

16 March 2020

Tips to keep the office healthy: From COVID-19 to the Common Cold

There are some measures that an employer can implement and document into company policy to help mitigate the spread of any infectious disease in the work environment. The Occupational Health and Safety act places an obligation on the employer to maintain a healthy work environment. This means, in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic, that the employer has an obligation to manage the risk of contamination in the workplace.

Some suggestions include:

1. Providing sanitizing wipes / hand sanitizer

Placing sanitizing wipes / hand sanitizer at the entrances to an office or store and encouraging clients and customers to use the wipe and hand sanitizer as they enter, can help prevent the contagious germs from being carried into the work environment.

Company policy may be adjusted to include a provision that employees must clean their workstations with sanitizing wipes before starting their day as well as after lunch. Special emphasis should be placed on the following hotspots that are frequently touched:

- Telephone
- Light switch
- Keyboard
- Desktop
- Mouse
- Frequently used stationery and office supplies such as staplers
- Door Handles

Directors

Mr. AE Steyn; Mr. C Swanepoel (LLB)

APPROVED MEMBER OF AHI EMPLOYERS ORGANISATION Reg. Nr. Ref No. LR2/6/3/475

Offices in

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2. Handwashing intervals and guidelines

Hand washing is not only important after using the restroom, but also when moving around the office touching various surfaces. It is recommended to wash, with soap and warm water, for a minimum of 20 seconds. Scheduling handwashing intervals is an option to limit instances employees absentmindedly move about the office, touching surfaces, without washing their hands

3. Implementing social distancing policies

Social distancing is just a fancy way of saying “avoid contact with other people.” Implementing policies restricting touch-contact, such as handshakes or hugs, can limit the transmission of communicable diseases.

4. Sickness at work

Every office has at least one employee that toughs it out no matter how sick he or she may be. This poses a significant threat to the health and wellness of fellow employees, clients and customers in the case of a interpersonal transmissible illness, such as the seasonal flu and COVID-19. Implementing a policy that requires an obviously sick employee to remain at home and not come to work may be required to curb this behaviour.

5. Special leave policy

As the COVID-19 infection spreads, many companies find themselves without a Special Leave policy. Special leave is a type of leave, separate from the BCEA entitlements (such as annual, sick, maternity and family responsibility leave.) This may need to be implemented should an employer deem it responsible to require an employee to go into compulsory quarantine. Compulsory quarantine (as instructed by the employer or government) does not fall under sick leave unless a medical certificate has been issued. Such a quarantine absence may be deducted from either sick or annual leave entitlements. An alternative may be to allow employees to work from home, where practically possible.

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We pray that you and your loved ones are kept safe and healthy through this time.

Kind regards

CARLO SWANEPOEL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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