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TO ALL HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS AND PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATIONS

Circular No 07 of 2020

STATE OF DISASTER: GUIDELINES FOR THE CONTAINMENT/MANAGEMENT OF THE CORONA VIRUS (COVID 19) IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. With the first cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) now confirmed in South Africa, the President of the Republic has declared a national State of Disaster. COVID-19 will undoubtedly impact on the public service in various ways. To mitigate the impact on the health of the citizens we serve, our employees and service delivery, it is important to have a common approach in the manner departments may deal with cases linked to the virus.

1.2. **KEEPING UP TO DATE:** Knowledge about the virus is continuing to unfold. For updates and the latest information, refer to the following resources:

- i. National Department of Health: <https://www.health.gov.za>
- ii. National Institute for Communicable Diseases: <https://www.nicd.ac.za>
- iii. National Institute of Occupational Health: <https://www.nioh.ac.za>
- iv. National Health Laboratory Service: <https://www.nhls.ac.za>
- v. World Health Organisation: <https://www.who.int>
- vi. Coronavirus Hotline Number: 0800 02 99 99

1.3. To strengthen communication and to discourage the spreading of fake news the National Department of Health (NDoH) has also developed a service via WhatsApp where the latest information on COVID-19 can be obtained and accessed on +27 600 123 456. Departments are encouraged to communicate this service to their employees to ensure they are in receipt of the latest information and combat the spreading of fake news that has the potential to disrupt service delivery, undo containment measures and lead to panic.

2. GUIDANCE FOR DEPARTMENTS TO PREPARE FOR THE CONTAINMENT/MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19.

2.1. The public service as the largest employer in the country must support the national agenda in combating COVID-19.

2.2. Heads of Department must immediately act on confirmed cases of COVID-19.

2.3. Departments have a legal obligation in accordance with Section 8, of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), 1993, as amended to, where reasonably practicable, provide and maintain a safe, healthy work environment that is without risk to employees.

2.4. Regulation 53 provides that a head of department shall establish and maintain a safe and healthy work environment for employees of the department and a safe and healthy service delivery environment for members of the public service regulations.

2.5. *Departments responsible for employment in the services and education are advised to issue similar guidance.*

2.6. To comply with the OSHA in the light of the COVID-19 threat, Departments must take as a minimum, the following steps to manage /contain the spread of the virus:

2.6.1. Conduct a **risk assessment** to identify the risks of a COVID-19 outbreak in the department. Identify areas in the department where provisions against COVID-19 are still inadequate and processes to immediately/urgently correct these.

2.6.2. Revise existing **health and safety** provisions in the department.

2.6.3. Establish a departmental **steering committee** including Organised Labour to deal with all issues concerning COVID-19 reporting directly to the Head of Department.

2.6.4. Focus on **communicating** and consider a dedicated email address where all cases involving COVID-19 must be reported.

2.6.5. Develop **guidelines, action plans and protocols** to manage any confirmed cases of COVID-19 among staff or in your buildings. Protocols issued by the NDoH **must** be taken into consideration when drafting guidelines and action plans. Departments must ensure that these protocols are aligned to national directives and advice.

2.6.6. Departments must classify their services in terms of Direct, Indirect, Back End and Transversal and inform citizens of which key services they will make available during the three (3) month period that is:

- 2.6.6.1. Has the department decided to limit some of its services to better manage crowds and gatherings;
- 2.6.6.2. Where online services are provided citizens must be encouraged to use these services;
- 2.6.6.3. Departments must ensure that all visitors entering and leaving the department must be recorded.
- 2.6.6.4. Departments must identify a facility/sickbay for isolation purposes. The facility should be well ventilated and be regularly cleaned.
- 2.6.7. Conduct **awareness programmes** on the prevention and control of COVID-19.
- 2.6.8. Establish a **communication protocol for the reporting** of all COVID-19 cases by employees.
- 2.6.9. Ensure regular communication in the department regarding the measures in place as well as the response of the department to the pandemic.
- 2.6.10. Draft and distribute the contact **details of departmental representatives** tasked with dealing with COVID-19 for the different business units, offices and buildings.
- 2.6.11. **Keep up to date** with NDoH and World Health Organisation (WHO) advice, updates and communicate these to employees regularly.
- 2.6.12. Ensure **budget reprioritisation** to facilitate funding to deal with COVID-19.
- 2.6.13. Suspend all **non-essential domestic travelling**. Essential travel must be regarded as travel that is absolutely necessary and required in the interest of service delivery.
- 2.6.14. Suspend all **non-essential/non-critical meetings** inside or outside the department.
- 2.6.15. Utilise **teleconferences and video conferencing** as options to face to face meetings where applicable.
- 2.6.16. Keep the number of participants to **meetings** within the minimum advised by the NDoH and provide the necessary **precautionary measures**.
- 2.6.17. Postpone or cancel all **mass gatherings/events** requiring a congregation of large numbers of employees and/or the public.
- 2.6.18. In instances where applicable, consideration should be given to those occupations that allow employees to **work from home** as a means to **minimise travel and possible exposure** to COVID-19. It is incumbent on a department to ensure that the necessary infrastructure and IT requirements to facilitate remote working are in place. Such requests must be approved by the Head of Department. A register of employees must be kept and sent to the DPSA.
- 2.6.19. It is incumbent on departments to procure sufficient **hand sanitisers, soap, gloves, masks, tissues and when possible temperature scanners** for use to **monitor employee's** possible exposure in terms of the COVID-19 symptoms. The procurement of such equipment must be defrayed from departments existing budget allocations. Such screening must be done by personnel with the requisite expertise.

2.6.20. In line with Regulation 53 of the Public Service Regulations, 2016 the protocols to be developed to deal with COVID-19 must provide for when possible the **screening of employees on a daily basis** in the morning to ascertain their state of health and whether or not they display symptoms of COVID-19. Employees displaying such symptoms must be requested to seek medical treatment from a medical professional in line with NDoH guidelines.

2.6.21. **Gatherings** of more than 100 people is prohibited. Where gatherings consist of less than 100 people stringent measures as developed by NDOH must be put in place in order to facilitate the prevention and control of COVID-19. If the required measures are not put in place such gatherings must be postponed.

3. PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES EMPLOYEES MUST BE ENCOURAGED TO ADOPT

3.1. In order to remain healthy, it is important not to be exposed to the COVID-19 virus. Employees can protect themselves and others by doing the following:

3.1.1. Washing their hands frequently. Hands must be washed often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, an alcohol-based hand sanitiser with at least 60% alcohol can be used.

3.1.2. Avoiding close contact with people who are sick. At least one (1) meter distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing must be maintained.

3.1.3. Avoiding touching their eyes, nose, and mouth.

3.1.4. Covering their cough or sneeze with a tissue, and disposing of the tissue safely afterwards.

3.1.5. Cleaning and disinfecting frequently-touched objects and surfaces.

3.1.6. Wearing of masks is not necessary unless taking care of an infected person. It is recommended that only infected people wear masks to prevent the spread of the virus.

3.1.7. Employees who have a fever, cough and have difficulty breathing must seek medical attention immediately. Follow the directions of the NDoH when seeking medical attention.

4. MANAGEMENT OF FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

It is incumbent on departments to develop internal protocols and communication strategies for the management of frontline staff and members of the public to ensure the continuation of service delivery in their respective sectors in line with protocols on the management of COVID-19, issued by the NDoH and the World Health Organisation.

Departments, such as those in the Security sector, Correctional Services, Home Affairs amongst others that have to deliver front line services and engage with the public should issue guidelines

for their offices.

4.1. FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES

Front line employees come in direct contact with the public in executing their responsibilities and as such are most at risk of contracting COVID-19. To ensure the health and safety of frontline employees it is important that the following precautions be taken:

- 4.1.1. Provide frontline employees with the necessary protective equipment, e.g. latex gloves, etc. in handling documents and assisting citizens.
- 4.1.2. Provide frontline employees with sufficient training to assist them to identify the risks and mitigating it sufficiently.
- 4.1.3. Ensure the workspace of frontline employees have sufficient facilities for them to wash their hands.
- 4.1.4. Ensure the cleaning of the hard surfaces e.g. workstations, countertops, and doorknobs on an hourly basis. The cleaning of the surfaces must be recorded on a two (2) hourly basis
- 4.1.5. Ensure frontline employees are conversant with the protocols pertaining to COVID-19 in order to respond timeously to identify risks.
- 4.1.6. Prevention of close or physical contact in the workplace, such as shaking hands.

4.2. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC VISITING FRONTLINE OFFICES

Regulation 53 of the Public Service Regulations 2016 bestows the onus on the Head of Department to establish a safe and secure service delivery environment for members of the public. In this regard it is important that the following steps must be implemented as a minimum to adhere to the aforementioned provisions:

- 4.2.1. Ensure cleaning of the waiting area for members of the public on a two (2) hourly basis.
- 4.2.2. Provision of hand sanitisers at strategic places for members of the public. Ensure the numbers of members of the public allowed in the venue is consistent with the protocols and guidelines of the department and management of crowds in waiting areas or/and queues.
- 4.2.3. Installation of scanners and ensure each and every member of the public is checked before entering the facility.
- 4.2.4. Guide and direct members of the public displaying symptoms consistent with COVID-19 to a medical professional.
- 4.2.5. Avail awareness material on COVID-19 to members of the public advising on the necessity for adherence to the protocols for COVID-19
- 4.2.6. Ensure posters on COVID-19 are placed in strategic locations where members of the public can be informed.

5. GUIDELINE ON TRAVEL

- 5.1. In line with the declared national state of disaster all non-essential international and domestic travel is prohibited. Departments must keep up to date with the regular travel alerts which will be issued by government as the situation evolves. It is incumbent on departments to establish guidelines that will define essential travel internationally and domestically that is to be considered.
- 5.2. With regard to personal travel it is incumbent on the employee to disclose to the employer whether high/medium or low risk countries were visited during such travels. National protocols regarding travel must be followed.
- 5.3. Where applicable departments must develop a process to manage employees who return from official travel and national protocols must be followed.

6. GUIDANCE ON HOW TO MANAGE COVID-19 CASES

- 6.1. Given the ability to rapidly spread, the management of confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases is of paramount importance. In this regard to what must be done by the Head of Department for the following scenarios, the following guidelines must be observed as a minimum:
 - A) **An employee tested positive for COVID-19** the Head of Department should formally grant approval for sick leave in accordance with the Determination and Directive on Leave of Absence in the Public Service or incapacity leave in accordance with the Policy and Procedure on Incapacity Leave and Ill-health Retirement processes if the employee has exhausted his/her normal sick leave.
 - B) The Head of Department should formally grant approval in accordance with Public Service Regulation 51 for all employees who worked closely with the affected employee to self-quarantine for a period of 14 days to ensure the infection does not spread. This must be done in consultation with the relevant authorities and NDoH protocols. Such employees should be requested to work remotely. A list of such employees must be kept and submitted to the DPSA.
 - C) The cleaning/disinfection of the affected workspaces must be facilitated. Contact must be maintained with such employees as a means of monitoring and evaluation.
 - D) Report the cases in the required format to the DPSA via the dedicated email address COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.

6.1.1. An employee was exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19:

- A) In terms of the NDoH's guidelines all those employee who were in contact with the infected person are required to self-quarantine at home for a period of 14 days or for a duration as prescribed by the NDoH while being monitored for symptoms.
- B) The Head of Department should formally grant approval in accordance with Public Service Regulation 51 for the employee to self-quarantine for a period of 14 days or as prescribed by NDoH to ensure the infection does not spread. This must be done in consultation with the relevant authorities. Such employees can be requested to work remotely.
- C) The HoD must ensure that the affected workspace/s are cleaned/disinfected.
- D) Contact must be maintained with such employee as a means of monitoring and evaluation.
- E) Report the cases in the required format to the DPSA via the dedicated email address COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.

6.1.2. An employee was exposed to an unconfirmed case of COVID-19:

- A) If an employee has been in contact with a person who has not yet been confirmed as infected by COVID-19 while laboratory test results for COVID-19 are awaited. Until the outcome of test results is known the Head of Department can decide, informed and guided by NDoH, Legal Services and Human Resources if restrictions or special control measures need to be applied until the results are known.
- B) Once the results are known, protocols by NDOH are effected, if applicable.
- C) Report the case to the DPSA via the dedicated email address, COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.

6.1.3. An employee appears ill and reports for duty displaying symptoms associated with COVID-19:

- A) If an employee presents themselves at work with similar symptoms consistent with COVID-19; being high fever, respiratory distress, dry cough, etc. they must be advised to contact the hotline, consult a medical professional and follow the NDoH protocols for COVID-19.
- B) The employee should be temporarily isolated in a sickbay or room identified for temporary isolation while arrangements are made for them to be transported to a medical facility. Employees must be encouraged to seek medical attention if they display flu like symptoms and to not report for duty.
- C) Further action should be taken once confirmation of diagnosis of a medical professional has been confirmed.
- D) Report the cases in the required format to the DPSA via the dedicated email address COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.

6.1.4. Closure of a unit/component/office /department if an employee tested positive for COVID-19.

- A) Report the exposure and incident to the NDoH
- B) The department must contact the relevant public health officials to discuss the case, identify people who have been exposed and advise on any actions or precautions that should be taken.
- C) An assessment of the unit/component/office will be conducted by the public health officials and advice on the management of the occurrence based on this assessment.
- D) The assessment decision to close a unit/component/office in the department is the prerogative of the Head of Department and will be based on the advice of the public health officials.
- E) The closure of a unit/component/office must be considered with due regard to the extent of the exposure and its implications on health and safety including service delivery needs of the department.
- F) Report the actions to the DPSA via the dedicated email address, COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.

6.1.5. An employee or employees refuse to report for duty based on the fear of being infected by COVID-19.

- A) The employment relationship is the legal link between employers and employees and stipulate that a person (employee) will perform work or a service under certain conditions in return for remuneration (employer).
- B) The onus is on the employee/s to demonstrate that the workplace is a risk and unsafe in relation to the virus.
- C) Refusal to report for duty, contrary to the instructions of the supervisor or HoD means that such absence is unpaid and should be dealt with in terms of the Disciplinary Code.

7. MANAGING OF ABSENCES OF EMPLOYEES DUE TO EXPOSURE TO COVID-19

7.1. The Determination and Directive on Leave of Absence in the Public Service specifically paragraph 14.8.3 provides for sick leave if an employee must be quarantined or isolated for a period of at least ten (10) days:

7.1.1. Working hours. -Subject to any collective agreements and the *Code of Good Practice on Arrangement of Working Time* issued in terms of section 87 of the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997 (Act No. 75 of 1997)*, a head of department shall determine:

- (a) the work week and daily hours of work for employees; and

- (b) the opening and closing times of places of work of the department, taking into account-
 - i. the needs of the public with due regard to the department's service delivery improvement plan; and
 - ii. the needs and circumstances of employees, including family obligations and transport arrangements

- 7.2. If an employee contracted COVID-19 and compulsory quarantine/isolation is advised by a *medical practitioner* **sick leave** may be granted for the duration of the period the employee needs to be quarantined or isolated. The terms and conditions attached to the granting of sick leave as stipulated in the Determination and Directive on Leave of Absence in the Public Service must be adhered to. If the employee's sick leave is exhausted he/she may apply for incapacity leave.
- 7.3. If an employee has been in **close contact with a confirmed case** of coronavirus and *quarantine/isolation is advised by a medical practitioner* **sick leave** may be granted for the duration of the period the employee needs to be quarantined or isolated. The terms and conditions attached to the granting of sick leave as stipulated in the Determination and Directive on Leave of Absence in the Public Service must be adhered to. If the employee's sick leave is exhausted he/she may apply for incapacity leave.
- 7.4. If an employer requires an **employee to self-quarantine/isolate** at home as a precautionary measure in the public interest and the safety of other employees the absence may be dealt with in terms of *Public Service Regulation 51 of the Public Service Regulations, 2016* as amended by re-determining the work week and daily hours of work of the employee. Such employees may be requested to work from home or remotely. The decision to re-determine an employee's working time rests with the Head of Department and must be approved within the parameters defined in the Public Service Regulations, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, Determination on Working Time, applicable PSCBC and Sectoral Bargaining Councils' collective agreements and, where applicable, departmental policies, based on the needs of the public with due regard to the department's service delivery needs.
- 7.5. If an employee decides to self-quarantine/isolate after their perceived contact with COVID-19 **without medical intervention** or requested request from the employer such isolation must be construed as a leave of **absence** and be covered by the employee's available **annual leave and thereafter unpaid leave** if insufficient annual leave credits are available. The employee must be informed of this process. Disciplinary measures in terms of the Disciplinary Code must be invoked if abuse of leave provisions are identified during the containment of the COVID-19.
- 7.6. If an employee needs to attend to his/her child, spouse or life partner who is/are either in *quarantine or isolation* he/she may be granted **family responsibility leave** in accordance with the provisions as outlined in the *Determination and Directive on Leave of Absence in the Public Service*. The terms and conditions attached to the granting of family responsibility leave as stipulated in the Determination and Directive on Leave of Absence in the Public Service must be

adhered to. An employee who has used all their family responsibility leave may, subject to the approval of the Head of department, apply to use available annual leave or use up to 184 calendar days of unpaid leave.

8. MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

8.1. The nature of the declared national state of disaster will place a significant strain on the human resources of departments

8.2. ACQUISITION OF ADDITIONAL HUMAN RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE DEPARTMENT TO CONTAIN COVID-19.

8.2.1. Where departments require additional human resources in relation to the management of the spread of COVID-19, such temporary employment should be done in terms of Regulation 57 (2)(b). It is incumbent on departments to inform the DPSA of such occurrences.

8.3. MANAGEMENT OF OVERTIME IN RELATION TO COVID-19.

8.3.1. Governments' response to COVID-19 will result in departments requiring employees to work significantly more than their normal hours to deal with the pandemic. I, have therefore authorised, as delegated, a deviation in terms of Regulation 4 from the provisions of Regulation 49(1)(c) of the Public Service Regulations, 2016 in respect of approved overtime compensation that exceeds the 30 percent (30%) threshold of the employee's monthly salary due to exceptional circumstances.

8.3.2. This deviation is an emergency response and is only applicable to the following departments:

- (a) **Department of Home Affairs; and**
- (b) **National and Provincial Departments of Health.**
- (c) **Department of Transport**

9. REPORTING AND STATISTICAL DATA

9.1. To ensure statistical data as it pertains to the manifestation of COVID-19 in the public service is available, all cases must be immediately reported to the DPSA.

9.2. In terms of reporting National departments must aggregate the total number of cases and submit to the DPSA. No statistics from regional offices of national departments will be accepted.

9.3. With regard to the Provinces the Office of the Premier will be responsible to collate the statistics for the province and submit to the DPSA. The template for reporting is attached as **Annexure A** to this circular.

- 9.4. Cases must be reported to the following dedicated email address: COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za. Kindly note that the aforementioned email address is exclusively for the submission of statistics of COVID-19 and should not be utilised for any other purpose.

10. CONTACT DETAILS

- 10.1. Enquiries regarding the management and containment of COVID-19 from a health and wellness perspective must be directed to Employee Health and Wellness for attention Mr Robert Foromo at WEMCOVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.
- 10.2. Enquiries as it relates to the implementation and application of conditions of service pertaining to COVID-19 in the public service must be directed to Employee Benefits for attention Mr Desmond v/d Westhuizen at COSCOVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.
11. We continue to call for calm and cooperation from Public Service employees during this period. Our collective and joint actions to support the national efforts to contain and manage COVID-19 is every public servants' responsibility. Public Service employees are also requested to share these messages with their families and their communities.
12. To enhance the guidance provided a list of frequently asked questions with appropriate responses is available at:
<http://www.health.gov.za/index.php/component/phocadownload/category/607#>; and
<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>.
13. In dealing with the response to COVID-19 Heads of Department must seek advice and use discretion in dealing with matters not covered in this circular.



Ms Yoliswa Makhasi

Director-General: DPSA

Date: 16/03/2020

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ANNEXURE A

REPORTING ON CLOSURE OF OFFICES DUE TO COVID-19

UNIT/COMPONENT INSTITUTION	DATE OF CLOSURE	NO OF EMPLOYEES AFFECTED	PHYSICAL ADDRESS OF UNIT	TYPE OF SERVICE IMPACTED BY CLOSURE	ENVISAGED DATE OF RE-OPENING