Guideline for drafting a COVID-19 contingency plan for essential services in Agro-processing

Guiding Principles:

1. *Main priority is to **keep workers safe** and **avoid infections** on way to work, at work, on way back to home, at home.*
2. *Keep **infected people OFF-SITE** to ensure uninterrupted operation of the business being a critical service.*
3. *Do detailed **risk assessment** for your entire business to identify all possible Covid-19 infection risk areas and implement **risk mitigation** measures.*
4. ***Compartmentalize** on-site workers into smaller groups to limit the impact of self-quarantine measures on the operation of the business as an essential service.*
5. *Develop clearly defined **procedure** on how to handle suspected Covid-19 case at your site / operations.*
6. *Use your well defined Covid-19 policy and procedures and risk mitigation measurements as the basis for **training** all your staff - conduct regular drills to ensure everyone knows exactly how to handle a suspected Covid-19 case.*

REMEMBER:

As the situation is fluid and we move through the different stages of lockdown, and as we learn more about Covid-19 and the associated risks, the documents MUST be updated to ensure most appropriate risk mitigation measures and procedures are in place.

Make this document your own in order to reflect your unique realities.

The **objective** is to be proactive in creating a safe working environment for all employees and specifically addressing the risk of spreading Covid-19 and how to deal with positive Covid-19 cases at the workplace. As an essential agro-processing service, it is critical to maintain the delivery of essential goods and services and to support the economic recovery of the industry. Commitment and dedication is needed to follow strict protocols and procedures to prevent the risk of infected people from disrupting major operations in the agro-processing sector.

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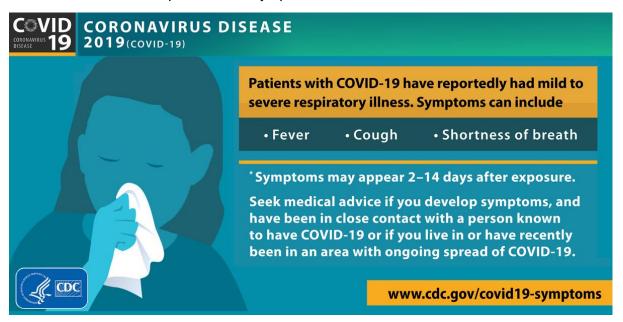8. Further information
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1.   Task team

It is required that a <u>manager be appointed</u> to address employee or workplace representative concerns and to keep them informed.   A <u>Covid-19 Task team</u> can be appointed to support the manager in his/her responsibility to act as intermediary between employees and management and to deal with any questions or concerns related to Covid-19. The manager and task team members are to be identified (with contact details) in the policy. An existing health & safety or risk assessment team can also be actioned as a Covid-19 task team and should include at least Quality&Safety; Health; HR and Management representatives.
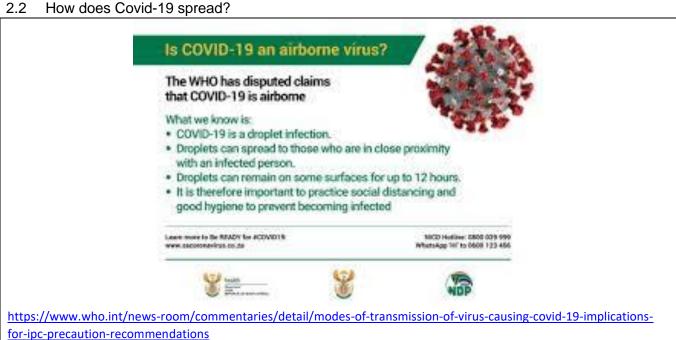
2.   COVID-19 infections and symptoms

2.1   Awareness of infectious process and symptoms of Covid-19

-    https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/covid-19-guidelines/

2.2   How does Covid-19 spread?

https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/modes-of-transmission-of-virus-causing-covid-19-implications-for-ipc-precaution-recommendations

2.3   Prevention

COVID-19 Prevention Tips

WASH	COVER	AVOID	DISTANCE	ISOLATE
Wash your hands frequently – for at leash 20 seconds	Use tissues when you cough or sneeze and dispose of the immediately, use elbow if tissue not available	Do not touch surfaces and then your mouth, eyes or nose.	Practise social distancing b not shaking hands, hugging etc.	Stay home if you become ill and prevent the spread of the illness.

3.   Risk assessment and administrative measures

A **risk assessment** must be undertaken and <u>updated</u> with the minimum measures as required by the OSHA Directive of 28 April 2020 (http://www.gpwonline.co.za/Gazettes/Gazettes/43257_29-04_Labour.pdf) Where <u>more than 500 employees</u> are employed, a **record** of the risk assessment and a copy of your written **policy** concerning the protection of the health and safety of your employees must be submitted to:
   i.   your health & safety committee (Covid-19 task team) and ;
   ii.   the Provincial Chief Inspector at http://www.labour.gov.za/About-Us/Ministry/Pages/IES0320-7398.aspx

Agro-processors are encouraged to align and partner with your local authorities to clarify roles and responsibilities and to foster good relations in the mutual fight agains combatting the spread of the virus.

4.   Creating a safe working environment

> *The Occupational Health and Safety Act, 85 of 1993, states that every employer shall provide and maintain, as far as is reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risk to the health of its employees.*

   i.   **Limit the amount of workers at the workplace** at any given time.
   – Work from home where possible
   – Implement shifts or rotation systems where relevant to create smaller working teams throughout your operation.
   – Consider implementing staggered work schedules or phase-in of employees in waves to gradually build towards having the entire workforce back.
   – Limit the number and size of in-person meetings held on-site where possible

   ii.   Ensure a **safe physical distancing of 1.5 meters** between workers on-site at all times.
   – safety screens can be used where workstations are in close vicinity.
   – revise layout of workspace/communal areas /entrances to accommodate physical distancing
   – use markers /signs to guide employees.

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iii. Importance of **personal sanitation & hygiene** to be emphasized and promoted
   - proper hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
   - frequent use of at least 70% concentrated alcohol-based hand sanitizers;
   - cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing; dispose of tissues and wash hands;
   - frequent cleaning/disinfection of work surfaces and touchpoints such as door handles etc.

> ***WHO Guideline****: All surfaces that the infected Worker has come into contact with must be cleaned, including all surfaces and objects visibly contaminated with body fluids/respiratory secretions, and all potentially contaminated high-contact areas such as toilets, door handles, and telephones. Alcohol-based sanitizers/surface disinfectants should be used for cleaning purposes. In general, alcohol-based disinfectants (ethanol, propan-2-ol, propan-1-ol) have been shown to significantly reduce the infectivity of enveloped viruses like COVID-19 virus, in concentrations of 70-80%. Common disinfectants with active ingredients based on quaternary ammonium compounds and chlorine would also have virucidal properties. All staff should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and water after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.* [https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/Hand_Hygiene_Why_How_and_When_Brochure.pdf]

iv. The wearing of approved* **face masks** for all workers on-site is required and employers should provide each worker, free of charge, with at least two (2) cloth masks – one for wear while at work and the other for communting to and from work.
   *[https://www.nicd.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/RSA_Recommended-Guidelines-for-Masks_Summary_FINAL09.04.2020_for_distribution.pdf] [https://youtu.be/VvZ3QO3a9eU]

v. Promote the use of **appropriate PPE** where relevant.

vi. Implement effective **cleaning and sanitation programmes** with the use of approved disinfectants.

vii. Encourage & establish **communication platforms** between work teams via on-line software and communication tools.

viii. Provide adequate **natural ventilation** in the workspace to further reduce the risk of transmission.

ix. Investigate **engineering solutions** which may reduce high-risk hand contact surfaces such as doorknobs, faucets etc.

x. Prevent Covid-19 **infected workers** from entering the workplace
   - workers who are unwell / have any symptoms of Covid-19 should not come to work – establish procedures for how to handle workers who notice symptoms whilst at home and how to report the illness by phone or email.

xi. Establish procedure to **screen workers** entering the workplace for observable symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath (see the OSHA Directive of 28 April 2020 http://www.gpwonline.co.za/Gazettes/Gazettes/43257_29-04_Labour.pdf)

xii. Establish procedure to **identify *high-risk workers*** based on medical background, age profile, etc. (see NCID definition of persons at highest risk: https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/covid-19-guidelines/)
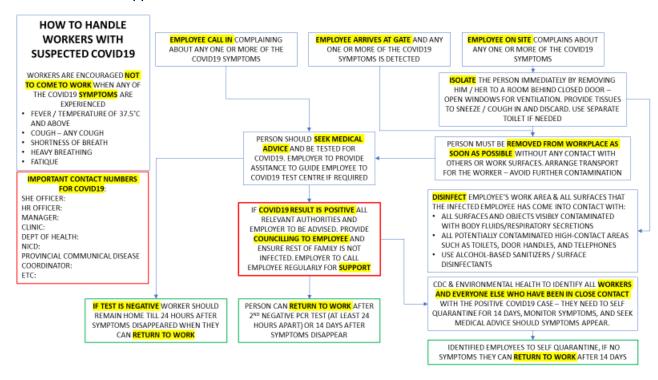
> ***WHO Guideline:*** *Pre-Requisite Programmes must ensure that COVID-19 infected (symptomatic individuals and confirmed asymptomatic carriers) workers and their contacts (those with exposure to confirmed cases) are excluded from food premises. Staff who are unwell or who have any symptoms of COVID-19 should not work. A procedure to allow staff to report illness by phone (or email) should be established so that workers with early stages of COVID-19 can receive reliable information and be quickly excluded from work environments. Food safety practices in food premises should continue to be delivered to the highest hygiene standards in line with established FSMS.*

The PRPs that underpin a food business FSMS will include guidelines for managing staff sickness in food premises. Included in these guidelines will be instruction for reporting staff sickness and policies for return to work when staff recovers from illness. Staff must be trained in the use of and comply with these guidelines and to report illness at the earliest opportunity to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 to fellow workers. Staff management practices (e.g. reporting illness and exclusion of ill workers) will make it unlikely that a food worker will become unwell in the workplace with symptoms of COVID-19. However, it is necessary to develop a plan of action to manage such an event. A more likely occurrence is that a food worker will report illness by telephone. Staff need to be aware that they should not report to work with symptoms of COVID-19 but notify such illness by telephone.

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331705/WHO-2019-nCoV-Food_Safety-2020.1-eng.pdf

5. Measures to be taken in case of a positive COVID-19 test-result (from a worker)

See flowchart in Appendix 1

__WHO Guideline__: If a Worker is confirmed to have COVID-19 it will be necessary to notify all close contacts of the infected worker so they too can take measures to minimise further risk of spread.

WHO definitions of a COVID-19 contact can be found at: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200321-sitrep-61-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=ce5ca11c_2

Examples of contacts (high-risk people) in the food industry could include (i) any worker who was in physical (i.e. touching) contact of a probable or confirmed case; (ii) any worker who was within 1 meter of a probable or confirmed case; (iii) any worker who has cleaned up any body fluids of a probable or confirmed case without adequate PPE (e.g. gloves, overalls, protective clothing); (iv) workers in the same working team or workgroup as the probable or confirmed case, and (v) any worker living in the same household as a probable or confirmed case.

WHO recommends that contacts be quarantined for 14 days from the last point of exposure to the confirmed case. At a minimum, workers who have had close contact with the infected person should be asked to stay at home for 14 days from the last time they had contact with the confirmed case and practice physical distancing. If they become unwell at any time within their 14-day isolation period and they test positive for COVID-19, they will become a confirmed case and should be managed as such.

> *Workers who have not had close contact with the original confirmed case should continue taking the usual precautions and attend work as usual. Organising Workers into small teams or workgroups will help to minimise disruption to the workforce in the event of a Worker reporting sick with symptoms of COVID-19. Closure of the workplace is not recommended.*
>
> ***Note**: **There is no requirement from WHO or from the SA Government (regulation) which stipulates that a workplace should be closed in the event of a positive COVID-19 worker test result. In fact, the WHO guidelines suggest that the workplace remain operational and that the risk is mitigated through specifically designed policies & procedures. This industry guideline therefor is focussed on how to prevent the spread of the virus, how to deal with a positive worker, how to identify other contacts, and how to disinfect the workspace and equipment of the worker who was tested positive so as to promote the safe working environment of all workers and the continuation of essential services in the food industry.***

5.1 Remove the individual immediately if at work
  - Identify a quarantine area at the workplace to keep probable & confirmed cases in isolation whilst awaiting transport to the home/ hospital.
  - Self-isolation if symptoms are mild
  - Medical care in more severe cases

5.2 Contact the relevant health authorities to report a confirmed case at the workplace

5.3 Identify everyone who has been in close contact with confirmed case in the last 14 days
  - All workers who have been in close contact with Covid-19 positive person to go into self-isolation for 14 days and monitor for any symptoms.
  - Should no symptoms appear after 14 days, the contact can be tested and where negative return to work. Contacts who develop flu-like symptoms during self-isolation and after contact with a probable or confirmed Covid-19 infected person, should remain in self-isolation and get tested. Positive tests should be managed as such.
  - Other workers who have been in close contact with a *contact* (those in close contact with a positive Covid-19 individual) are to remain at work for as long as the workers in self-isolation are not testing positive. Close monitoring of flu-lilke symptoms are required and workers must continue to wear face masks and relevant PPE at all times and adhere to personal hygiene requirements to prevent the spread of the virus at the workplace.

5.4 Disinfect all areas where the worker with positive Covid-19 result have been working with adequate / approved chemicals.

5.5 Support confirmed Covid-19 positive workers during self-isolation with guidance and information on medical care etc..

5.6 Simultaneously address concerns of remaining workers on the health status of confirmed positive workers and how to keep the working environment safe.

5.7 Continue to monitor all workers closely for symptoms.

> *Reminder : Worker health information is confidential and need to be protected and respected*

6. **Re-introducing workers to the workplace after self-isolation or recovery after testing positive for COVID-19.**

> **_WHO Guideline_**_: A return to work policy for staff who have been infected and recovered from COVID-19 should be in place. WHO recommends that a confirmed case could be released from isolation once their symptoms resolve and they have two negative PCR tests at least 24 hours apart. If testing is not possible, the WHO recommends that a confirmed patient can be released from isolation 14 days after symptoms resolve._

6.1 Workers who tested positive
  - Laboratory confirmation (TR-PCR assay) that worker is not infected by SARS-CoV-2 and that no symptoms are present.
  - Follow-up PCR test (2nd) to confirm a negative result at least 24 hours apart.
  - When both results are negative and NO symptoms are present for at least three (3) days, the worker may return to work

6.2 Workers who were in self-isolation
  - If no symptoms developed during the 14-day self isolation, the worker may return to work.

7. **Other procedures/policies with specific focus on mitigating the risk of COVID-19 and creating a safe working environment**

7.1 <u>Visitors and external transporter procedures</u> to be implemented and to include a visitors log, screening results, restricted movements, hygiene requirements, use of dedicated areas etc. An example of a visitors screening form, can be found [*here*]

7.2 <u>Training & education of workers</u> regarding Covid-19 (including symptoms), good hygiene practises and avoiding the spread of the virus should be included in a policy and implemented to to reach all workers. Records is to be kept of all training provided to workers.

7.3 <u>Communication and awareness</u> regarding Covid-19 to all workers on-site and those working from home should provide guidance and information on how to create a designated safe working place, including measures for infection prevention and protecting their family.

7.4 Company <u>events, gatherings & travel</u> to be in-line with national disaster management regulations [https://www.gov.za/coronavirus/guidelines] and with the focus on preventing the spread of Covid-19 to or from the workplace.
[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf]

8. **Further information**

For more information on SARS-CoV-2 you can contact the Department of Health on: www.health.gov.za

In the case of suspected exposure contact the coronavirus hotline in South Africa: **0800 02 9999**

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) provides the latest information about COVID-19 and the global outbreak: http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/covid-19-communication-resources/

On the link provided above, click on *Covid-19 Technical Resources* for more information on Covid-19.
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9 Conclusion

In taking the responsible steps as outlined in the industry guideline, agro-processors can protect its workers and minimize the risk of disruption to its business. When the animal-sourced food value-chain partners all take these steps together, the continued supply of food is promoted to the people of South Africa.

10   References

1. Department Employment and Labour Workplace preparedness: COVID -19 (SARS-CoV-19 virus) https://www.labourguide.co.za/workshop/1773-covid-19-guideline-mar2020/file

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3. OSH Act Directive : Covid-19 Occupational Health and Safety Measures in Workplaces (C19 OHS), 2020. GN479 GG43257 p3 29Apr2020 http://www.gpwonline.co.za/Gazettes/Gazettes/43257_29-04_Labour.pdf

4. SA Government - https://www.gov.za/NovelCoronavirus

5. World Health Organization; Getting your Workplace ready for COVID-19 (19 March 2020) https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf