WORKING GUIDELINES FOR THE BELIZE PUBLIC SERVICE IN CASES OF COVID-19

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1. PURPOSE

These guidelines are intended to inform Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Heads of Department (HODs) on how to facilitate the safety of public officers while ensuring continuous delivery of public services throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. These guidelines are not intended for health care professionals, who have separate protocols and guidelines for staff at work. These guidelines provide protocols as a matter of policy for officers working or seeking to return to work after a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 or after the officer had close or proximate contact with a person with COVID-19.

2. BACKGROUND

The world remains severely affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Treatment options are limited and effective immunisation many months away. Prevention is the focus of our efforts, the safety of public officers our priority.

3. DEFINITIONS:

For the purpose of Covid-19, the following definitions are being provided:

a) **Quarantine:**
keeping someone who was in close contact with someone who has been confirmed to be ill (COVID-19 positive) away from others.

b) **Isolation:**
keeping someone who is sick or tested positive for COVID-19 without symptoms away from others, even in their own home.

c) **Close Contact:**
someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 10 minutes starting from 48 hours before illness onset until the time the person was isolated.

4. SAFE & ROUTINE CLEANING PROCEDURES:

a) **Wear disposable gloves** to clean and disinfect
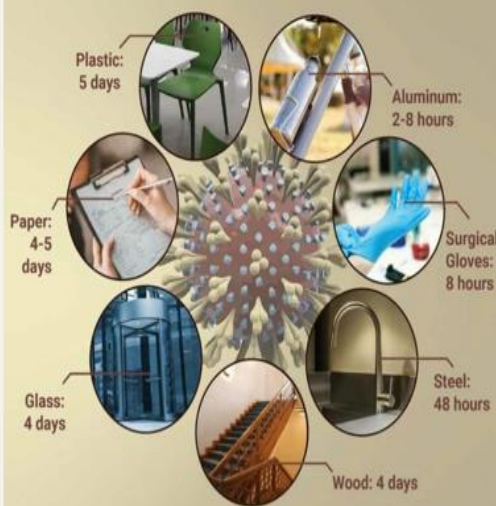
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b) **Clean surfaces using soap and water, then use disinfectant.**

- o Cleaning with soap and water **reduces number of germs, dirt and impurities** on the surface. **Disinfecting kills germs** on surfaces.

c) **Clean** and disinfect highly touched surfaces more frequently. These include:
  - o Tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.

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CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

- Normal routine cleaning with soap and water will decrease how much of the virus is on surfaces and objects, which reduces the risk of exposure.
- Disinfection using EPA-approved disinfectants against COVID-19 can also help reduce the risk. *Frequent disinfection of surfaces and objects touched by multiple people is important.*
- When EPA-approved disinfectants are not available, alternative disinfectants can be used **(for example, 1/3 cup of bleach added to 1 gallon of water, or 70% alcohol solutions).**

Warning:

- Do not mix bleach or other cleaning and disinfection products together.
- This can cause fumes that may be very dangerous to breathe in.
- Bleach solutions will be effective for disinfection up to 24 hours.
- Keep all disinfectants out of the reach of children.

5. GENERAL CONTROLS:

a) Develop policies for visitor restriction (Online services, face to face by appointment only)
b) Use information from trusted sources only and communicate with staff regularly

6. ENGINEERING CONTROLS:

a) Establish handwashing stations or sanitizer
b) Establish physical barriers (e.g. plexi glass)
c) Provide spacing Guidelines
d) Establish safe trash disposal
e) Re-arrange office spacing – occupied desks 6 feet apart – discourage shared equipment

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7. **ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS:**

   a) Limit members of the public in the building at any one time
   b) Practice distancing
   c) Provide Information – posters, signage, messaging
   d) Establish sanitation protocols
   e) Establish guidelines for reporting symptoms and/or history of staff and/or public
   f) Establish systems to provide feedback and to respond to any complaints
   g) Establish flexible work arrangements – shifts, rotations, adjusted hours
   h) Use accessible means of communication systems for all staff – Teams/Zoom/WhatsApp
   i) Working from home should be according to approved guidelines

8. **PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT:**

   - Wear Masks
   - Provide training if necessary
   - Enforcement to be consistent

9. **HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (AS PER CIRCULAR #13 OF 2020):**

   a) Staff members with symptoms should stay home
   b) Hand washing, masks and distancing should be mandatory
   c) Staff members who develop symptoms at the office should be isolated and medical advice sought from trusted sources
   d) All surfaces of staff members desk and equipment should be properly cleaned
   e) All staff should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and water after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.
   f) If an officer is confirmed to have COVID-19 all staff should work with MOH and assist with identifying any workplace contacts to minimize further risk of spread.
   g) Staff who have not had close contact with the original confirmed case should continue taking the usual precautions and attend work as usual.
   h) Staff who have had close contact with someone from outside the office who has tested positive should report it and work with MOH to assist with contact tracing and follow the official guidance from MOH

i) Vacation leave and/or sick leave (accompanied by a medical certificate) may be considered at any time as well as extended sick leave or special leave as provided by MPS Circular No. 13 of 2020

j) If a staff, client, or visitor is identified as a suspect case of COVID-19, the office should be cleaned, paying special attention to high touch areas. It is important to ensure that environmental cleaning and disinfection procedures are followed consistently and correctly.

k) Follow routine cleaning procedures using basic cleaning agents.

l) Cleaning staff should wear gloves, eye protection, a face mask, and protective gown **only during the cleaning process.**

m) Thoroughly cleaning high-touch surfaces with water and detergent and applying commonly used disinfectants (such as bleach) are effective and sufficient procedures.

n) Office equipment, food utensils and waste should be managed in accordance with safe routine procedures.

o) In relevant circumstance, washing cloths, eating utensils and any other item in contact with a suspected case's body fluids should be collected separately, preferably double bagged.

p) In relevant circumstance, disinfect contaminated items in such a way as to avoid any contact with persons or contamination of the environment.

q) In relevant circumstance, surfaces or objects contaminated with body fluids, secretions or excretions should be cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible using standard detergents/disinfectants and following safe procedures

10. WORKING OR RETURNING TO WORK PROTOCOLS

Diligence must be paid to the health and safety of officers, especially for those officers that previously tested positive for COVID-19 or had close or proximate contact with a person with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time. CEOs and HODs along with management and staff should take the following actions related to COVID-19 symptoms or exposure:

a) If an officer tests positive for COVID-19, regardless of whether the officer is symptomatic or asymptomatic, the officer may return to work upon completing at least 14 days of isolation from the onset of symptoms or 14 days of isolation after the first positive test if they remain asymptomatic, and after a negative Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Test.

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- o For these purposes ISOLATION means keeping someone who is sick or tested positive for COVID-19 without symptoms away from others, even in their own home.

b) If an officer has had close or proximate contact with a person with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time AND is experiencing COVID-19 related symptoms, the officer may return to work upon completing at least 14 days of isolation from the onset of symptoms, and after having had a negative Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Test.

- o For these purposes close contact means someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 10 minutes starting from 48 hours before illness onset until the time the person was isolated. The MOH should be contacted if the extent of contact between an individual and a person suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 is unclear.

c) If an officer has had close or proximate contact with a person with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time AND is not experiencing COVID-19 related symptoms, the officer may return to work upon completing 14 days of self-quarantine.

- o For these purposes QUARANTINE means keeping someone who was in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 away from others

d) Officers who return to work, even though they are asymptomatic must adhere to the following practices prior to and during work, which should be monitored and documented by the AO/A and the officer:

  i. Regular monitoring: The officer must self-monitor for a temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit every 12 hours and symptoms consistent with COVID-19.
  ii. Wear a mask: The officer must wear a face mask at all times while in the workplace.
  iii. Social distance: The officer must continue social distancing practices, including maintaining, at least, six feet of distance from others.

  iv. Clean and disinfect workspaces: Ministries and Departments must continue to regularly clean and disinfect all areas, such as offices, bathrooms, water dispensers, common areas, and shared electronic equipment, which should be discouraged.

  v. Maintain quarantine: The officer must continue to self-quarantine and self-monitor for temperature and symptoms when not at the workplace for 14 days after last exposure.

e) If an officer is symptomatic upon arrival at work or becomes sick with COVID-19 symptoms while at the workplace, absent close or proximate contact with a person with COVID-19, the officer must be separated and sent home immediately and may return to work upon completing at least 14 days of isolation from the onset of symptoms OR upon receipt of a negative COVID-19 test result.

END