



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NOTICE: RETURN TO WORK OF VULNERABLE EMPLOYEES

1. Persons with significant comorbidities and/or ≥ 60 years are at increased risk of severe Covid-19. During the SARS-CoV-2 surge, these vulnerable persons were advised to stay at home or if they were essential workers, to re-focus their job description away from direct interaction with members of the public, especially in health care settings.
2. This notice provides guidance as to how the return to work of vulnerable employees should be managed given the decline in the number of cases of Covid-19 infection in most parts of the country and transition to level 1 lockdown. The guidance takes into account that the number of Covid-19 cases may increase after a period of lower transmission, and that such a resurgence may be localised or more widespread.
3. Workplaces should comply with Department of Labour and Employment and Occupational Health regulations and directives regarding prevention and management of Covid-19 in workplaces, including those which relate to management of vulnerable employees.
4. Decisions regarding return to work of vulnerable employees should be based on assessment of:
 - The employee's level of vulnerability based on their age and co-morbidity/co-morbidities (see Annexure B)
 - The risk of exposure based on the employee's current job description
 - The risk of community transmission based on the district Covid-19 positivity rates.
5. The previous list of co-morbidities has been reviewed based on published literature and local data on hospital admissions and deaths. Based on the categories shown in Annexure B, vulnerable employees should be categorised as vulnerable or highly vulnerable.
6. The first step is to eliminate or reduce potential exposure to the SARS-CoV-2 virus by vulnerable employees. Such accommodation may include alternative temporary placement/redeployment to a different role and responsibility, restriction of certain duties, protective isolation (e.g. providing a dedicated, clean office, etc.), provision of specific PPE, stricter physical distancing protocols (including staggering of shifts), barriers or additional hygiene measures and limiting duration of close interaction with clients, colleagues and/or the public

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reducing external risks (see Guidance on vulnerable employees and workplace accommodation in relation to COVID-19 (V4: 25 May 2020 for more details).

7. Based on their current job description, the level of exposure of an employee or group of employees should then be assessed using the Department of Labour and Employment risk categories as shown below.

Low Exposure Risk	Jobs that do not require contact with people known to be or suspected of being infected with SARS-CoV-2, nor frequent close contact with (i.e. within 2 meter of) the general public.
Medium Exposure Risk	Jobs that require frequent and/or close contact with (i.e. within 2 meters of) people who may be infected with SARS-CoV-2, but who are not known or suspected COVID-19 patients.
High Exposure Risk	Jobs with high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19.
Very High Exposure Risk	Jobs with high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19 during specific medical, post-mortem, or laboratory procedures.

8. Finally, decisions regarding return to work should be informed by district Covid-19 positivity rates. Positivity rates (the proportion of all Covid-19 tests which are positive) for each district will be available on the NICD website. These will be based on the average positivity rate over the previous 14-day period, and will be updated on the 1st and 15th of each month.
9. The recommended action based on job-related risk of exposure and district positivity rates is shown below in Annexure A. The following vulnerable persons should continue to stay at home.
 - Highly vulnerable employees with one or more medium, high or very high factor as outlined in Annexure A.
 - Vulnerable employees with one or more high or very high risk factor
10. A number of examples are also shown in Annexure A.
11. Your co-operation in implementing this guidance will be highly appreciated.

Kind regards


DR SSS BUTHELEZI
DIRECTOR-GENERAL: HEALTH
DATE: 2020/11/10

ANNEXURE A: CLASSIFICATION OF RISK BASED ON EXPOSURE AND DISTRICT POSITIVITY RATES

Risk category	Job-related risk exposure	District Positivity Rate
Low	Jobs that do not require contact with people known to be or suspected of being infected with SARS-CoV-2, nor frequent close contact with (i.e. within 2 meter of) the general public.	< 5%
Medium	Jobs that require frequent and/or close contact with (i.e. within 2 meters of) people who may be infected with SARS-CoV-2, but who are not known or suspected COVID-19 patients.	5 – 10%
High	Jobs with high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19.	≥ 10%
Very High	Jobs with high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19 during specific medical, post-mortem, or laboratory procedures.	-

Who should not return to work?

1. Anyone with severe co-morbidity plus one or more medium, high or very high risk factor
2. Anyone with a co-morbidity plus one or more high or very high risk factor.

Examples:

Example 1.

Someone who is over 60 years of age who works in a well-ventilated office where physical distancing can be maintained. Such a person can return to work if the district positivity rate is below 5%.

Rationale: Although the person is classified as being highly vulnerable, once the positivity rate falls below 5%, there are no medium, high or very high risk factors.

Example 2.

Someone who is 50 years with well-controlled diabetes who works as a supermarket cashier. Such a person can return to work once the positivity rate is below 10%.

Rationale: The person is classified as being vulnerable, but once the positivity rate falls below 10%, there are no high or very high risk factors.

Example 3.

Someone who is 45 years old with chronic obstructive airways disease who works as a frontline nurse in a hospital. Such a person is classified as highly vulnerable and should not return to work because the job-related risk of exposure is very high. An effort should be made to reduce the job-related risk of exposure through alternative temporary placement/redeployment to a different role and responsibility or other means.

ANNEXURE B: LIST OF VULNERABLE EMPLOYEES

Vulnerable employees

Any person with one or more of the following conditions;

- Hypertension
- Diabetes
- Chronic cardiac disease
- Chronic renal disease
- Malignancy
- HIV
- Tuberculosis (current; current and past)

Highly vulnerable employees

Risk Factor	Detail	Definition
Age	People 60 years and older with/without comorbidities ⁱ	Aged 60 years or older with one or more disorders or conditions.
People of all ages with the following underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled:		
Cardiovascular Disease	Moderate/ Severe Hypertension ^{i, ii, iii}	Moderate hypertension: systolic BP 160-179mmHg and/or diastolic BP 100-109 mmHg. Severe hypertension: systolic BP \geq 180 mmHg and/or diastolic BP \geq 110 mmHg.
	Congestive cardiac failure or other serious cardiovascular disease ^{ii, iv, v, vi}	Confirmed clinical diagnosis of congestive cardiac failure or other serious cardiovascular disease
	Cerebrovascular disease, including stroke and transient ischaemic attack ^{iv, vi}	Confirmed clinical diagnosis of cerebrovascular disease.
Respiratory Disease ^{vii}	Pulmonary Tuberculosis – untreated or in early treatment	People who have not completed the intensive phase or first two months of treatment in line with the National Department of Health Standard Treatment Guidelines.
	Moderate to severe asthma ^{viii, ix}	Asthma which requires treatment with high dose inhaled corticosteroids plus a second controller (and/or systemic corticosteroids) to prevent it from becoming 'uncontrolled' or which remains 'uncontrolled' despite this therapy.
	Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) ^{viii, x}	Confirmed clinical diagnosis of COPD
	Other severe chronic lung pathology, including cystic fibrosis and bronchiectasis	Confirmed clinical diagnosis – irrespective of severity.

Kidney Disease	Chronic Kidney Disease ^{xi} xii	eGFR < 45
Pregnancy	Third trimester pregnancy xiii, xiv	Estimated to be further than week 27 of pregnancy
Immunosuppression	Poorly controlled type II Diabetes Mellitus ^{xv, xvi, xvii, ii, xviii, xix, xx}	HBA1c ≥7.5% within last 6 months
	Cancer undergoing active treatment	Currently undergoing chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy
	Human Immunodeficiency Virus with advanced immunosuppression ^{xxi}	HIV positive persons with CD4 count <200 cells/mm ³ who are ART-naïve or who initiated ART within last 3 months
	Chronic immunosuppressant use xxii, xxiii	Chronic use of corticosteroids of >20mg prednisone per day or equivalent, methotrexate, biologicals or other immunosuppressants.
	Transplant ^{xxiv, xxv, xxvi, xxvii, xxviii}	On chronic immunosuppressants
Metabolic syndrome	Severe obesity ^{xxix}	Body mass index (MBI) of 40 and higher

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