



# African Union COVID-19 / Occupational Safety and Health **GUIDELINES SERIES**

*Food and Retail  
Sector*

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**Volume 5**



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## Foreword



The COVID-19 pandemic is significantly impacting economies, social cohesion and health systems of African Countries. The effects of the pandemic, if not efficiently and effectively addressed, will have an adverse impact on the realisation of continental goals set in the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals and other developmental goals and targets at the continental, regional and national level.

In February 2020, the AU Member States adopted a strategy that aims to prevent severe illness and death from COVID-19 infection and to minimize social disruption and economic consequences of COVID-19 outbreak. The AU has so far established a Coronavirus fund with commitments to-date totalling USD20 million. At the national level, most African countries have implemented lockdowns, testing (of suspected cases) and contact tracing.

On the 4th of April 2020, the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) published a White Paper on AUDA-NEPAD Response to COVID-19 and other epidemics. The Paper features five key priorities with an aim of strengthening: health systems; food systems; skills development and employment; education; and national planning and data systems.

As part of AUDA-NEPAD's White Paper, particular focus has been placed on occupational safety and health (OSH) for both frontline health care workers and the working population at large. It is evident that the impact of COVID-19 on the working population is significant, especially the working population that have high exposure risks due to the nature of their work. This cohort includes healthcare workers, laboratory workers, border management teams, those in the food supply, logistics and public transportation industry, death-care workers, and waste management workers, amongst others. Similarly, the pandemic has posed significant risks to other workers, inter alia, increased absenteeism; loss of wages and jobs; loss of man-hours and productivity; increase in medical costs in the face of limited medical insurance cover and social protection; changes in the way of doing business; and interruption of supply chains.

There is, therefore, need for a coordinated response by the AU Member States to minimise the impact of COVID-19 on the working population. Such efforts will, amongst others, promote the efficient and effective deployment of expert support thereby making available technical support and evidence-based guidance and advice on occupational safety and health needs within the realm of AU's COVID-19 response Plan.

It is with the foregoing that AUDA-NEPAD in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the International Labour organisation and other partners have developed the COVID-19/OSH Guidelines for Specific Workplaces. The guidelines covering thematic areas such as Occupational Safety, Health and Wellness of Health Workers and Clinical Occupation Health, serve as key technical reference instruments for all stakeholders, including national and sub-national governments, regional bodies, civil society, academia and development partners, to work in a coordinated and coherent manner in addressing occupational safety and health at workplaces in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is our sincere hope that the values and imperatives that are framed in the guidelines will inspire all of us to promote occupational safety and health at workplaces as part of the concerted efforts to fight against the effects of the global pandemic and advance the Continent's development agenda encapsulated in Agenda 2063.

**Dr Ibrahim A Mayaki**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

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## Definition Of Terms

**Coronavirus disease:** (COVID-19) is an infectious disease bred by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

**Contact tracing:** is the identification and follow-up of persons who may have come into contact with an infected person.

**Hazard:** is anything with the potential to cause harm.

**Isolation:** is a separation of sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick.

**Occupational Safety and health:** is the science of the anticipation, recognition, evaluation and control of hazards arising in or from the workplace that could impair the health and well-being of workers, taking into account the possible impact on the surrounding communities and the general environment.

**Personal protective equipment:** is equipment that will protect the user against the risk of accidents or adverse effects on health.

**Physical or social distancing:** means keeping space between oneself and other people by staying at least 2 meters) from other people, staying out of crowded places and avoiding mass gatherings.

**Quarantine:** is a separation and restriction of the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.

**Risk:** is the likelihood that the harm from a particular hazard is realized.

**Workplace risk assessment:** is a careful examination of what, in the workplace, could cause harm to people; it enables a weighing up of whether enough precautions are in place or whether more should be done to prevent harm to those at risk, including workers and members of the public.

## Acronyms

AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency- New Partnership for Africa's Development
CDC	Centre for Communicable Diseases
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
FSMS	Food Safety Management Systems
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points
GMP	Good manufacturing practices
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
ILO	International Labour Organization
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SARS-COV-2	Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2
WHO	World Health Organization

## 1. Introduction

Opening up countries' economies post COVID19 lockdown measures requires strategic repositioning of workplace risk management strategies, which will address policy conflict and facilitate coherence with existing national guidelines and ILO standards.

This guideline offers practical guidance for food and retail sector (both formal and informal) to implement measures to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. It addresses the protection of workers and customers, minimizing the risk of disease transmission. Due to the wide variety of establishments in the food and retail sector (formal and informal traders) it may not be possible to implement all measures at all times, trying to tackle the problem from multiple angles can help reduce health risks and exposure to COVID-19.

Existing Food Safety Management System (FSM) already have very stringent requirements that reduce the likelihood of foodborne disease transmission. However, additional measures must be taken to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 from touching surfaces or from person-to-person.

## 2. Scope of Application

This guideline applies to the food and retail sector (both formal and informal) E.g. supermarket, catering companies, food processing plants, food/groceries pick-up and delivery services, takeaways and restaurants, meat and poultry processing, staff canteens and rest areas, open food markets, etc.

## 3. Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is:

- To assist the employers to protect their workers and customers by ensuring safe and healthy workplaces.
- To outline minimum protection measures that organisations should take to help prevent the spread of COVID19 within the food and retail sectors.
- To direct employers on how to manage and handle workers with symptoms of COVID19.

## 4. Elements of a Management System

### Workplace policy, planning and organisation

#### Policy

The national policy on OSH management systems and sector inspection programme should be

reviewed to address challenges posed by COVID-19. Where no national OSH policies exist, national guidelines should be developed. The review should:

- Be based on national needs, conditions and existing legal framework.
- Be developed in consultation with representative organisations of employers, workers and other bodies critical to the fight against COVID-19.
- Promote the incorporation of issues of COVID-19 into OSH management systems, which in turn should form part of the overall management of an organisation.
- Be broad-based, addressing the Food and Retail sector supply chain at the national level and should be aligned with national food safety and hygiene policy framework.
- Promote the participation of workers and their representatives throughout the supply chains. Areas of the supply chain that tend to receive less attention, such as logistical operations (i.e. transportation of goods), should receive particular attention. Transportation has proven to be a means of spreading SARS-CoV-2 en-mass.

### Planning and Work Organisation

The employer should assume overall responsibility for the protection of workers' safety and health and provide leadership for COVID-19 preventive measures. The employer should develop an infectious disease preparedness and Response Plan, which should:

- Allocate responsibility, accountability and authority for the development, implementation and performance of COVID-19 guidelines within the broader spectrum of OSH management systems.
- Ensure that the COVID-19 guidelines are a line management responsibility.

### Risk assessment

Organisations need to assess existing risk management approaches and identify how old risk assessment and management tools could be used to assess and manage the threat of COVID19 infection to both employees and customers. As a minimum, the employer should:

- Identify the threat of COVID19 infection across business operations and for specific tasks; special consideration should be made for the nature of business and extend of public exposure. Risk profiling process should consider all states of business operations such as premise entry and service/payment points, use of shopping carts, extend of service in terms number of customer served daily, premises design to facilitate social/physical distancing and effective hand washing.





- Decide who is likely to be exposed to COVID19 and how serious the risk of exposure is.
- Take action to eliminate the risk of exposure, or if this is not possible, control the risk.
- Assessing business operation risk of exposing workforce and members of the public to COVID19 should be an integral part of business operation management.

### **Risk prevention, control and management**

To prevent or reduce the risk of COVID19 transmission many sectors have introduced physical distancing measures such as working from home and teleworking. However, such measures are not always applicable to the food and retail sectors. Keeping workers in the food production and supply chain healthy and safe while sustaining food supply requires responsive OSH policy/guidelines. Such measures should be aligned with the sector-specific guidelines such as Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS). As a minimum risk prevention, control and management strategies that are in line with the hierarchy of control should be adapted. These may include the following:

- **Elimination**

In the absence of a vaccine for COVID19, workers suspected of having made contact with COVID19 cases should not be allowed at work. When evident, workers with symptoms linked to COVID19 should not be allowed in the workplace.

- **Engineering control**

Premise modification: by placing plexiglass barriers at tills and counters as far as reasonably practicable to protect workers and customers and modifying premise to increase ventilation rates.

- **Administration**

Administrative measures may also include procedures such as return to work procedures, cleaning procedures and handwashing procedures. Procedures may address the following:

- » Flexible worksites and flexible working hours to enhance social distancing.
- » Discouraging sharing of working tools and equipment among workers. Where this is not possible, encourage sanitization of tools and equipment before and after use.
- » Discouraging workers from sharing using each other's phones and other utensils.
- » Enhancing housekeeping measures by emphasising the disinfection of working surfaces, tools and equipment.

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Needs to be of good quality and acceptable standards. In cases where cloth masks are to be used, such masks should comply with WHO guidelines. Information and training in the correct use of PPE, including correct procedures for putting on and removing masks should be made available. As a minimum, PPEs should be considered for identified job tasks with increased risk of exposure to COVID19, when it is difficult to maintain a physical distance of at least 2 meters from co-workers and customers at all times.

- **Health surveillance**

Organisation's occupational health and safety programs and COVID-19 preparedness plans should include:

- » How to remain in contact with employees to ensure they continue to monitor their health, avoid tasks/ activities that could increase risks for exposures to coronavirus, and do not report to work while symptomatic.
- » Educating employees on what to do if they or their close contacts become sick with symptoms of COVID-19.
- » To the extent feasible, screening workers for symptoms of COVID-19 at the start of their duty day using a combination of visual observation for signs of illness; temperature checks; and asking about fever, cough, or shortness of breath in the previous 48 hours.
- » Consultation with State or local health officials before allowing symptomatic, infected, or exposed employees to return to work.
- » Exposed employees should remain excluded from work until 14 days have passed after the last potential exposure.
- » Procedures should be devised for managing employees identified to be symptomatic or tested positive for COVID-19 while on duty.
- » Whenever possible, the organisation should avoid workers with pending test result for COVID19 from resuming duty.

### **Protection of persons other than workers**

Persons, other than workers, who visit the workplace, should be subjected to procedures aimed at protecting them and workers from COVID-19. At the barest minimum, the procedures should include:

- Induction on OSH and COVID-19 related issues before admission to the worksite.
- Carrying out appropriate personal hygiene measures such as hand washing or sanitization.
- Carrying out temperature checks.

- Provision of appropriate PPE.
- Limiting time spent on the worksite.
- Limiting areas visited on the worksite.
- Provide IEC materials at entry points to premises.

### **Work arrangement and operations (including teleworking)**

- To minimise opportunities for the transmission of COVID19, workers arrival and departure times to work, especially for premises with large workforce should be staggered to discourage crowding outside the premises.
- Where queuing is taking place, queue management systems should be introduced to maintain a 2-metre distance between people, both inside the food premises and in the external public areas where customers may need to queue.
- The business should regulate entry to ensure that premises do not become overcrowded and limit the spread of COVID19.
- Employer to introduce floor markings inside the commercial spaces to facilitate compliance with the social distancing advice of 2 metres, particularly in the most crowded areas, such as serving counters and tills.

### **Washing, Sanitation and Hygiene in the Workplace**

- Business setup should facilitate frequent handwashing and ensure good hygiene practices in food preparation and handling areas.
- To minimise the spread of Coronavirus, business premises, factories, and malls should be equipped with additional pop-up handwashing stations or facilities if possible, providing soap, water and hand sanitiser.
- Business to frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using standard cleaning products effective against COVID19.
- Cleaning practices should be in line with the Food Safety Management System, HACCP and GMP.
- Cleaning and waste disposal should be handled in a manner, which helps reduce the spread of coronavirus.

### **Education, training and communication**

- Competent authority and relevant Government agencies to facilitate the provisions of information education material (IEC) on the transmission, prevention and control of COVID19 in the workplace, translated in local languages where possible.

- Employers can help reduce the spread of coronavirus in the workplace and community by providing access to correct information on the prevention of COVID19, as such leaflets, posters and other material should be distributed in walk place, and COVID19 should be added to safety talks (toolbox talks).
- To increase awareness and help reduce the spread of Coronavirus, Business may make regular announcements to remind both workers and customers to follow social distancing advice and clean their hands regularly.
- Use additional signage to ask customers not to enter the shop if they have symptoms.

### Isolation, quarantine and contact tracing

- The competent authority and relevant government agencies to communicate to the industry minimum requirement for isolation, quarantine and contact tracing for COVID19 cases.
- As far as reasonably practicable, employers to provide isolation room (sickbay) in the workplace to allow effective isolation and quarantine of workers who may be unwell and show signs and

symptoms of COVID19, which include cough or high temperature.

- To facilitate adequate contact tracing, employers to cooperate with relevant authorities by maintaining UpToDate employees' sick records and report all suspected cases of COVID19 to the relevant authority as may be prescribed.

### Incident and disease reporting and notification

- » The competent authority in each member state, in consultation with the most representative organisations of employers and workers, should:
  - » Review their incident and disease reporting procedures to accommodate COVID-19. However, the decision whether to classify COVID-19 as an occupational disease or not should follow the guidelines laid down in the ILO Protocol (P155) of 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981, whose Article 1 (b) defines an occupational disease as, "any disease contracted as a result of exposure to risk factors arising from work activity." Establish means for the recording and notification of incidents and cases of COVID-19 in



workplaces. Ensure that means for the recording and notification of incidents of COVID-19 in workplaces determine the responsibility of employers to:

- Notify the competent authorities.
- Provide adequate and appropriate information to workers.
- » Establish the criteria according to which incidents and cases of COVID-19 in the workplace are to be notified.
- » Determine the time limits for notification of incidents and cases of COVID-19.
- » Determine the data to be included in the notification which should include, but not be limited to, the following:
  - Name of enterprise/establishment and employer.
  - Name of the economic sector.
  - If applicable, the name of the infected person, his/her bio-data and his/her physical address.
  - Workplace/department/section where the suspect works
  - If possible, the circumstances of exposure.

### Return to work

Before workers return to work, employers, in consultation with workers' representatives, should put in place a COVID-19 preparedness and response plan to guide actions at the workplace level. As a minimum, the plan should:

- Incorporate recommendations from provincial/state/local and/or national public health authorities into workplace-specific guidelines.
- Take into consideration risk levels associated with various areas of the supply chain, departments and the nature of tasks carried out by workers. Questions that ought to be answered in determining the risk levels include where, how and what the sources of exposure to COVID-19 might be.
- Consider workers' individual risk factors such as age, pregnancy, pre-existing medical conditions etc.
- Facilitate implementation of basic infection prevention measures with emphasis on good personal and corporate hygiene including handwashing with soap and running water; hand rubbing with commercial hand sanitizer; covering coughs and sneezes; safe disposal facilities for tissues used to cover coughs and sneezes.
- Discourage sharing of work tools, equipment and desks among workers.

- Institute a regular housekeeping schedule factoring in routine cleaning and disinfection of work surfaces.

### Protection against psychological impact including violence and victimisation

The advent of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has had and will continue to have an impact on the world of work. Essential services such as those provided by the Food and Retail sector have been stretched thin as people are made to work longer hours and more shifts, thus leaving them with little time for rest. Coupled with this, frontline workers such as point-of-sale attendants are constantly exposed to the danger of contracting COVID-19 through constant close interaction with the public and handling of cash that could be contaminated with respiratory droplets.

Put together, all these factors can cause stress and fatigue among workers. In view of the above and considering the negative impact that stress can have on the productivity of an enterprise, governments should encourage employers to develop measures aimed at tackling stress and fatigue in the workplace. As much as possible the measures developed should seek to promote healthy habits, rather than being reactive, in their approach to addressing stress in the workplace. When developing the measures, employers should:

- Work in concert with workers to develop the measures.
- Establish a Stress and Fatigue Risk Management Plan for stress and fatigue mitigation on the job; that should include:
  - » Identification of risk factors associated with stress and fatigue in the workplace.
  - » Identification of workers at risk of fatigue.
  - » Catalogue the possible common signs of stress and fatigue.
  - » Promotion of measures aimed at reducing exposure to fatigue including regularly scheduled breaks to rest and recharge their batteries.
- Publicise the Plan among the enterprise's workers.
- Encourage employers to promote open communication between and among co-workers, supervisors and senior management.
- Develop a support structure for workers who may be stressed and fatigued.
- Identify and note down the list of bodies, including contact details, which can provide stress-related information and provide professional help.

## 5. Key relevant documents

The following international and national standards and guidelines and policies apply. Include the following:

- Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155),
- Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161),
- Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187),
- Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 (No.121),
- Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), and
- ILO Recommendations on the List of Occupational Diseases,
- ILO Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems, ILO-OSH 2001 serves as a key guide to managing the risks posed by COVID-19.
- Country national OSH policies and primary legislation

## 6. Further reading material

- [COVID-19 and Food Safety: Guidance for competent authorities responsible for national food safety control systems](#)
- [COVID-19 and food safety: guidance for food businesses](#)



Thank you to all our partners for making this project a success





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