

Guidelines for Preventing the Spread of Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) in Offices

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1. Introduction

Corporations have undertaken a variety of measures to prevent the spread of Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) to protect the lives and health of everyone associated with them, including their employees, customers, suppliers, and neighboring residents, and their efforts have achieved results in containing the virus. On the other hand, if we consider that it will be a long time before this pandemic comes to a complete end, as well as pursuing further efforts to prevent infection and playing a role in preventing the spread of COVID-19, corporations will be called upon to step up their contributions to citizens' lives through their businesses.

These Guidelines have been compiled as a reference for the basic matters that enterprise offices (in this context, offices refers to the concept of workplaces under the Industrial Safety and Health Act, where employees conduct clerical work) should consider when they undertake COVID-19 prevention measures that best suit the actual circumstances of their individual industries and workplaces. They are based on the Basic Policies for Novel Coronavirus Disease Control¹ by the Government of Japan (announced on March 28, revised on May 4; hereinafter referred to as “the Basic Policies”), the analysis and recommendations of the Expert Meeting on the Novel Coronavirus Control², and other relevant sources.

Having gained an adequate understanding of the intent and contents of the Basic Policies, in light of the “Basic Positions to the Prevention of Infection” and “Specific Measures Enterprises Should Undertake” sections of these Guidelines, and the guidelines and other resources provided by the industry associations, etc., to which they belong, enterprises are asked to convene

¹ https://corona.go.jp/news/news_20200411_53.html

² [Expert Meeting on the Novel Coronavirus Disease Control's Analysis of the Response to the Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and Recommendations \(May 4, 2020\) \(https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000121431_00093.html\)](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000121431_00093.html)

meetings of their health committee and other committees as necessary, exercise ingenuity in engaging in the prevention of the COVID-19 infection in ways that take the circumstances of their individual manufacturing workplaces and other considerations into account, and strive to play an ongoing role as social infrastructure.

Enterprises' efforts should not stop at measures to prevent infection in their own workplaces. They are also asked to actively contribute to support for measures that will help prevent the spread of infection at other enterprises, including their business counterparts and healthcare workers, through such means as provision and sharing of information.

Enterprises are supposed to use these guidelines in their business activities not only while under the current state of emergency declaration, but also after the state of emergency declaration has been lifted, until the risk of infection of COVID-19 has been reduced and the health, safety, and security of enterprises' associates can be adequately ensured through the establishment of treatment methods for all stages of the disease, from early diagnosis to the prevent more severe symptoms, the development of a vaccine, and other means. The insights of the relevant government ministries and agencies and other experts have been obtained in the preparation of these Guidelines. The Guidelines will be progressively reviewed as necessary, based on trends in the disease, opinions of experts, revisions of the Basic Policies, and other developments.

2. Basic Positions to the Prevention of Infection

Recognizing that their efforts to prevent infection in their workplaces will help to prevent the spread of COVID-19 throughout the community as a whole, enterprises should establish relevant frameworks, assess the risks of infection according to the characteristics of their respective workplaces, and undertake measures in line with those risks.

In particular, to prevent the spread of infection to employees, their initiatives should include consideration of different forms of commuting (where and when employees will work), thorough implementation of infection prevention measures by individuals, and the enhancement of workplace environment measures.

3. Specific Measures Enterprises Should Undertake

(1) Framework for Infection Prevention Measures

- Establish a framework in which top management will take the lead in considering the establishment and revision of measures for the prevention of COVID-19.
- In addition to meeting their obligations under relevant legislation, including the Infectious Disease Act and the Act on Special Measures for Pandemic Influenza and New Infectious Diseases Preparedness and Response, strive to make use of health committees and industrial healthcare staff such as industrial physicians under occupational health and safety legislation.
- Regularly collect accurate information about COVID-19 from such sources as the national and local governments and industry associations.

(2) Ensuring Health

- Have employees take their temperature and check for any possible symptoms of COVID-19 before coming to work. Encourage any person who is unwell to take leave under the various leave programs. If any employees become unwell while at work, have them leave work immediately and stay home as necessary.
- For any employees who are convalescing at home due to symptoms such as high fever, if, after checking their health conditions on a daily basis, they no longer have any symptoms and a decision is to be made on their return to work, refer to the guidelines of academic societies³, etc. If their symptoms show no sign of improvement, instruct them to consult a physician or public health center.
- Regarding the above, treat the workers of sub-contractors and temporary workers in the same way, acting through the sub-contractor enterprise and temporary worker dispatch agency.

(3) Commuting

³ E.g., COVID-19 Control Measures Guide for Workplaces, produced by the Japan Society of Travel and Health and the Japan Society for Occupational Health (<https://www.sanei.or.jp/images/contents/416/COVID-19guide0511koukai.pdf>)

- Consider a variety of forms of work programs to reduce the frequency of commutes and relieve congestion on public transport. These could include remote work (work from home or from satellite offices), staggered start and finish times, rotation work (dividing workdays and working hours into multiple shifts), flexible working hour system, and four-day work weeks.
- For employees who are able to commute without using public transport, such as by private vehicle, these methods may be permitted, taking the situation regarding the roads and parking into consideration and taking due care to prevent commuting-related accidents.

(4) During Working Hours

- Review personnel distribution to the maximum extent to ensure that employees can maintain a certain distance between each other, aiming for a distance of two meters as much as possible.
- Ensure thorough regularly handwashing by employees, including when they first arrive at work and after rest breaks. Arrange for plumbing fixtures, soap, and other items necessary to achieve this. Have hand sanitizer available in work environments where water cannot be used.
- Encourage employees to wear face masks, etc. while working.
- Arrange office spaces, including desk placements, in a spacious manner to prevent infection through respiratory droplets. Avoid desk arrangements in which people face each other without partitions by, as far as possible, placing desks diagonally opposite or alongside each other (in such cases, consider keeping desks at least one meter apart).
- When the windows can be opened, open them at least twice an hour to refresh the air in the room. Make efforts to refresh the air in the entire building and respective workspaces. When mechanical means of ventilation are being used, there is no need to also open the windows.
- Devise ways of keeping to a minimum any supplies that are used jointly by others or touched by multiple people.
- Shield places of frequent face-to-face contact between people with acrylic panels, transparent plastic curtains, or similar.

- For work outside the office, have workers avoid crowded places, including rush hour on public transport.
- For business trips, monitor the conditions of infection in the area to be visited and postpone the trip if it is not urgent.
- Keep records of the people met, times, routes, places visited, and other details during outside work and business trips.
- Consider holding meetings and events online.
- Consider holding general meetings of shareholders in a format that will not require people to come to the venue, such as encouraging shareholders to exercise their voting rights in advance.
- When holding face-to-face meetings, wear face masks and exercise care regarding ventilation of the room. Take other precautions such as reducing the number of seats or labeling the places at the table, to ensure attendees do not sit close together or face-to-face.
- Regarding face-to-face meetings or events outside the company, carefully consider the need to attend and, if attending, keep numbers to a minimum and wear face masks.
- Consider conducting recruitment seminars, interviews, and the like online.
- Regarding remote work, refer to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's guidelines⁴ and other appropriate sources, while being mindful to properly ascertain working hours and establish appropriate working environments.

(5) Break Spaces

- Regularly disinfect common-use items (tables, chairs, etc.)
- Be thorough about handwashing when entering and leaving the room.
- Including smoking breaks, when taking rests or breaks, strive to maintain a distance of two meters between people as much as possible, and devise ways of limiting the number of people using the break room at the same time, such as providing additional break spaces or staggering break times.
- For indoor break spaces in particular, thoroughly commit to avoiding the "Three Cs" (closed spaces with poor ventilation, crowded places with

⁴ Refer to Guidelines for Appropriate Labor Management in Remote Work, Ministry of Labour, Health and Welfare (www.mhlw.go.jp/content/000553510.pdf), etc.

many people nearby, and close-contact settings such as close-range conversations), by providing more spaces, regularly refreshing the air in the space, and other means.

- If employees are drinking and eating in staff dining rooms, etc., make efforts to keep people around two meters apart as much as possible, such as staggering meal break times or reducing the number of seats. If constraints in the facility makes this difficult, give consideration to ensuring that people do not sit face-to-face.

(6) Restrooms

- Regular cleaning of toilets is sufficient, but restrooms that are used by the general public should be wiped down with disinfectant.
- If the toilets are fitted with lids, post signs instructing users to close the lid before flushing.
- Stop the use of hand dryers, prohibit shared-use towels, and install paper towels or encourage employees to bring their own towels for their personal use.

(7) Equipment and Fixtures

- Frequently wash and disinfect common-use equipment such as doorknobs, light switches, handrails and straps, elevator buttons, trash receptacles, telephones, and common-use tables and chairs.
- Collect trash at frequent intervals and seal trash that has nasal discharge, saliva, etc. on it in plastic bags. Employees that perform cleaning duties, including trash collection, should wear face masks and gloves and thoroughly wash their hands after performing the work.

NB: For disinfection of equipment and fixtures, use the disinfectant most suited to the particular surface, such as a sodium hypochlorite solution or ethanol.

(8) Visitor Access to Offices

- Consider the necessity of allowing access to the office by outside visitors, including business counterparts. If access is to be allowed, ask those visitors to take the same infection prevention measures as employees.

- To achieve this, encourage visitors' understanding by providing the organizations to which these outside visitors belong with detailed explanations of the office's infection prevention measures.
- Consider conducting exchanges of business cards online.

(9) Raising Awareness of Infection Prevention Measures Among Employees

- Make employees understand the importance of infection prevention measures and encourage them to modify their behavior, including in their daily lives. Recommended actions to achieve this include publicizing information such as the "Ten Tips for Reducing Contact by 80%"⁵ and "Examples of Practicing 'New Lifestyle'"⁶ previously released by the Expert Meeting on Novel Coronavirus Control.
- For employees who use public transport and public facilities such as libraries, thoroughly impress on them the need to wear face masks, practice proper cough etiquette, and not talk in confined spaces such as in train carriages, among other actions.
- Be mindful of the human rights of patients, infected persons, healthcare workers, people returning from overseas, the families of such people, children, etc.
- To ensure that employees who have returned to work after having recovered from COVID-19 and their associates are not discriminated against in the workplace, raise awareness and educate employees and provide other accommodations to ensure their smooth return to the workplace.
- If an employee shows signs of being unwell, including but not limited to symptoms of COVID-19 which include fever and loss of sense of taste or smell, if an employee has potentially been in close contact with an infected person, or if a member of an employee's family living with the employee has been infected, encourage such employees to take advantage of the various leave schemes or to work from home.
- If, within the past 14 days, an employee has traveled to a country/region on which the government has imposed restrictions on entry into Japan or

⁵ https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000121431_00116.html

⁶ https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000121431_newlifestyle.html

has mandated an observation period after entry, or has had close contact with a resident of such a country/region, instruct that employee to stay at home.

- It is recommended that business transaction counterparts be encouraged to take similar action.

(10) Response in the Event of a Confirmed Case of Infection

a. If an employee is confirmed as having been infected

- Comply with the instructions of the public health center or medical institution.
- Based on the area of activity of the infected person, disinfect the areas in which the infected person has been working and consider having employees working in the same areas also stay at home.
- In consideration of the human rights of the infected person, take care not to identify the infected person by name. Personal data collected for the purpose of preventing the spread of infection of COVID-19 should be handled properly while being mindful of privacy concerns⁷.
- Regarding whether or not to publicly announce the confirmation of a case of COVID-19 in the workplace and how to make such an announcement, give the matter consideration in light of the actual circumstances based on public health requirements, while being mindful of privacy concerns as above.

b. If an employee of another company occupying the same rental office building is confirmed as having been infected

- Comply with the instructions of the public health center, medical institution, and building owner.

(11) Other

- Establish frameworks for contact between the organization's general safety and health manager or safety and health promotor and the public health center and cooperate with public health center interview requests,

⁷ Refer to Handling of personal data for preventing the spread of Novel-Coronavirus (COVID-19) disease, Personal Information Protection Commission (https://www.ppc.go.jp/news/careful_information/covid-19/), etc.

etc.