Instructions for institutions regarding the safe organisation of work in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19

- Following those instructions will help to ensure the better and more efficient prevention and control of infectious diseases within institutions and in society in general.

- COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease which is caused by coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus). It spreads from person to person by means of the projection of aerosols, mainly though close contact with infectious persons.*

- The SARS-CoV-2 virus can become airborne through sneezing, coughing, intensive breathing, speaking, or singing, and so on. Various surfaces at home, at work, at school, or elsewhere in public spaces may also be contaminated with the virus. It is possible to become infected by touching contaminated objects and then touching one’s mouth, eyes, or nose. The virus may also spread via contact with individuals who exhibit very mild symptoms or no symptoms at all.

- If conditions are favourable, the virus can survive on contaminated surfaces for up to three days, but it can be destroyed through wet-cleaning and disinfection.

- The risk of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 is higher in enclosed, crowded, and poorly ventilated rooms.

- The incubation period for the virus ranges from two to fourteen days, being five days long on average. Most adults are infectious from two days before developing symptoms to up to ten days after falling ill (or after testing positive).

- In most cases an individual may return to work when at least ten days have passed since they first developed symptoms which are characteristic of COVID-19 and, provided that they have not had a fever within the last 72 hours (without using antipyretics). It is not necessary to take a SARS-CoV-2 test.

Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 is a biological hazard

- As of 24 November 2002, coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 is deemed to be a biological hazard which is included in hazard group 3. Hazards in this group may result in severe levels of illness in humans and are a serious threat to employee health.

- In the case of any work which includes coming into contact with biological hazards, the employer must, during the course of the working environment risk analysis, undertake the following tasks:
  - determining the type, extent, and duration of the risk of infection for the employee and assessing the resulting risk to the employee’s health;
  - considering where and how the employee may come into contact with the virus and map out all potential infection sites: office and production premises, non-work rooms, auditoriums, cloakrooms, etc.

- Based on the results from the risk analysis, any and all required precautions must be taken. The precautions are introduced on the Labour Inspectorate’s ‘Tööelu’ website.

Organising work and preventive measures

In the case of the risk of a spread of coronavirus, the following precautions must be taken in the working environment:

1. **The number of individuals who may come into close contact with one another must be minimised.** For example:
   - allowing teleworking;
   - working in shifts;
   - always having the same people work together in the same shift and preventing any contact between the people of different shifts;
These instructions were last amended on 2 February 2021
The latest versions of all instructions

1. Organising meetings over a video bridge, etc;
   increasing distances between employees within the working environment. This means ensuring that there is a space of at least two metres between any two employees in work rooms, as well as in public spaces;
   using additional rooms to create workstations;
   using a more flexible work schedule. For example, beginning the working day later in order to avoid close contact on public transport and in other public spaces during rush hours; organising breaks at different times, etc.

2. The following rule must be clearly communicated to employees: it is prohibited to be at work if you are ill or are a close contact of a COVID-19 case. Arrangements must be made to enable employees to follow this rule (such as, for example, allowing teleworking).

3. Masks must be worn or other measures must be taken to cover one’s nose and mouth in indoor public spaces and with other individuals with whom one comes into contact on a daily basis, such as, for example, using a visor. It is advisable to organise training on the proper and safe use of masks. Instructions for the proper use of masks are available on the Health Board’s website.
   Wearing a mask is not compulsory for individuals who have medical requirements that mean wearing a mask is not necessary. Presenting proof of a waiver of the need to wear a mask is not required. The same is true for individuals who need to communicate with someone who has hearing difficulties and who must be able to read their conversation partner’s lips, as well as for children who are under twelve years of age.
   Used masks must be disposed of in a waste receptacle which bears the appropriate label or should be placed in a sealable bag and disposed of as mixed domestic waste. More information about the disposal of used masks can be found on the Ministry of the Environment website.

4. Employees must be able to wash their hands regularly. The instructions that have been provided for washing hands must be followed. Main movement pathways must be equipped with hand sanitisers. Instructions that have been provided regarding the proper sanitisation of hands must be followed.

5. Reminders must be posted in visible locations which help to prevent the spread of the virus (regarding social distancing, hand-washing, and staying at home when ill).

6. The employer must determine which individuals are included in the risk groups (the elderly, employees with chronic diseases or a level of immunodeficiency, or those who have at-risk loved ones at home). If the nature of the work allows, those individuals should be permitted to telework. If teleworking is not possible, the aforementioned measures should be taken to reduce the potential number of close contact events.

7. Employees should be advised to use the HOIA app.

8. The cleanliness of the premises and proper ventilation must be ensured. See ‘The cleanliness of the premises and proper ventilation’, below.

9. If an employee has fallen ill with COVID-19 or if a customer who has visited the premises has been found to have been infected, contact tracing must be launched immediately in order to prevent the further spread of the virus. See ‘When an employee falls ill’, below.

Organising work-related trips

- Work-related trips abroad should only be organised if they are unavoidable. Before travelling abroad, employees must familiarise themselves with any rules which have been established at their destination.
They must also check to see which restrictions they will be subjected to after returning from their trip and agree with their employer regarding the organisation of their work after they return from abroad in the case of their travelling for work-related purposes to a high-risk country. Further information can be found on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website.

- Any individuals who are returning from higher-risk countries must observe valid restrictions on their freedom of movement, but may continue to work remotely if possible. If it is unavoidable for the employee to be in their workplace in order that they are able to fulfil their duties, they must be tested for SARS-CoV-2 immediately after their arrival and, in the case of there being a negative test result, may return to work once they have agreed to do so with their employer, making sure they minimise their contact with other employees (such as ensuring that they visit the office at a time at which it is not being used by others, or using a separate room, and wearing a mask at meetings and in shared spaces), and taking all precautions to prevent the spread of the virus.

Organising meetings, training, or conferences

If possible, meetings should be held over an electronic means of communication. If this is not possible then the following points should be observed where possible:

- The meeting should be held in a room which allows for social distancing (a rate of 50% occupancy should never be exceeded).
- The conference room must be properly ventilated and regularly aired.
- Participants in meetings must wear masks or cover their noses and mouths.
- If possible, meeting rooms should be supplied with masks, as well as with instructions for the proper use and disposal of masks.
- Hand hygiene products must be provided to all participants in the meeting;
- After the meeting has concluded, all surfaces in the room (tabletops, handles, etc), as well as any shared equipment (microphones, pointers, etc) must be cleaned, and a sufficient supply must be ensured of those products which are required for cleaning. The advice of the Health Board in terms of cleaning and disinfection should be followed.

Training, conferences, and other, larger, gatherings should only be organised physically if it is unavoidable, but holding events via electronic means of communication should be preferred.

- In the case of a physical conference having to be organised, the following points should be observed:
  - Social distancing must be ensured in the room (such as ensuring one or two empty seats between two people, or a two-metre distance between speakers and the audience). The same considerations should be kept in mind in other places in which people may gather, such as cloakrooms, reception desk areas, catering facilities, toilets, and other such situations.
  - The conference room must be properly ventilated and regularly aired.
  - Shared equipment used for speaking and presentations (microphones, pointers, etc) must be cleaned after each use.
  - Participants in conferences and training must wear masks or cover their noses and mouths (with a visor, for example).
  - The number of people in the conference room must not exceed 50% of the capacity of that room.
  - Hand hygiene facilities or products must be made available to the participants in rooms other than the main meeting room itself.
  - All participants must be reminded that they may not take part in the conference if they have fallen ill or have come into close contact with a COVID-19 case.
  - The premises must be thoroughly cleaned and aired after the event has concluded.

- It is strongly advisable not to invite foreign guests from high-risk countries to the event. If foreign guests are invited, they must be notified of the self-isolation rules which will be applicable to them. Further information can be found on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website. Please note that those parties which are inviting guests from abroad must ensure that their guests have been tested before they speak at or participating in an event, if this is necessary.
• Instructions for organising events and the related FAQ can be found on the Ministry of Culture website.

The cleanliness of the premises and proper ventilation

• Something which must be ensured is the requirement that air which is mechanically supplied and removed in the form of a ventilation system is supplied through a system that is fully functional and which has been switched on. The requirements contained in Regulation No 8 by the Minister of Economic Affairs and Infrastructure, dated 2 April 2020, regarding the requirements for the ventilation and aeration of social welfare institution buildings and non-residential buildings that have indoor climate control must be followed.
• In buildings with no indoor climate control facilities, employees must air the rooms intensively such as, for example, by ensuring an interval of fifteen minutes before entering a room which has been used by other individuals prior to that, or at least once per hour.
• The premises must be regularly cleaned by using the standard methods and cleaning materials. Frequently-touched surfaces (door handles, handles, keyboards, touch screens, etc) must be cleaned every two to four hours.
• Any premises which may have been contaminated with the virus must be closed to third parties and should be thoroughly cleaned, disinfected, and ventilated before reopening. The advice of the Health Board in terms of cleaning and disinfection should be followed.

When an employee falls ill with an infectious respiratory tract disease (fever, cough, lack of energy, and other symptoms)

What to do if an employee falls ill with an infectious respiratory tract disease
• An employee who falls ill outside of working hours must stay at home.
• An employee who falls ill at work must leave as soon as possible. Until the employee leaves for a medical institution or to go home, it is advisable to isolate them from others and to have them wear a mask. If a symptomatic individual cannot be isolated, masks must also be provided to the other employees.
• The employee must contact their family physician who will determine whether or not that person should be diagnosed with COVID-19, plus their need to be tested, and the need to sign a certificate to show their incapacity for work.
• An employee who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 must be quarantined. They may only return to work after having consulted their family physician. As a rule, an individual with COVID-19 must self-isolate until at least ten days have passed since they first developed symptoms, provided that they have not had a fever within the last 72 hours (without using antipyretics).
• From the perspective of slowing down the spread of COVID-19, it is important for any employee who has fallen ill to notify their employer of their COVID-19 diagnosis having been confirmed. The employer must be notified in a manner which has been agreed between the employee and the employer.

Providing notification of potential close contacts
• If a COVID-19 case is known to have been present in the workplace, contact tracing must immediately be launched in order to prevent the further spread of the virus. In order to make this process smoother, you will be asked to map out all potential close contacts in the workplace.
• For this purpose, any individuals who came into contact with a COVID-19 case within the period in which they were infectious, including cumulatively, must be identified and those individuals must be notified that they are required to self-isolate.
  ✓ Close contacts of a symptomatic COVID-19 case are classed as being those individuals who came into contact with the case roughly within two days before and ten days after the case developed symptoms.
  ✓ Close contacts of an asymptomatic COVID-19 case are classed as those individuals who came into contact with the case roughly two days before and up to ten days after the individual tested positive.
• Please enter the details of any work-related close contacts in the respective table (the table is available here).
• Following your conversation with the Health Board, please send the table to the Health Board’s respective regional department (you will receive the required contact details) and in an encrypted format.

A close contact is an individual who came into contact with a COVID-19 case within the period in which the case was infectious, by meeting at least one of the following criteria:
- having been within a distance of up to two metres (inclusive) of a person who has been infected with COVID-19 for a period of at least fifteen minutes, including cumulatively;¹
- having come into direct physical contact with an individual who has been infected with COVID-19 (such as, for example, shaking hands);
- having come into direct contact with the secretions of an individual who has been infected with COVID-19 and without using any protection (such as, for example, having been coughed on or having touched a patient’s tissue with bare hands);
- having spent over fifteen minutes in the same room with an individual who has been infected with COVID-19 (such as, for example, in a classroom, meeting room, hospital waiting room, work room, etc), especially if this room was not properly ventilated and/or no personal protective equipment was used.

¹ A cumulative close contact is classed as being a case in which an individual meets a COVID-19 case during the period within which they are infectious, during a single meeting lasting for a period of fifteen minutes, or several times in shorter individual periods of time (such as for five minutes in the cloakroom, five minutes during a lunch break, and five minutes in a public space, all of which totals up to fifteen minutes over the space of 24 hours).

Instructions for the close contacts of a COVID-19 case
• Close contacts must observe self-isolation instructions for close contacts.
• Close contacts must self-isolate for ten days while monitoring their health condition carefully. Even though it is not compulsory to be tested, the Health Board advises close contacts to undergo SARS-CoV-2 testing after completing their ten-day self-isolation period in order to detect potential asymptomatic cases.
• The requirement to self-isolate at one’s place of residence or other permanent place of accommodation for ten calendar days and take the coronavirus SARS-CoV2 test is not applied to the following cases:
  1) if the individual has had COVID-19 within the past six months and has been declared by a physician to have recovered;
  2) if the individual has been vaccinated against COVID-19 and no more than two months have passed since completion of the vaccination process.
• Please use the self-isolation calculator to calculate the required duration of your self-isolation period.
• Remaining employees may continue to carry out their daily duties, but should also keep an eye on their health.
• If a COVID-19 diagnosis is not confirmed for an employee who has fallen ill, all other employees may continue to carry out their duties but must monitor their health over the following ten days.
• Any employees who have come into contact with a COVID-19 case should be allowed to telework if possible (instead of taking a certificate for sick leave).

Guidelines and advice are available at:
The Health Board’s COVID-19-related publications and instructions
The coronavirus crisis website of the Government of the Republic
The Labour Inspectorate’s advice to the employer and employee

COVID-19 instructions for institutions for the safe organisation of work