



MINISTRY OF HEALTH WELLNESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

COVID-19 Guidance For Businesses and Employers

March 2 2020

Introduction

In January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new coronavirus disease in Hubei Province, China to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. WHO stated there is a high risk of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spreading to other countries around the world. To date there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Antigua and Barbuda.

Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19

WHO and public health authorities around the world are taking action to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. However, long term success cannot be taken for granted. We must prepare ourselves in the event that COVID-19 is introduced into Antigua and Barbuda. All sections of our society, including businesses and employers, must play a role if we are to stop the spread of this disease. This document outlines simple ways to prevent the spread of the virus, things to consider when employees travel, and how to get your business ready in case COVID-19 arrives in Antigua and Barbuda.

How COVID-19 spreads

When someone who has COVID-19 coughs or exhales they release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as desks, tables or telephones. People could catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. If they are standing within one meter of a person with COVID-19 they can catch it by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them. In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu. Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age: people over 40 seem to be more vulnerable than those under 40. People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.

Simple ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in your workplace

The low-cost measures below will help prevent the spread of infections in your workplace, such as colds, flu and stomach bugs, and protect your customers, contractors and employees.

Employers should start doing these things now, even though there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Antigua and Barbuda. You can already reduce working days lost due to illness and stop or slow the spread of COVID-19 if it arrives at one of your workplaces.

- Make sure your workplaces are clean and hygienic
 - Avoid unnecessary touching of surfaces and areas.
 - Surfaces (e.g. desks and tables) and objects (e.g. telephones, keyboards) need to be wiped with disinfectants regularly.
 - Why? Because contamination on surfaces touched by employees and customers is one of the main ways that COVID-19 spreads.
- Promote regular and thorough hand-washing by employees, contractors and customers.
 - Ensure that staff, contractors and customers have access to places where they can wash their hands with soap and running pipe-borne water because proper hand-washing kills the virus on your hands and prevents the spread of COVID-19.
 - Place sanitizing hand rub dispensers in prominent places around the workplace. Make sure these dispensers are regularly refilled.
 - Display posters promoting and demonstrating hand-washing should be conspicuously placed in areas designated for hand-washing.
 - Combine this with other communication measures such as offering guidance from occupational health and safety officers, briefings at meetings and information on the internet to promote hand-washing.
 - Dry hands thoroughly with single-use paper towels or napkins and then properly dispose of them in a covered bin.
 - Hands can also be dried using hot air if such machines are available.
- Promote good respiratory hygiene in the workplace because good respiratory hygiene prevents the spread of COVID-19

- Display posters promoting respiratory hygiene. Combine this with other communication measures such as offering guidance from occupational health and safety officers, briefing at meetings and information on the intranet etc.
- Ensure that paper tissues are available at your workplaces, for those who develop a runny nose or cough at work, along with closed bins for hygienically disposing of them.
- Advise employees and contractors to consult national travel advice before going on business trips.
- Brief your employees, contractors and customers that if COVID-19 starts spreading in your community anyone with even a mild cough or low-grade fever (37.3 C or more) needs to stay at home. They should also stay home (or work from home) if they have had to take simple medications, such as paracetamol/acetaminophen, ibuprofen or aspirin, which may mask symptoms of infection.

Things to consider when you and your employees travel

- Before traveling
 - Make sure your organization and its employees have the latest information on areas where COVID-19 is spreading. You can find this at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>.
 - Based on the latest information, your organization should assess the benefits and risks related to upcoming travel plans.
 - Avoid sending employees who may be at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. older employees and those with medical conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease) to areas where COVID-19 is spreading.
 - Make sure all persons travelling to locations reporting COVID-19 are briefed by a qualified professional (e.g. staff health services, health care provider or the Ministry of Health Wellness and the Environment)
 - Consider issuing employees who are about to travel with small bottles (under 100 CL) of alcohol-based hand rub.
- While traveling:
 - Encourage employees to wash their hands regularly and stay at least one meter away from people who are coughing or sneezing

- Ensure employees know what to do and who to contact if they feel ill while traveling.
- Ensure that your employees comply with instructions from local authorities where they are traveling. If, for example, they are told by local authorities not to go somewhere they should comply with this. Your employees should comply with any local restrictions on travel, movement or large gatherings.
- When you or your employees return from traveling:
 - Employees who have returned from an area where COVID-19 is spreading should monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days and take their temperature twice a day.
 - If they develop even a mild cough or low grade fever (i.e. a temperature of 37.3 C or more) they should stay at home and self-isolate. This means avoiding close contact (one meter or nearer) with other people, including family members. They should also telephone their healthcare provider or the Ministry of Health Wellness and the Environment, giving us details of their recent travel and symptoms.

Getting your business ready in the event that there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in Antigua and Barbuda

- Develop a plan of what to do if someone becomes ill with suspected COVID-19 at one of your workplaces.
 - The plan should cover putting the ill person in a room or area where they are isolated from others in the workplace, limiting the number of people who have contact with the sick person and contacting the Ministry of Health Wellness and the Environment.
 - Consider how to identify persons who may be at risk, and support them, without inviting stigma and discrimination into your workplace. This could include persons who have recently travelled to an area reporting cases, or other personnel who have conditions that put them at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. diabetes, heart and lung disease, older age).
- Consider promoting regular teleworking across your organization. If there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in Antigua and Barbuda, the Ministry of Health Wellness and the Environment may advise people to avoid public transport and crowded places. Teleworking will help your business keep operating while your employees stay safe.
- Develop a contingency and business continuity plan for an outbreak in the communities where your business operates.

- The plan will help prepare your organization for the possibility of an outbreak of COVID19 in its workplaces or community. It may also be valid for other health emergencies.
- The plan should address how to keep your business running even if a significant number of employees, contractors and suppliers cannot come to your place of business - either due to local restrictions on travel or because they are ill.
- Communicate to your employees and contractors about the plan and make sure they are aware of what they need to do – or not do – under the plan. Emphasize key points such as the importance of staying away from work even if they have only mild symptoms or have had to take simple medications (e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen) which may mask the symptoms.
- Be sure your plan addresses the mental health and social consequences of a case of COVID-19 in the workplace or in the community and offer information and support.
- For small and medium-sized businesses without in-house staff health and welfare support, develop partnerships and plans with your local health and social service providers in advance of any emergency.

Remember:

Now is the time to prepare for COVID-19. Simple precautions and planning can make a big difference. Action now will help protect your employees and your business.

For further reliable information on COVID-19, please consult <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>