



## **Environmental Health Guidelines and Procedures for Global Services Sector (GSS) / Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) Revised Guidance for COVID-19**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) was declared for the outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) / COVID-19 on 30 January 2020 by World Health Organization (WHO) Director General (DG) based on the number of persons affected. On the 11th March, 2020 – WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic.

Jamaica confirmed its first case of COVID-19 on March 10, 2020. The Government of Jamaica has mounted an intense prevention and control programme for the outbreak. Prevention and containment is a key strategy to minimize the impact on Jamaica's labour force. The Ministry of Health & Wellness (MOHW) is providing the following information to guide employers in supporting this strategy. It describes four possible scenarios for workplaces based on the extent of spread at this time.

When someone who has COVID-19 coughs or sneezes, they release droplets of infected fluid, which in most cases fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as desks, tables, telephones etc. Persons can become infected with COVID-19 by coming into contact with these contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Where persons are standing within one meter (3 feet) of an infected person, they can acquire the disease by inhaling droplets expelled through coughing, sneezing or exhalation. In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to the flu virus.

In light of this, where the workplace becomes aware of the possible exposure to COVID-19 by a confirmed or suspected person; these guidelines are intended primarily to guard against the risks to human health posed by contamination of the environment.



## **BACKGROUND**

The Global Services and BPO sectors provide support services in areas such as healthcare, telecommunications, national security, among others. GSS/BPO employs over 40,000 persons directly and indirectly in Jamaica, and operates in most parishes.

The layout of these facilities not only allow for close contact between employees but the sheer numbers of persons on one floor allows for the exposure and spread of infection to several hundreds of persons in a short period of time. Other areas of concern include:

1. Transportation of workers which is often done utilizing buses that will require special and frequent cleaning and disinfection procedures especially during this period,
2. Congregation of persons at the entrance and exits of the facility, and
3. Use of common areas by large number of persons.

## **METHOD OF SPREAD**

When an ill person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or exhales, they release droplets of infected fluid.

- If persons are standing within one meter (three feet) of a person with COVID-19, they can be infected by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled.
- Most of these droplets fall on nearby surfaces and objects, such as desks, tables or telephones.
- Persons can also be infected with COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.
- Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some go on to experience more serious complication and thus require hospital care.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, additional health precautions must be taken to prevent the spread of this infection among the individuals working in this industry. The Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) has stipulations which applies to all public spaces, in terms of the number of persons permitted to gather- a maximum of 10 persons, and they are required to maintain a social distance of a minimum six feet (6ft).



## Scope of the Document

This document is to be used as guidelines for the operation of all BPOs and as such all conditions outlined within are regarded as critical, and fall within the ambit of the MOHW regulations governing such operations. There must therefore be strict adherence to these and other such guidelines to include, the *MOHW Interim Guidance for COVID-19 - Recommendations for Infection Prevention and Control for Employers*.

The following outlines the specific measures which must be implemented and adhered to in all facilities of this type:

### A. Sanitary and Hygiene Practices

1. Handwashing stations and/or automated hand sanitizers are to be suitably located at the entrance of the center to allow for employees to wash and sanitize hands. In addition to the entrance to the complex, hands-free hand sanitizer dispensers are to be erected:
  - at each door,
  - within each work area (batch of work cubicles)
  - lunch rooms, and
  - other heavily trafficked areas.

Ensure selected hand sanitizers contain 62% – 70% alcohol content.

2. Handwashing facilities for bathrooms, at entrances to the complex, within the work area (where practicable) should be equipped at all times with liquid soap, disposable paper towels and a lined, “hands free” garbage bin which must at no time be more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  full.
3. In an attempt to ensure a safe working environment, employees are encouraged to carry out timely cleaning / sanitization of their work devices and space.
4. Common spaces and high touch surfaces are to be cleaned frequently (at least once every 2 hours).

### B. Furnishings and Equipment

1. All furnishing, partitions and equipment (where possible) must be made of material that can be easily cleaned and sanitized. Where possible eliminate the use of:
  - a. Carpets, rugs, mats, curtains and blinds.



**Where the use of these items is unavoidable, a strict weekly deep-cleaning and daily vacuuming schedule must be documented and adhered to.**

### **C. Social Distancing and COVID-19 Risk Reduction Measures**

1. All BPO facilities are to be so designed or retrofitted to allow for a 2-meter passage-way all around work area.
2. Work cubicle arrangements must allow each worker a work-space of at least 4.5 square meters (with a minimum width of 2.25 meters).
3. Rows of cubicle work stations should be at least 2 meters apart.
4. All GSS/ BPO facilities must be so arranged to allow for at least 6 feet circumference between work cubicles.
5. All work cubicles are to be outfitted with the necessary physical barriers at heights of:
  - at least 0.5 meter above the desk (with 6 feet circumference)
  - At least 1 meter above the desk (with less than 6 feet circumference)
6. Social distancing is expected to be exercised in all work spaces, lunch areas (outdoor dining is preferred to be done, under favorable environmental conditions), common areas and bathrooms. It is also further expected that the following will be observed:
  - a. No congregating at any time - to ensure that there are no more than 10 persons together. Scheduled breaks should be arranged to prevent overcrowding in common areas.
  - b. Encourage the use of stairs. Where elevators are to be used, implement measures (example: post signage throughout the facility that indicate this stipulation) that no more than two persons are carried at any given time.
  - c. Large floors should have full physical separation to accommodate smaller groups with no more than 50 persons in these areas. Separate restroom and lunch room is recommended for each such area.
7. Workers are to be placed in “Block” or “Group” systems, which will see these employees using designated entrance/exit points; lunch room access and the like.
  - a. Logs of all workers assigned are to be posted and workers informed of their groupings.
  - b. Management must have in their possession a map of layout of floors with work stations and persons assigned to work stations as well as



supervisors attached to groups. This along with phone contact and address must be updated weekly and be available when needed by the Health Department.

- c. Only assigned points of entry / exit, travel route within the facility, are to be used by the assigned “Block” or “Group”. This special arrangement must be discussed and the layout of the same be posted for all members of staff access.
  - d. Training and special meetings are to be held only with designated “Block” or “Group” workers at any given time.
  - e. The same group assignment is expected to be achieved in lunch areas. Therefore, lunch hours for all staff must be staggered, allowing for adequate time in between for cleaning and sanitization by support staff.
8. Personal equipment (example: headsets, keyboards and other devices) used by employees to carry out their functions or duties should not be shared.
  9. All entrance doors are either to be left open, manned, or fitted with automatic doors.
  10. All equipment must be cleaned at the start and end of each shift. Materials for cleaning must be provided.

### **C. Transportation**

Transportation provided for staff should be cleaned and sanitized at the end of each route traversed (especially where multiple trips are made within the scheduled work hours). The vehicles used for transporting staff members must carry only seated passengers as per the recommendations of the Government of Jamaica.

- As far as possible, windows are to remain open during transportation of the workers to allow for proper ventilation.

### **D. Ventilation Considerations**

The size of the Coronavirus is between 80-160 nanometers and remains active at common indoor conditions up to 3 hours, and up to 2-3 days on room surfaces (fomites). It is with this fact, that special consideration must be given to the Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems within the BPO setting. For the proper monitoring and maintenance of all HVAC systems, trained and certified HVAC operators are to be employed.

The following requirements are to be established and maintained in all BPO facilities in light of the present COVID-19 crisis.

- a) Secure ventilation of spaces with outdoor air - Increase the outdoor air ventilation in the building as much as possible by bringing fresh air into the building
- b) Switch air handling units with recirculation to 100% outdoor air.
- c) Switch ventilation to nominal speed at least 2 hours before the building usage time and switch to lower speed 2 hours after the building usage time.
- d) At nights and on weekends, ventilation systems (AC) are to remain on, keeping the systems running at lower speed.
- e) Ensure comfort parameters are attained and maintained
- f) Ensure regular airing with windows (even in mechanically ventilated buildings)
- g) Where room air cleaners are to be used, they are to contain High-Efficiency Particulate Arrestor (HEPA) filters - of at least H13 and are to be so located close to the breathing zones.
- h) Increase the frequency of replacement of air filter as well as their effectiveness by upgrading to a *Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) 13* filter. Ensure filters are large enough to achieve a low face velocity
- i) Ensure the areas around the filter racks are properly sealed to prevent any air bypassing the filters.
- j) Replace central outdoor air and extract air filters according to established maintenance schedule by the HVAC operator.
- k) Regular filter replacement and maintenance works shall be performed with common protective measures including respiratory protection.
- l) For single spaces not served by a centralized HVAC system. Single space high-efficiency filtration units (either ceiling mounted or portable) can be highly effective in reducing/lowering concentrations of infectious aerosols. They also achieve directional airflow source control that provides exposure protection.

## **E. Environmental Cleaning and General Consideration**

1. Ensure the entire facility and all work spaces are maintained in a clean and hygienic manner according to the MOHW guidelines.
  - a. All support staff carrying out cleaning and sanitization of the facility must be properly trained and provided with the necessary personal protective equipment (such as masks and industrial gloves).



- b. The correct cleaning and disinfecting materials and compounds (in the correct concentrations as per the MOHW guideline - **see appendix 1**) must be provided and used as directed.
- c. Flooring in these facilities should be able to be easily cleaned and sanitized. Therefore, the use of carpets is not recommended since they will serve as a source of possible contamination since the required cleaning and sanitizing/disinfection regimen cannot be applied.

## **F. Handling of Sick Persons**

- a. All sick workers are to report or inform their supervisors of the illness and stay home.
- b. Attendance policies are to be suspended (or relaxed) and ill workers encouraged to stay home, reporting flu-like symptoms to the Ministry of Health and Wellness hotline (888-ONE-LOVE) or via email using *covid19@moh.gov.jm* or via the report yourself website - *jamcovid19.moh.gov.jm*
- c. Where workers have known infected family members within their household, these workers are to self-quarantined and/ or work from home where possible. For these workers, the home quarantine order must be submitted to the employer.
- d. Within the facility, an isolation room is to be identified and be available in the event a worker starts to present or display symptoms of COVID-19 (elevated temperature, coughing and shortness of breath). The Ministry of Health and Wellness is to be notified.

## **G. Measures to be taken where an employee has tested positive for COVID-19 -** *(see Interim Guide for COVID-19, Recommendations for Infection Prevention and Control for Employers)*

- Where an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, employers are to inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace while maintaining confidentiality as required by the MOHW.
- Deep cleaning and sanitization must be conducted within the facility and special attention made for those areas where the infected person(s) was stationed. This must be done in accordance with MOHW guidelines.
- In the event that a large number of persons become infected, this may result in a site lock down.



- Allow the MOHW to make formal announcements in the event a team member has tested positive of COVID-19.

## **H. Communication**

- a. Contact the Local Public Health Department to support in conduct health education sessions on proper sneeze and cough etiquette, proper handwashing and personal hygiene practices (such as proper hand sanitization, social distancing and its importance).
- b. Training must be confined to each group of employees. There should be no cross training.
- c. Relevant health education pamphlets / posters are to be strategically placed throughout the center, providing tips and guidance to workers.
- d. In an attempt to promote frequent and proper handwashing, display proper handwashing signs / posters throughout the call center.
- e. Encourage all staff members to practice the recommendations or guidelines of the MOHW to avoid contracting and spreading the disease.

## **I. Mask Etiquette**

The MOHW advises the wearing of masks in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies).

Medical masks (surgical masks or N-95 respirators) are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders. If masks are to be used within the facility, then cloth masks are recommended (see CDC recommendations for cloth masks).

### **When to use a mask**

- If you are healthy, you only need to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person with suspected COVID-19 infection.
- Wear a mask if you are ill, i.e., coughing or sneezing.
- Persons who are quarantined or isolated at home with or without respiratory symptoms
- Caregivers of persons who are quarantined or isolated and other members of the household;





- Persons who have had COVID-19 and have been discharged from hospital should wear a mask for two weeks; and
- Elderly and persons with chronic illnesses, who are at high risk, if infected, of developing severe illness and complications of illness. These persons must also avoid ill persons and minimize contact with the public.

Appropriate use of masks / facial coverings is essential to ensure their effective use and to reduce the risk of transmission associated with the incorrect use and cleaning of masks. Cloth masks should:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include multiple layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction
- be able to be washed and dried without damage or change to shape

If you wear a mask, then you must know how to use it and dispose of it properly. The following information on the correct use of masks are derived from the practice in health-care settings. It is therefore expected that all staff employ the measures or steps listed below:

- Before putting on a mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Place mask carefully to cover mouth and nose and tie securely to minimize any gaps between the face and the mask;
- While in use, avoid touching the mask;
- Remove the mask by using appropriate technique (i.e. do not touch the front but remove the lace from behind or using the ear loops);
- After removal or whenever you inadvertently touch a used mask, clean hands by using an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water if visibly soiled
- Replace masks with a new clean, dry mask as soon as they become damp/humid;
- Do not re-use single-use masks;
- Discard single-use masks after each use and dispose of them immediately upon removal in a closed bin.



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***NB.*** *Masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.*

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## APPENDIX 1

### General Cleaning

Cleaning refers to the removal of visible dirt, grime and impurities. Cleaning does not kill germs but helps remove them from the surface. Increasing daily cleaning and disinfection of common areas utilized by the public is one of the primary strategies to prevent COVID-19 transmission.

Cleaning of public spaces includes, but is not limited to, the following procedures:

- Gather and remove (sweeping) all trash, debris and accumulated material from surfaces (roadways, walkways, drains).
- Garbage receptacles (bins and skips) should be enclosed, emptied and cleaned as per pick-up schedule.
- Regular refuse collection (twice weekly) is recommended. Followed by pressure washing of the area.
- During general cleaning a simple soap solution can be used to remove organic matter that may be present on surfaces and special attention should be paid to door knobs, light switches, bus/taxi sheds, rails, staff rooms, desktops, washrooms and other high touch surfaces.

### Disinfection

Disinfection refers to the use of chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. This is most effective after surfaces are cleaned. Both steps are important to reduce the spread of infection.

- When using commercially prepared disinfectants be sure to follow the instructions on the label to disinfect effectively. Alternatively, bleach can be used to prepare a solution that is as effective as commercially prepared disinfectants.

### Steps for Disinfecting Surfaces

- Clean and flush surfaces with soap and water before disinfecting, and for pavements and walkways flush with ample supply of water



- Prepare disinfection solution as per disinfection guide provided in Table 1 below
- Apply chlorine bleach and water solution to the entire area to be disinfected
- For frequently touched surfaces wipe extensively and allow to air dry

### Preparing a bleach solution by mixing

**Table 1: Disinfection Solution Guide**

<b>Water</b>	<b>Bleach Strength 5.25% (Household Bleach)</b>	<b>Bleach Strength 8.25% (Industrial Bleach)</b>
1 Gallon	3 Tablespoons	2 Tablespoons
55 Gallon	165 Tablespoons or 2.4 litres (0.64 gallons)	110 Tablespoons or 1.63 Litres (0.43 gallons)
500 gallon	1,500 Tablespoons or 22 litres (5.87 gallons)	1,000 Tablespoon or 14.79 Litres (3.91 gallons)

### Preparation Tips

- Prepare a fresh bleach solution each day in a well ventilated area that is separate from children
- Label bottles of bleach solution with contents, ratio and date mixed.
- Use cool water. Always add bleach to cool water, NOT water to bleach.
- Wear gloves and eye protection.
- Prepare solution in an area with an eye-wash.