



Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Business in Bermuda

Introduction

This information is intended to help prevent workplace exposures to novel coronavirus. This guidance is also useful for preventing other respiratory diseases, including seasonal influenza, from spreading in the workplace.

Risk of novel coronavirus infection is based on a travel history and/or exposure to persons symptomatic with novel coronavirus infection. To prevent stigma and discrimination in the workplace, risk determinations should not be based on nationality or country of origin.

Screening procedures are in place at Bermuda's airport to assess for relevant travel history in persons entering Bermuda. These persons will undergo a risk assessment and be advised on the appropriate public health measures during their time in Bermuda. This may consist of self-quarantine and monitoring by public health for 14 days.

Recommended strategies for employers to use now

Information for Travellers

Travellers from affected areas are being monitored. Affected areas should be checked at: www.gov.bm/health-information

Travelers who have been in affected areas should be prepared to self-quarantine until a risk assessment is completed by a public health officer to determine measures to implement based on the travelers' risk level. Public health measures may include active monitoring or supervision of self-monitoring by public health authorities, or the application of movement restrictions, including isolation and quarantine, when needed to prevent the possible spread of COVID-19 in Bermuda.

Any traveler that has been to an affected area and develops fever, cough or shortness of breath, should inform their health care provider of their travel history prior to attending for medical care.

Align policies with current public health guidance for persons under self-quarantine

The Ministry of Health advises businesses to consider allowing employees under self-quarantine to work remotely from home if that is an option in your business. Otherwise, consider a non-punitive leave policy for persons under self-quarantine.

Actively encourage sick employees to stay home

Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.

Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.

Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies which support necessary exclusion from work.

It is recommended that employers do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.

Employers should aim to maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member.

Separate sick employees

Employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available).

Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all employees

Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, and hand hygiene at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.

Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.

Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.

Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.

Perform routine environmental cleaning

Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.

No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.

Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps

Visit www.gov.bm/health-information for travel advice related to novel coronavirus. Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of acute respiratory illness before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick. Ensure employees who become sick while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor and should promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.

If outside Bermuda, sick employees should follow your company's policy for obtaining medical care or contact a healthcare provider or overseas medical assistance company to assist them with finding an appropriate healthcare provider in that country.

Recommended strategies to lower the impact of novel coronavirus in the workplace in the event of an outbreak in Bermuda

If there is evidence of a novel coronavirus outbreak in Bermuda, employers should plan to be able to respond in a flexible way to varying levels of severity and be prepared to refine their business response plans as needed. The Ministry of Health, with our regional health partners, will continue to monitor official information on the novel coronavirus and make additional recommendations as needed.

Prepare for increased absences

Employers should plan to monitor and respond to absenteeism at the workplace. Implement plans to continue your essential business functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism.

Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions so that the workplace is able to operate even if key staff members are absent.

Assess your essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your services or products. Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed).

Prepare for social distancing

Plan to minimize exposure between employees and also between employees and the public. Consider cancelling large work-related meetings or events.

Explore whether you can establish policies and practices, such as flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), to increase the physical distance among employees and between employees and others.

For employees who are able to telework, supervisors should encourage employees to telework instead of coming into the workplace until symptoms are completely resolved. If applicable, have the information technology and infrastructure needed to support multiple employees who may be able to work from home.

Adapted from:

Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), February 2020

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020. Retrieved 14 February 2020 from:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/guidance-business-response.html>