



PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE
REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

MOST IMMEDIATE

SEC/COV/1

19 March 2020

From : Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service

To : Supervising Officers of Ministries/Departments

General Preparedness and Response to COVID-19

As you are aware, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared COVID-19 as a pandemic and has assessed the risk to be "very high" both at regional and global levels.

2. The outbreak of the COVID-19 presents a major challenge for the country. Consequently, Government has been taking all necessary measures to strengthen our level of preparedness and response to this threat.

3. As you are aware, there are three reported cases of COVID-19 in Mauritius as at date.

4. There is therefore, an urgent need to adopt a collective, coordinated and comprehensive approach, engaging all stakeholders, in our endeavour to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our country.

5. Public sector organisations will inevitably have to join the collective effort and raise the level of awareness and preparedness among their employees and their families. An effective response does require the active participation of a well-informed public and also service providers. We therefore have to educate all our employees and their families so that they know the symptoms and how to protect themselves and others.

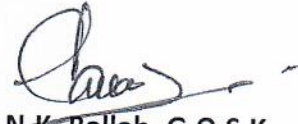
6. In view thereof, a **Fact Sheet** on COVID-19 has been prepared, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms, outlining, *inter-alia*, the symptoms of the COVID-19 disease, its mode of transmission, the protective measures, etc. The aim is to ensure a common understanding of the issue and fight rumours and misinformation, as this is a vital part of the battle against the Coronavirus. A copy of the Fact Sheet is enclosed at **Annex A**.

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7. There is also a need to act with foresight and help public officers stay safe at their workplace. To this end, all Supervising Officers are requested to set up, under their chairpersonship, a Committee comprising all heads of sections/divisions/departments to specifically look into preparedness and response at the workplace and development of an appropriate business continuity plan. This Committee would also have the task of identifying and implementing appropriate resilience measures. A brief outline of the areas which may be considered at the level of this Committee is enclosed at Annex B.

8. I rely on your usual support and collaboration and invite you all to lead this crucial endeavour in your respective organization so as to prevent the spread of the virus and consolidate our general state of preparedness and response for this threat.

9. I should be grateful if you could bring the content of this Circular to the attention of all staff of your Ministry /Department and of all Parastatal Bodies and Government-Owned Companies falling under the aegis of your Ministry. This Circular can also be accessed on pmo.govmu.org.



N.K. Ballah, G.O.S.K
Secretary to Cabinet
and Head of the Civil Service

FACT SHEET

INTRODUCTION

In January 2020, the World HEALTH Organisation (WHO), declared the outbreak of a new disease caused by the Corona virus in Hubei Province, China to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

The World Health Organization WHO announced "COVID-19" as the name of this new disease on 11 February 2020,

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the COVID-19 outbreak as pandemic.

What is a Coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry cough and breathing difficulties. Most people recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Some people especially older people and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

How does COVID-19 spread?

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth when a person with COVID-19 coughs or sneezes.

These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. This are why it is important to stay more than 1 meter (3 feet) away from a person who is sick.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES FOR EVERYONE

You can reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 by taking some simple precautions:

1. **CLEAN YOUR HANDS REGULARLY AND THOROUGHLY WITH AN ALCOHOL-BASED HAND RUB OR WASH THEM WITH SOAP AND WATER.**

WHY? Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

2. **MAINTAIN AT LEAST 1 METRE (3 FEET) DISTANCE BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ANYONE WHO IS COUGHING OR SNEEZING.**

WHY? When someone coughs or sneezes they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.

3. **AVOID TOUCHING EYES, NOSE AND MOUTH.**

WHY? Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

4. **MAKE SURE YOU, AND THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU, FOLLOW GOOD RESPIRATORY HYGIENE. THIS MEANS COVERING YOUR MOUTH AND NOSE WITH YOUR BENT ELBOW OR TISSUE WHEN YOU COUGH OR SNEEZE. THEN DISPOSE OF THE USED TISSUE IMMEDIATELY.**

WHY? Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

Protective measures for persons who are in areas affected by COVID-19 or have recently visited areas where COVID-19 is spreading (for the past 14 days)

1. Follow the guidance outlined above (Protective measures for everyone)
2. If you develop fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical advice promptly as this may be due to a respiratory infection or other serious condition.

How likely am I to catch COVID-19?

The risk depends on where you are and more specifically, whether there is a COVID-19 outbreak there.

Should I wear a mask to protect myself?

1. Only wear a mask if you are ill with COVID-19 symptoms (especially coughing) or looking after someone who may have COVID-19.
2. Disposable face mask can only be used once. If you are not ill or looking after someone who is ill then you are wasting a mask.
3. The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are to frequently clean your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue and maintain a distance of at least 1 meter (3 feet) from people who are coughing or sneezing.

Is there a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19

Not yet. To date, there is no vaccine and no specific antiviral medicine to prevent or treat COVID-19. However, those affected should receive care to relieve symptoms. People with serious illness should be hospitalized. Most patients recover thanks to supportive care.

Possible vaccines and some specific drug treatments are under investigation. They are being tested through clinical trials. WHO is coordinating efforts to develop vaccines and medicines to prevent and treat COVID-19.

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COVID-19

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Basic principles to help public officers stay safe and help to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Recommendations are:

1. Sick officers should not come to work

If you develop fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical advice promptly.

2. Enforce regular hand washing with safe water and soap, alcohol rub/hand sanitizer

Clean your hands regularly and thoroughly with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.

WHY? Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

3. Encourage daily disinfection and cleaning of common surfaces, such as doorknobs, phones, tap, handrails, lift buttons.

If you think a surface may be infected, clean it with simple disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others

4. Ensure provision of clean water, sanitation and waste management facilities and follow environmental cleaning and decontamination procedures

Chlorine is effective as decontamination (at 0.05%) for environmental cleaning when preceded by cleaning with soap and water.

5. Promote social distancing

Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.

WHY? When someone coughs or sneezes they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe

in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.

STAY INFORMED ABOUT COVID-19

Understand basic information about coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

1. Symptoms of COVID-19

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2. How is COVID-19 transmitted?

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth when a person with COVID-19 coughs or sneezes.

These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. This are why it is important to stay more than 1 meter (3 feet) away from a person who is sick.

3. How to prevent COVID-19 transmission?

You can reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 by taking some simple precautions:

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Preparedness and Response

1. Update and develop emergency and contingency plans
2. Prepare and maintain hand washing stations with soap and water and if possible place alcohol based hand rubs, hand sanitizer at each reception desk at entrances and exits and in conference rooms and toilets.
3. Clean and disinfect premises and frequently touched surfaces daily.
4. Implement social distancing practices such as cancelling meeting when possible or use of teleconferences.

ESTABLISH PROCEDURES IF OFFICERS BECOME ILL

1. Plan ahead with Health Authorities and update emergency contact details.
2. Establish procedures for separating sick person with other personnel without creating stigma.

3. Notify the local health authorities and send to nearest Health Institution.
4. Inform the next of kin of the sick person, as the case may be.
5. Establish procedure for follow up actions.

PROMOTION OF INFORMATION SHARING

1. Share known information with staff and provide updated information on the prevailing situation, including preventive measures to clear confusion and avoid misunderstanding.
2. Confirmed cases of COVID-19 amongst staff and/or their relatives should be reported to the Ministry/Department.
3. Promote sharing of information through the Safety and Health Committee and any other mechanism such as posters, pamphlets.

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