

Office Notice xx/2020

An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh

Central Statistics Office

Protocol if a staff member is ill in the context of the of Covid-19 pandemic

It is prudent that we have plans in place should a staff member be infected (or suspected of infection) with the Covid-19 virus. This document applies to all staff, those working onsite and from home.

At the outset, it is important to say that we will respect the staff member's confidentiality in any such incident as far as possible. However, this requires everyone - the individual, their manager and their colleagues, to actively respect this confidentiality too. We do not want to stigmatise, blame, fear or cause additional stress to anyone involved. What is needed is understanding, support and empathy¹. You should read this document from two perspectives – if a colleague was affected and if it was you who was affected.

For reasons of confidentiality, we will not be announcing if or where a case may have been encountered. As described below, the HSE will contact all of those that need to be contacted and will give them appropriate advice. All appropriate measures will be taken in relation to the health and safety of other staff. Where required CSO will issue relevant communications to staff.

Also important, is the extent to which staff can continue to operate from home. In the current emergency situation, with anticipated high levels of illness and absence, it is important that everyone continue to contribute to the provision of essential public services as far as possible in the national interest. It is imperative that line managers maintain daily contact with staff

¹ The current Covid-19 situation is a time of uncertainty which can result in feelings of fear, anxiety and stress. These are very normal reactions to a threat such as this. The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) is available to provide support to all staff at this time. Tel: 0761 00 00 30 where staff can speak to an Employee Assistance Officer in confidence.

working remotely by sharing personal mobile and email contacts in addition to any connectivity provided by the Office.

It is not possible to centrally prepare a protocol for every eventuality in every CSO location. This protocol can be adapted to the actual circumstances with the overriding priority being the dignity and safety of everyone involved. Each HOD should take time to 'walk through' this protocol with staff so that everyone is aware of the necessary procedures and any local arrangements that may have to apply. For instance, if the HOD was absent (or was the affected person) another staff member would need to take over some of the functions set out in this document. HR will ensure that this document is published on the CSO website at www.cso.ie/en/staffnews

Please also remember that although this protocol is being put in place by the CSO for the good of all staff, individuals bear a huge level of responsibility in making sure their colleagues are kept safe.

This protocol is based on the current (as of 18 March 2020) HSE guidelines on COVID-19 and PER document update on 15 March 2020 but we may have to amend and update it based on experience or updated medical advice.

There are three main scenarios covered in this protocol. Obviously, there can be other scenarios but these guidelines should be enough to construct an appropriate response. The three scenarios are:

1. Where a staff member contacts their manager from home to let them know that they have symptoms of COVID-19;
2. Where a staff member advises from home that they themselves or a member of their immediate family is a confirmed case of COVID-19 infection;
3. Where a staff member shows symptoms of Covid-19 while in work.

The document also sets out some practical steps to help prevent the spread of the virus in the workplace.

Important note: Any staff member who is feeling unwell should not attend the office. This applies to any transmissible illness during this Covid-19 emergency period.

Scenario 1

A staff member contacts their manager from home to let them know that they have symptoms of COVID-19

The manager should advise the staff member to stay at home and if they have not already done so, ring their GP or any of the helplines listed on HSE.ie.

The manager should refer the staff member to the most recent guidance material from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform relating to working arrangements and leave associated with COVID-19. They should also request the staff member to pay particular attention to the latest HSE Guidelines on self-Isolation.

The manager should ask the staff member to give the manager's contact details as a contact point should the HSE decide that the case requires contacts tracing through the employer. As necessary, if subsequently contacted by the HSE, the manager can liaise with HR.

Managers should also ask the member of staff to maintain communication with them requesting to be kept informed if, ultimately, they are diagnosed with COVID-19. This is a confidential process between the manager and the member of staff and should remain so. However, the existing guidelines from DPER about recording and classifying absences are applicable.

At this point in time, the HSE advice is that, in this scenario, there is no need to carry out any additional cleaning, or isolation of other staff unless the HSE so direct through contact with the employer. The CSO and staff will follow any instructions received from the HSE.

The staff member is advised not to inform colleagues of their symptoms/suspicions as it might cause unnecessary distress, as HSE advice is that there is little risk of transmission to colleagues in this scenario.

The general principles applying to the management of sick leave, for example the requirement of staff to contact managers and for ongoing contact with staff who are on special leave for this purpose, will apply.

If the staff member is capable of doing so, the staff member may carry out duties from home.

The line manager should alert HR to the situation (using the email address AlertHR@cso.ie) who in turn will update the Management Board. If the manager is subsequently contacted by the HSE concerning the case, HR should also be informed and all assistance will be provided.

Scenario 2

A staff member contacts their manager from home and advises that they themselves or a member of their immediate family is a confirmed case of COVID-19 infection

The staff member should inform their manager of any instructions they have received from the HSE, (the staff member should copy AlertHR@cso.ie on any communications with their line manager).. In this scenario it is almost certain that the HSE advice will be that the staff member should remain at home. In such a case, the staff member should follow all advice and should not come into work until cleared to do so by medical advice.

The manager should refer the staff member to the most recent guidance material from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform relating to working arrangements and leave associated with COVID-19. The staff member should maintain communication throughout their absence, in particular in relation to whether or not they have been confirmed as having contracted COVID-19. This is a confidential process between the manager, HR and the member of staff and should remain so. However, the existing guidelines from DPER about recording and classifying absences are applicable.

If the staff member is confirmed as positive for COVID-19 infection, Public Health officials will interview the staff member in order to identify and trace known contacts. This could mean that other colleagues may be contacted individually and asked to present themselves for testing and possible self-isolation. The manager and colleagues should treat this process sensitively, as it is a very worrying time for people. As much flexibility and support as possible should be given to staff. Throughout this process everyone should respect confidentiality to avoid causing unnecessary worry. Managers should, in turn, ask these members of staff to keep communicating with them on a regular basis.

If the CSO is notified that a staff member has tested positive for COVID 19 virus and that person has been in the workplace during the infectious period (i.e. when symptomatic or in

the days immediately preceding this), the CSO will arrange for cleaning and disinfection; based on advice/instructions received from the HSE on foot of the incident.

The general principles applying to the management of sick leave, for example the requirement of staff to contact managers and for ongoing contact with staff who are on special leave for this purpose, will apply.

If the staff member is capable of doing so, the staff member may carry out duties from home.

The manager should alert HR to the situation (using the email address AlertHR@cso.ie) who in turn will update the Management Board. If the manager is subsequently contacted by the HSE concerning the incident HR should also be informed, and all assistance will be provided.

Scenario 3

A staff member becomes ill while in work

REMEMBER - If a staff member were to become incapacitated in the workplace, an ambulance should be called immediately - whatever the cause.

If a staff member shows symptoms of illness, the following procedure should be followed assuming the staff member is not incapacitated, in which case an ambulance should be called (by person, manager, other contact).

If the staff member occupies a single occupancy office, they should remain in that office. If the staff member is in an open plan office, they should go to the first aid room.

If the staff member prefers to go home and deal with the situation from there it is their choice. However, they should consider whether they are fit enough to do so and also whether the GP/HSE might first have relevant advice.

The person, manager, other contact should alert HR to the situation. The CSO will arrange for cleaning and disinfection; based on advice/instructions received from the HSE on foot of the incident.

First aiders will not be involved in assisting with any Covid 19 issues. We have back up first aid rooms available in each building which can be used for other first aid cases if necessary . These rooms are stocked with a first aid box and anti viral/anti bacterial wipes.

Clearly, maintaining confidentiality in this scenario is going to be difficult. This is where colleagues' calmness, commonsense, support and empathy are particularly necessary.

If the employee is absent following the incident, the manager should alert HR to the situation (using the email address AlertHR@cso.ie). If the manager is subsequently contacted by the HSE to advise that the incident was related to COVID-19, HR should also be informed, and all assistance will be provided. The existing guidelines from DPER, [Communication to Civil and Public Service on Delay Phase of COVID-19 \(PDF 119KB\)](#) about recording and classifying

absences are applicable as are the general principles applying to the management of sick leave, for example the requirement of staff to contact managers and for ongoing contact with staff who are on special leave for this purpose, will apply.

Practical steps to help prevent the spread of the virus in the workplace

Staff should take the practical measures set out on the HSE website to protect themselves and their colleagues:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/protect-yourself.html>

Try this thought exercise – ask yourself to name the persons with whom you have had close contact (longer than 15 mins at a distance of less than 2 meters) at work over the past 14 days. This is how the virus could spread. Think about how using the social distancing advice above might change this number.

Managers, please bring this Office Notice to the attention of all eligible officers without delay, including eligible officers not currently on Lotus Notes, and staff on annual leave and sick leave.

Marie Creedon

HR Manager

23 March 2020