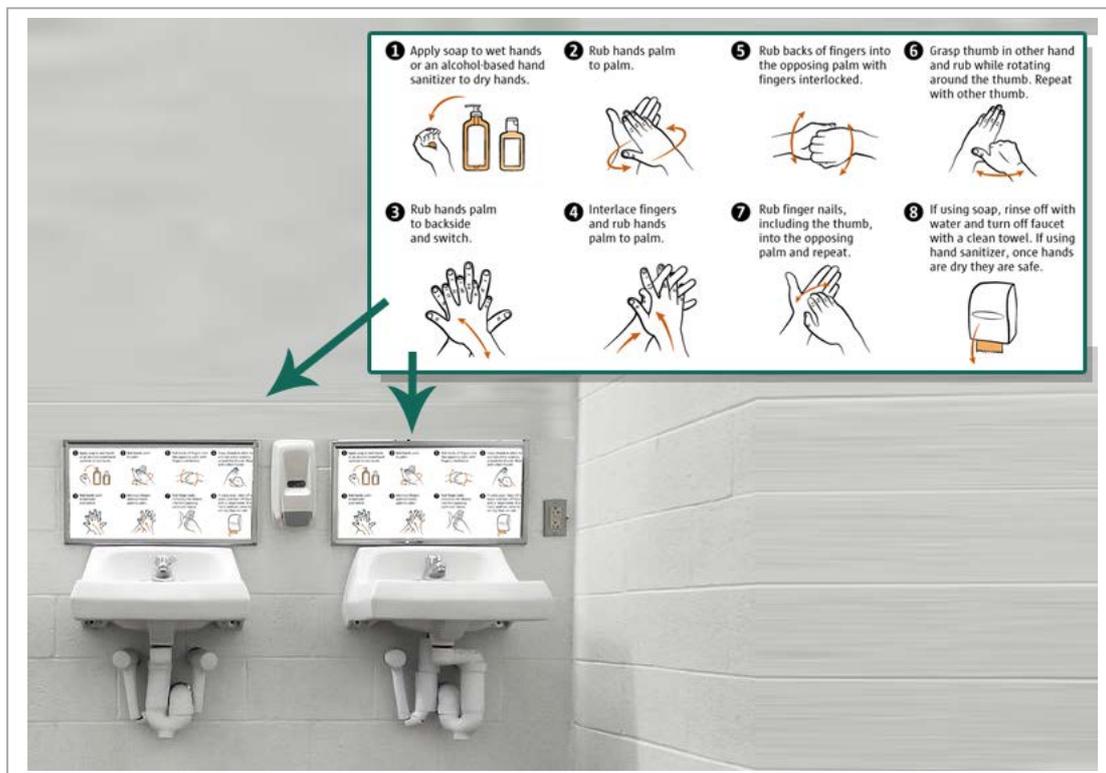
#### 5. Site Access Points

- Ad-hoc visitors to sites or offices are to be denied access.
- A strict visitor access control policy to be implemented for all sites or offices, which should include application, pre-screening procedures (including a medical and travel history questionnaire), and authorisation procedures.
- All individuals will be required to wash their hands with a hand sanitiser or soap and water, before and immediately after using a fingerprint reader such as those used for access control.
- Introduce staggered start times or multiple access points to reduce congestion.
- Have in place safety representatives equipped with the necessary PPE to ensure adequate distancing between workers (2m) is enforced at access points.
- No breathalysers are to be used. Should an individual display suspected intoxication, alternative methods of testing will be considered.
- Entrances to offices and sites must have a hand washing facility and all individuals entering and exiting the site must wash their hands - alternatively hand sanitiser must be provided.
- Hand washing technique posters shall be displayed near the hand wash area.
- A fever screening process will be implemented at all site access points.
- Visitor registers at entry points will be completed by the security guard and not by the visitor.
- Security guards will wash their hands every time they use the visitors register and pen.

#### 6. Hand Washing

- All individuals shall wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use approved alcohol based sanitizer when: -
  - entering or leaving a site;
  - before eating
  - after eating;
  - after site walks;
  - after ablutions;
  - after touching hand rails, door handles, paper, envelopes etc; and

- any other interactions that may require hand washing.
- Basins with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitizer must be provided at: -
  - site access points;
  - offices;
  - ablution facilities;
  - eating areas; and
  - appropriate areas around the site such that a person does not need to walk further than 50m to access these facilities
- Where soap and water are provided for hand washing, so too must paper towels be provided for drying of hands.
- Workers who work in close contact shall have regular access to hand washing facilities.



## 7. Cleaning

- Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are frequently touched. This must be done at regular intervals and shall include: -
  - door handles;
  - handrails;
  - basins;
  - taps;
  - toilets;
  - lift and hoist controls;

- showers;
  - tables;
  - chairs;
  - computer equipment;
  - telephones / cellphones;
  - photocopiers;
  - gates; and
  - biometric readers
- As far as practicable, crockery and eating utensils should be disposable.
  - Sites are to ensure that soap and water is always available and hand sanitiser levels are kept at levels that are sufficient.
  - Adequate rubbish bins are to be provided for the disposal of paper towels.
  - Cleaning registers are to be provided in the areas where regular cleaning is required.

## 8. Respiratory Hygiene

- Individuals who sneeze must be considerate. Leave the group or room, cover their mouths and nose with a tissue and dispose of the tissue properly; alternatively sneeze into a flexed inside of the elbow.
- Avoid touching one's eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

## 9. Social Distancing

The following will apply to all individuals on a construction site:

- There will be no hand shaking with any person.
- Avoid the unnecessary touching of other individuals.
- When talking, sitting or eating with others, keep a distance of at least 2m between yourselves.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has a fever or cough and request that site or office management follow these procedures and guidelines in terms of dealing with this person.
- Lifts should be avoided, as they are a confined space. Use stairways and do not touch the hand rails.
- Where tasks require workers to be in close contact, the site shall provide the appropriate PPE for this.
- Wherever possible, work that requires close contact shall be planned to reduce the number of individuals involved in the activity at any one time.

## 10. PPE

- Workers who work in close contact with one another shall wear appropriate PPE
- Workers shall be trained on how to wear, remove and - where appropriate - dispose of their PPE properly.
- Bins for the disposal of masks shall be provided.
- Safety and supervisory personal shall ensure no close contact work is carried out by workers who are using defective or inadequate PPE.

## 11. Ablution, Eating and Changing Facilities

- The number of individuals using these facilities at one time is to be restricted to allow for social distancing requirements, and this should be supervised accordingly to ensure compliance.
- Break times are to be staggered to reduce congestion.
- Eating tables should be cleaned before and after each use.

## 12. Meetings / Briefings

- Meetings where spacing of individuals would be less than 2m apart are not to be permitted.
- Toolbox talks shall be limited to a maximum duration of 15 minutes and shall be in groups that allow for a 2m spacing between individuals but do not require the speaker to shout.
- Toolbox talks must be held in well ventilated areas.
- The awareness of hand washing and other hygiene behaviours is to be communicated daily.
- Site meetings shall be reduced to only those that are essential and shall wherever possible be held via video conference.
- Wherever possible, meetings and / or briefings shall be held in open areas with good ventilation.

## 13. Transport

- Where transport is provided, occupancy of the vehicle should be reduced in line with government policy in the taxi industry.
- Transport vehicles should be sanitized before and after each trip.
- A fever screening process will be implemented prior to embarkation.



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