Guidelines

Guidelines for Government Employees and Organizations in the wake of COVID-19 epidemic

Objective

To provide guidelines regarding the mitigation of spread of person-to-person transmission of COVID-19 in Government office settings.

Rationale

The increasing number of COVID-19 positive cases in the offices reduces the official efficiency and puts a burden on the official conduct of business. In wake of this, it is prudent to develop procedures in case of any detection of officers/officials with COVID-19 positive test and make necessary arrangements for continuation of the official business. It is also prudent that the administrivia measures are in place for periodic cleaning and where necessary, disinfection of these structures

General Preventive Measures for Government Employees

- Every government office must develop SOPs, based on these guidelines, related to the work environment (Office/Site), share these with all its employees and ensure mechanisms for implementation.
- All employees must wear surgical/medical masks at all times
- Sanitising hand rub dispensers to be placed at prominent places. Ensure these dispensers are regularly refilled
- There should be designated entry points for any office building having trained personal for "Thermal screening" of all who enter the building (staff or visitors). Those exhibiting fever should not be allowed access into the office.
- Provide employees with instructions on hygiene measures and behavioural conduct
- Every office shall have at least one notified staff member dedicated to ensuring that safety precautions and hygiene recommendations are implemented
- Posters should be pasted at prominent places on the cough and sneeze actions (respiratory etiquettes)
- Surfaces that are frequently touched with hands should be cleaned often. This would include (but would not be limited to): Doors in entrance/exiting areas, counters and

shelves, desk surfaces, chairs (e.g. arm rests), tables, phones, computer keyboards (especially if shared), counters, light switches, copy machines, staplers, scissors

- Social distancing of 2 meters must be observed at workplaces and must adjust the seating arrangements accordingly
- Encourage virtual meetings
- Limit use and occupancy of elevators to maintain social distancing of at least 2 meters
- Every government office should have contact details of all employees for tracking in case of any positive COVID-19 infection
- Elderly employees (age > 50) or with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease should be encouraged to work from home

Document handling

- If feasible, promote and use alternative document handling methods, such as: taking orders by phone, email, WhatsApp or document pictures
- Exchange of devices, utensils and paperwork/file work should be avoided as much as possible
- Where a physical exchange of documentation/paperwork/file work cannot be avoided
  - Use disposable gloves
  - Use hand sanitizer (70% alcohol) or wash entirely often (including nails and back of hand) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after exchanging/ touching paperwork
  - Assign a tray to deposit paperwork/file work, separated 2 meters / 6 feet from an individual workstation
- Where applicable, assign someone responsible for managing documentarian/paperwork/forms

Heating, Ventilation and Air-conditioning (HVAC) System

- Before using the air conditioning and ventilation system, it should be cleaned. It can be disinfected by spraying, soaking or wiping with chlorine (bromine), quaternary ammonium salts, or chlorine dioxide disinfectant.
- As recommended by WHO, any ventilation or air conditioning system that normally runs with a recirculation mode should now be set up to run on full outside air where this is possible
- If any suspected or asymptomatic cases were detected, the air conditioning and ventilation system should be stopped immediately
- Natural ventilation should be encouraged
- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, and other methods should be encouraged

Notifying the Focal person

- Every Government office shall notify a Focal Person/ Help desk for COVID-19 whereby the officers/officials would report any suspected/reported case of COVID-19 and issue instructions accordingly

- The Focal Person/ Help Desk shall provide assistance to the employees and notify the lab confirmed cases to the concerned authorities

Suspected/Confirmed COVID-19 cases

Immediate Response

- Government employees who have COVID-19 symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath) should notify their head/supervisor and stay home.
- Employees who appear to have symptoms upon arrival at work or who become sick during the day should immediately be separated from other employees and sent home.
- Employees should not return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met, in consultation with healthcare providers and local health departments.
- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 (these are individuals requiring quarantine) should notify their supervisor and work from home

Protect Other Employees

- If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure but maintain confidentiality
- Fellow employees should self-monitor for symptoms
- Identify where the infected employee worked and came into contact with (within 2 meters, having exchange of documents without precautions, long exposure time) during the 14 days prior to testing positive or first displaying symptoms
- Employers should notify and instruct those employees who came into contact with the sick employee within the 14-day period to go home and self-isolate for 14 days, and work from home
- Employees should not return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met

Disinfection of Workplace

- In case of reporting of the lab confirmed Covid-19 positive cases, the office setting is to be closed/sealed for disinfection with the recommended disinfection material. (Refer Mo/NHSRC guidelines of cleaning & disinfecting guidelines)
- The office staff is to be sent home for isolation and follow the instructions of the Focal Person/Help Desk
- Urgent measures should be taken for proper fumigation, sterilization and other necessary precautionary measures within premises of office setting after persons suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 positive
- Employers should follow (Mo/NHSR&C guidelines for cleaning and disinfection of environmental surfaces) for disinfection of office

- Training should be provided to all cleaning staff on site prior to providing cleaning tasks. Training should include when to use personal protective equipment, what PPE is necessary, how to properly wear, use, and take off PPE, and how to properly dispose of PPE
- Employers must ensure workers are trained on the hazards of the cleaning chemicals
- Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment (like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and copy/print/scanning machines) used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces

Note: The above recommendations are being regularly reviewed by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination and will be updated based on the international recommendations and best practices.

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References

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2. Guidelines for environmental infection Control in Health-Care Facilities. Recommendations of CDC and Health-Care Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC), 2003 (Updated July 2019)
3. Interim Guidelines for Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection of Areas Exposed to Confirmed Case(s) of COVID-19 in Non-Healthcare Premises
4. COVID-19: General Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting for Non-Health Care Setting-NYC health
5. Cleaning and disinfection of environmental surfaces in the context of COVID-19- Interim guidance-WHO

For more information, please contact:

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http://covid.gov.pk/

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