COVID-19 briefing

27 April 2020

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

This briefing note on Occupational Safety and Health in the COVID-19 period reflects a summary of guidance and advice that's been published by the World Health Organisation, International Labour Organisation and a range of country and sector briefings. It aligns to ETI Base Code clause 3 (working conditions are safe and hygienic).

Context

Health, safety, wellbeing and labour rights always go hand in hand for the long-term sustainability of jobs, workers and industries. An investment in workplace Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) is paramount for responsible business. In this crisis, safe workplaces play a critical role in keeping workers safe from the virus but also can act as a conduit for cascading information on the crises to inform and raise awareness between workers, their families, and communities.

OSH applies to all workers and where operations are still functioning or preparing to reopen, workers' safety, including quarantine and sick leave arrangements are paramount.

While there are no current figures of the impact on workers of COVID-19, the ITUC reports that 3.3 billion workers are currently affected by full or partial workplace closures to stop the spread of the virus.

Principles - universal high-level advice

The advice from the World Health Organisation on handwashing and the use of sanitizers is universal. It is vital therefore to reinforce health and safety messages to all suppliers and producers.

The ILO recommends a 4 step approach to managing COVID-19:

1. Risk assessment and risk management for prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 in workplaces
2. Identification of workers / occupations / sectors at increased risk of contagion
3. Implementation of control and prevention measures based on risk assessment
4. Dissemination of information on preventive and protective measures to reduce the spread of infectious diseases, in collaboration with public health authorities

ILO advice on OSH includes **social dialogue in times of a pandemic** and clearly maps the employer and worker organisations roles and responsibilities as:

Employers and their organisations	Workers and their organisations
• Collaborate with government to shape policy measures that are conducive for business resilience and sustainability • Observe advice/guidance provided by public authorities • Communicate critical information to workers • Review or draw up a business continuity plan • Identify and mitigate risks of contagion to workers • Promote workplace hygiene	• Participate in decision-making and policy responses to epidemics • Actively co-operate with employers in the implementation of the preventative and protective measures • Strictly follow the workplace hygiene practices and adopt responsible behaviours

Practical steps to take in your supply chain

- Review and adapt your supply chain health and safety **policy or code of conduct** to reflect the importance of and commitment to keeping workers safe in the crisis and recovery period. This needs to confirm that workers have a right to remove themselves from a work situation that poses imminent and danger for life or health, in accordance with national law and laid out procedures and immediately inform their immediate supervisor of the situation
- Review and update your supply chain **due diligence mapping** to ensure that all known operations and types of jobs in your sourcing/production countries reflect current hazards and potential risks to workers. This could include, for example, handling of hazardous chemicals, repetitive strain injury or heavy lifting
- Track **national action plans** and changes in regulation on local occupational health services or local public health authority who may have developed information materials to promote workplace prevention of risk of exposure to the virus and other technical advice
- Draw on the knowledge and expertise of Company OSH professionals to assist with the **development of risk mapping, materials, and communications** for your supply chain
- Establish, through communication with your suppliers, what emergency contingency and consultation plans are being made to ensure the health and safety of workers relating to:
    1. **Consultation** - where workplaces have established and elected workplace health, safety and wellbeing committees, ensure that representatives are consulted, informed, and trained on special COVID-19 information and advice
    2. **Operational** to include for example, transport to and from work, number of workers, shift patterns, canteen facilities and access to sanitation and clean water
    3. **Reduced workforce**, including for example outsourced to home workers or changes to shift patterns to avoid large concentrations of workers in the facilities or workplace
    4. **Closed** and whether there are maintenance, cleaning or security teams to ensure that those workers benefit from safety precautions, but also that the premises are safe for recovery
- Integrate safety and health into your contingency and business continuity and recovery plan

Practical steps for workplaces

Consultation with workers

At a worksite, the Health and Safety Committee and local trade union ought to be consulted on changes to working practices and COVID-19 measures in accordance to national regulation and advice

The rights and responsibilities of workers on site are mapped out by the ILO and Base Code clause 3. In the pandemic phases (crises management, resilience and recovery), it is important to recognise and raise awareness of them. They include:

- The right to remove themselves from a work situation which they have reasonable justification to believe presents an imminent and serious danger to their life or health, without undue consequences
- The right to receive adequate information and training on COVID-19 arrangements in a way that's accessible to them
- The right to enquire into (and to be consulted on) all aspects of safety associated with their work and COVID-19 preparations and practice
- There is a duty to co-operate with the employer in the field of OSH (e.g. comply with OSH instructions and procedures; use PPE correctly; report to supervisor hazardous situation; etc.)

Education, awareness, and communication

- Develop posters or signs to raise awareness of the virus, risks and keeping healthy. For multilingual work sites, graphic representation would be best
- Through workplace elected bodies, identify "sanitisation champions" per shifts, floors, units etc. They can be trained to raise awareness, but also remind/check hygiene protocols are adhered to
- Promote and communicate good respiratory hygiene at the workplace, such as covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Where a workplace is closed, contact with workers can be maintained via social media or mobile phone applications. These platforms can be used to cascade local health information

Hygiene, sanitisation and personal protective equipment

- Promote a culture of regular wiping of workstations, machinery, doorknobs, keyboards and working objects with disinfectant and regularly disinfect common areas including rest rooms, canteens and handrails. This could coincide with shift changes for example
- Ensure there is additional hand washing facilities or potable water for workers who may be working off site with no access to water for hand washing
- Place sanitizing hand rub dispensers in prominent places around the workplace and make sure these dispensers are regularly refilled. This could include entry and exit points to the workplace
- Provide staff and visitors with ample and easily accessible places where they can wash their hands with soap and water, disinfect hands with sanitizers, and in addition, promote a culture of hand washing
- Provide, where necessary, adequate protective clothing and protective equipment (at no cost to workers)

Operational arrangements

- Organise work in a way to allow for physical distancing of at least 2 meters (6 feet) from other people or another distance as prescribed by the relevant competent authority - revise shift patterns and worker numbers that takes into consideration distancing for work operations. This could include staggered shift start times to reduce congestion and early shift finishes
- Ensure that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the workplaces, machinery, equipment and processes under their control are safe and without risk to health
- Arrange for additional breaks for handwashing and changing protective clothing
- Mark out safe distancing in walkways, corridors, or production lines
- Stagger break times so that teams do not congregate in rest rooms or canteens
- Improve ventilation and provide more fresh air to rooms and operations with high risk of exposure to the virus
- Prepare additional measures for first-aid arrangements to deal with emergencies and accidents during the COVID-19 period
- Identify supplies including PPE that may be in shortage and plan allocation accordingly
- Prohibit non-essential visitors and outside contractors
- Prohibit interaction with truck drivers and limit their movement in the facility

Additional considerations

- For workers who are sick or who are caring for others who are sick, employers should ensure that they stay at home to avoid infecting other workers in the factory. It should be made clear that workers will be able to count the time at home as sick leave. Otherwise, fearing a loss of income, they will be inclined to work if possible, potentially infecting co-workers
- Human resources protocols for internal grievance procedures could be adapted for workers to report COVID-19 symptom's, medical treatment, or bereavement
- Where transportation to and from work is provided or arranged by the employer it is important to reduce density and number of people in group transportation. This could include increasing the number of vehicles to transport workers, signage on social distancing, providing drivers with protective visors for drivers and disinfection of commonly touched parts of the vehicle. Guidance should also be available for workers who need to use public transport

Further information and resources

- World Health Organisation COVID-19 portal
- World Health Organisation COVID-19 advice on preparing the workplace
- Advice for ships by the International Transport Federation
- Good practice for farms – includes transport and farm equipment
- IUF workers guidance for agriculture and food services
- ILO safety and health at work
- IndustriALL COVID-19 advice and guidance