



Engineering Iron and Steel Association of Zimbabwe

33 Knightsbridge Road, Highlands Harare. +263 242 746796
+263 86 77 160 776 info@eisaz.co.zw www.eisaz.co.zw

Coronavirus (COVID-19) - EMPLOYERS` GUIDE

1.0 Introduction

The coronavirus disease, officially named COVID-19, has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. As the virus continues to spread extensively, it's posing a significant challenge to many organisations. As the virus is now spreading through community transmission in the SADC region, it is more likely that employers and workers will be affected to a greater or lesser extent in some way. People's health and well-being, and measures to prevent the virus from spreading should be at the heart of every employer's response. The virus is likely to cause wider disruptions with suppliers and customers, and could lead to shortages of fuel and other basic commodities. There may also be disruptions to public transport and other events

This guide will help you plan your organisation's response to the global health emergency which was declared a National Disaster in President E.D Mngangwa`s State Of the Nation address on 17th March 2020.

2.0 What should employers be doing in the current situation?

Organisations should focus on planning and prevention with both urgency and calm. Do what you can to immediately protect staff and to plan for possible disruptions if things escalate. Your employee's health and well-being is paramount. Employers have a statutory duty of care for people's health and safety at work in terms of Safety and Health legislation in Zimbabwe.

3.0 HR basics to follow

- ✓ Make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date.
- ✓ Ensure that all employees know how to report any suspected risk to themselves from **COVID-19** and that all potential incidents are reported to **HR** so they can understand the overall risk to the workforce.
- ✓ Make sure all staff are aware of your response as an employer and what you are doing to protect people's health and reduce the risk of infection spreading.
- ✓ Continue to communicate as the situation changes.
- ✓ Make sure managers are clear on any relevant policies and processes, for example sickness reporting and sick pay, and procedures in case someone in the workplace develops the virus.

4.0 Protect your workforce

- Keep your workforce well-informed of the ongoing developments and official advice from the Government and Ministry of Health and Child Care. Latest updates are available on <http://www.mohcc.gov.zw/>.
- Encourage employees to avoid non-essential social contact. Advise them of what to do with regards to self-isolation for anyone (or anyone who lives with someone) who develops a new, continuous cough or a high temperature
- Reduce the spread of infection by providing soap and hand sanitiser gels with alcohol, especially in communal areas like kitchens and coffee areas.
- Provide staff with hand sanitisers. Increase the frequency and intensity of office cleaning; consider a deep clean; think about frequent wiping down of communal spaces such as kitchens, handrails on stairs, lift buttons, door handles, etc.
- Discourage them from handshaking at the workplace.
- includes individuals who may be a carrier of COVID-19 but may not have symptoms

5.0 What to do if an employee who display COVID-19 symptoms has been instructed to self-isolate by the doctor

- EISAZ recommends that employers should provide contractual sick leave pay in terms of the Labour Act Chapter 28:01 if an employee is asked to self-isolate by a medical professional.
- Employers need to ask for medical evidence for a period of absence where an employee is advised to self-isolate.

6.0 Protect your business

- Employers should develop a contingency plan to prepare for a range of eventualities regarding the business impact of the virus.
- Think about transferrable skills -will you have enough people to keep business critical operations running if you do face staff shortages.
- Encourage team working / external meetings through video conferencing, etc. Make sure there's the right IT support in place for people.
- Consider creative resourcing solutions like staggering shifts so fewer people are in the workplace at any one time .Consider having A and B teams to reduce the number of people in the workplace at any one time and reduce the risk of infection.
- Encourage people to do online banking rather than going to the banks

7.0 Planning your short-term response: key policies and processes to review and communicate

Once you have taken immediate steps to protect your workforce you can look to plan your short-term response. President E.D Mnangagwa on Tuesday 17th March 2020 announced that Government was declaring the pandemic a state of national disaster, to enable the Government to mobilise resources and curb the spread of the disease. The President is today expected to launch a coronavirus national preparedness and response plan

We strongly encourage that you should act now so that you can continue to protect your workforce and allow for as much business continuity as possible.

8.0 Vacation leave

Review your policy around vacation leave and make clear to employees what will happen if they need to cancel their holiday due to travel restrictions. If you ask employees to voluntarily disclose where they are planning to go on holiday be prepared to have an open discussion about plans to travel to high-risk areas and think about what you will do upon their return. Think about the impact self-isolation of that employee post-visit will have on their work and their wider team.

9.0 Staff mental health and well-being

- ✓ Be aware that some employees, understandably, may be very worried about catching the virus, while others will have concerns about their family or friends.
- ✓ Listen to people's concerns and reassure them that any measures taken are to protect people and there is no need to panic. Communicate regularly with the workforce and ensure that line managers are regularly informed about the organisation's contingency plans so that they can also provide guidance reassure people.
- ✓ Signpost employees to further advice or support, such as employee assistance programmes and any other well-being resources you have available. Consider providing counselling for those employees who are particularly anxious.
- ✓ Keep checking in on people's workloads and stress levels and offer support where possible. If you can, adjust targets for employees who remain working and be flexible with deadlines.
- ✓ If a large number of employees are unable to work this could lead to other employees working longer hours. In this case you need to ensure you still comply with the provisions of the NEC for Engineering Iron and Steel Industry's CBA SI 134/2017 regarding working hours, night shifts and rest breaks.

10.0 Short-time and lay-off working

In case your business is severely affected by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) situation you may need to look at introducing temporary measures in order to protect the workforce and the business.

These measures include moving to short time working (where employees work less than their regular contractual hours, for example a three-day week). This requires urgent notification of short time work to the NEC.

11.0 Business closure

Unfortunately, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) situation may lead to some businesses going bankrupt or being forced to cease trading according to evidence already seen in some parts of the global village. In this scenario employers would need to follow retrenchment procedures stipulated in the Labour Act Chapter 28:01.

Employers will have to follow the correct procedure, which includes, by law, compensation for loss of and a notice period payment.

12.0 Risks to consider

Throughout your organisation's response to the COVID-19 global health emergency there will be people management risks that you will need to be aware of and take steps to address.

13.0 Business continuity and pressure on remaining staff

- ✓ The outbreak of the virus is very likely to affect employees in your organisation in different ways. Some employees may need to keep working while others self-isolate or stop working, and so think about how you can prevent perceptions of unfairness creeping in and keep everyone on board in these exceptional times.
- ✓ If workers are asked to work extra hours to cover for absent staff, make sure you comply with your overtime payment obligations under SI 34/2017. Regularly communicate how much you value everyone's contribution. If some people are taking on additional responsibilities to bridge gaps, make sure they feel appreciated and this is for a relatively short time. Emphasise that you can only succeed as an organisation and protect your people and the business if you all pull together. Make sure that you are not putting unacceptable levels of demands on people and that they have the support and resources in place to fulfil their tasks, particularly any additional duties.
- ✓ Line managers should be trained and confident to spot any early warning signs of people experiencing stress; make sure they have regular catch ups with people to ensure they are coping with any extra demands or workloads.
- ✓ Provide clear signposting to any internal and external support for people, such as counselling and an employee assistance programme.

EISAZ believes that its members will be assisted by the guidelines given above and we shall ensure that the guidelines are continuously reviewed to reflect Government's advice from time to time.

Yours faithfully

M RUZIWA
SECRETARY GENERAL

