



COVID-19

Workplace Preparedness Framework

April 2020

1. BACKGROUND

The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes coronaviruses as a “family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases”. At the end of 2019, a novel strain of the coronavirus (now known as Covid-19) broke out in Wuhan, China and quickly spread all over the world killing and posing a serious health risk to all those who come into contact with the virus.

Covid-19 is a highly contagious illness. The symptoms of Covid-19 initially mimic the symptoms of the common cold, but there are some key differences which set the coronavirus apart from the seasonal flu and the common cold. General symptoms of Covid-19 are associated with the upper respiratory system and they include fever, coughing and shortness of breath. If left untreated or not treated correctly, infection can lead to pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and, in the worst case, death.

At the end of January 2020, the WHO declared the outbreak of Covid-19 as a public health emergency of international concern.

On 22 March 2020, The President of South Africa, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa declared a National State of Disaster in terms of the Disaster Management Act and detailed various measures that the Government would be implementing to all citizens on how to ensure that the spread of the virus is contained. Due to the health hazards including the rapid spread of the virus, South Africa instituted a national lock-down effective 26 March – 16 April 2020, which was further extended to 30 April 2020

As a result, GEPF closed its offices on 23 March 2020 till 16 April 2020 which was later extended to 30 April 2020 in line with lockdown regulations. During this period the Organisation instituted remote working. Remote working protocols were developed and shared with all employees with regular updates as informed by the Government including health partners assigned to advise in the fight against the pandemic.

The purpose of the framework is to stipulate measures that shall be taken by GEPF in order to protect the health and safety of employees and members of the public (visitors) who enter the workplace or may be exposed to GEPF environment.

On 23 April 2020, The State President addressed the nation on the progress of the effectiveness of the measures currently being implemented to contain the virus spread.

Government also announced the following **risk-adjusted strategy for economic activity**:

(Ongoing feedback loop informs the decision to remain at a particular level, relax restrictions further, or return to a higher level of restrictions)

Level 1	Low virus spread, high health system readiness.
Level 2	Moderate virus spread, with high health system readiness.
Level 3	Moderate virus spread, with moderate health system readiness.
Level 4	Moderate to high virus spread, with low to moderate health system readiness.
Level 5	High virus spread, and/or low health system readiness.

This document provides a framework for the management of reintegrating employees to the workplace during the Covid-19.

2 L E G A L R E G U L A T I O N S

The legislation governing workplaces in relation to COVID – 19 are the **Occupational Health and Safety Act, Act 85 of 1993**, as amended, read with the **Hazardous Biological Agents Regulations. Section 8 (1) of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act, Act 85 of 1993**, as amended, that requires the employer to provide and maintain as far as is reasonably practicable a working environment that is safe and healthy for employees. Specifically, section 8(2)(b) requires steps such as may be reasonably practicable to eliminate or mitigate any hazard or potential hazard before resorting to personal protective equipment (PPE). However, in the case of COVID–19, a combination of controls is required, although the main principle is to follow the hierarchy of controls. However, before the implementation of control measures, the risk assessment below was reviewed and updated, taking into account the new hazards posed by exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace. This is in accordance with **Section 8 (2) (d) of the OHS Act**.

Within the **Department of Co-operative and Traditional Affairs**, the **Disaster Management Act of 2002** regulations have been amended on 2 April 2020. In line with this Government Gazette, the GEPF is classified as an essential service.

3 R I S K A S S E S S M E N T

A risk assessment was conducted in March 2020 for assessing risks relating to Covid-19 at the GEPF Erasmuskloof Office. The outcomes are detailed in “**Annexure A**”, the risk register before lockdown. The risk assessment was updated in relation to the same office during the lockdown period in preparation of mitigating the risks when employees return to work. The resultant risk register is indicated in the following **Table1** below. The Risk assessment shall be shared with all staff members.

With Covid-19, it is not possible to eliminate the hazard completely, the most effective protection measures shall be implemented in addition to the workplace controls that will be put in place to eliminate the risks of infections in the workplace.

The GEPF is committed to fulfilling its obligations as a caring employer and will do everything possible to control the spreading of the disease within the work environment.

IDENTIFIED HAZARD/RISK	DESCRIPTION	WHO MIGHT BE HARMED	EXISTING CONTROLS	ADDITIONAL CONTROLS/ACTIONS	RESIDUAL RISK RATING	RESPONSIBLE	IMPLEMENTATION DATE
Rapid contamination and unsafe working environment	Contaminated work-space	*Employees; *Board and Committees *Clients and visitors.	*Labour law provisions (reactive); *Hand sanitizer.	*Screening (Temperature gauge); *Clean surfaces every 2 hours; *Deep cleaning of the office prior to commencement of operations; *Procurement of face masks, gloves and/or face shields	12	HR	6 May 2020
Inadequate implementation of physical/social distancing	Breach of regulations	*Employees and visitors.	*Regulations	*Furniture rearrangement at reception to promote acceptable physical distance	12	Finance and Procurement	4 May 2020
Increased absenteeism	High levels of absenteeism due to Covid-19 infection.	*Employees	*Sick leave policy	*GEPF to continue with remote working capability in case of sick employees.	9	HR	Ongoing

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IDENTIFIED HAZARD/RISK	DESCRIPTION	WHO MIGHT BE HARMED	EXISTING CONTROLS	ADDITIONAL CONTROLS/ACTIONS	RESIDUAL RISK RATING	RESPONSIBLE	IMPLEMENTATION DATE
Inability to detect sick persons	Unable to detect persons that must be referred for testing	*Employees *Board and Committees *Visitors	*None	*Screening/Temperature assessments	16	HR	Ongoing
Demand Risk	Demand for goods and services could exceed supply	*GEPF employees	*Procurement deviations	*SCM to consider actions	9	Procurement and Finance	4 May 2020
Adverse impact on employee health (vulnerable groups)	Vulnerable groups might be adversely affected	*GEPF employees	* Regulations	* Staff over 60 to work from home * Employees with pre-existing medical conditions to be considered to work from home subject to application	16	HR and Exco	11 May 2020
Adequacy of ventilation in the building	Ensure sound ventilation within the building	*GEPF employees; *Board and Sub-Committees; *Visitors	*Air-conditioning	*Currently deemed to be sufficient	9	HR and Procurement	N.A

Table 1: Risk Register

4 GEPF HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Some of the controls mentioned below should be read in addition to the current policies and procedures currently in place to reduce or minimize exposure to a hazard:

- Management shall consider special circumstances and make certain determinations in accordance with the merits of each request to work from home.
- The sick leave policy of the GEPF applies.
- An employee will be encouraged to disclose any other conditions or situation in the home environment that may pose a risk to the shared workspace. Confidentiality must be maintained at all times and HR will be the central point of dealing with such matters.
- Direct contact among employees, clients, and other stakeholders shall be minimised by replacing face-to-face meetings with virtual communications where possible to do so.
- Local and International air travel shall be discontinued until further notice. GEPF will regularly check any travel advice from the Department of Health at: **www.health.gov.za**
- The GEPF will ensure that its HR Policies are applied.
- Employees are encouraged to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 if they suspect possible exposure and to disclose such signs and symptoms to the employer in a confidential manner so that the employer may take the necessary action to mitigate any risks that may arise from such illness.
- Employees are required to exercise respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes.
- Workers with pre-existing health conditions will be considered for the option to work from home.
- The GEPF shall screen staff on a daily basis for symptoms associated with Covid-19 (i.e. fever, cough, sore throat, redness of eyes or shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing).
- Employees are further required to report to HR unit if they suffer from any of the following additional symptoms: body aches, loss of smell or loss of taste, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fatigue, weakness or tiredness;
- The GEPF shall make available the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) to employees as required by the law.
- All employees will be required to wear a mask especially where social distancing is not possible. GEPF will provide employees with disposable masks.
- The GEPF will ensure that it has wipes, sanitisers available and/or hand washing facilities with soap.
- The GEPF to install a physical barrier, such as clear plastic sneeze guards at reception and shared areas.

- Biometric system shall be disabled.
- Visitors and employees entering the organisation will undergo a temperature screen. A visitor with temperature above 38 will not be permitted to enter the office.
- Visitors to the office will need to complete a COVID-19 Register and/or Screening Questionnaire and will be required to sanitize their hands at the reception area before assistance is provided.
- Employees are discouraged from using other employees' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible.
- Measures will be put in place to ensure that areas such as toilets, common areas, door handles, shared electronic equipment are regularly cleaned and disinfected;
- The GEPF has available, through the EWP, psychological and behavioural support to address employee stress and anxieties that may manifest.
- The GEPF will continue communicating and updating employees on all matters relating to the manner of operating within the organisation to ensure that all employees are updated and are aware of what is expected from them.

5 CONCLUSION

The GEPF is committed to fulfil its obligations as a caring employer and will ensure that a safe and healthy working environment is provided for employees and visitors. The GEPF is cognisant of the overall risk level which will be monitored to ensure readiness to mitigate the risk of contamination of employees. The following considerations have been noted:

- Measures to detect sick employees are being put in place;
- Deep cleaning will take place;
- Cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces will be done regularly; and
- GEPF will check regularly on the websites of the National Department of Health, National Institute of Communicable Diseases and the National Institute for Occupational Health whether any additional PPE is required or recommended in any guidelines given the nature of the workplace or the nature of employee's duties.

GEPF is aware of the risks associated with Covid-19 in the workplace and this framework guides the Organisations' commitment in providing a safe and healthy environment for all its employees. This document will be reviewed and updated as and when required in order to ensure that it is aligned with national efforts to contain the spread of the virus in the workplace.

G E P F W O R K P L A C E P R E P A R E D N E S S F R A M E W O R K

Annexure A: Preliminary Risk Assessment

Risk	Risk Description	Inherent Impact	Inherent Likelihood	Risk Causes	Risk Consequences	Current Controls	Control Effectiveness	Residual Impact	Residual Likelihood	Residual Rating	Actions To be Taken	Task Owners	
Increased absenteeism	High levels of absenteeism due to the disease	4	4	16	*Illness; *Shutdown.	*Reputational Damage *Financial Losses *Inability to continue operations	*Remote working approach; *Staggered workforce; *Delegations of authority	3	3	3	9	*GEPF to implement and test remote working capability before adverse measures such a full shutdown get implemented. *Delegations of authority must be three levels deep for emergency incidents	Exco
Rapid contamination and unsafe working environment	Contaminated work-space	4	4	16	*Increased infections; *Lack of testing; *On-going meeting attendance.	*Reputational Damage *Financial Losses *Inability to continue operations *Litigation	*Labour law provisions(reactive); *Hand sanitors.	2	4	3	12	*Explore the legality of temperature testing; *Clean surfaces every 2 hours; *Alternatively introduce remote working requirements	Exco
Demand Risk	Demand for goods and services could exceed supply	4	3	12	*disruption of aviation and supply chains; *Companies unable to procure equipment or services; *Stock piling;	*Reputational Damage *Financial loss *Hampered service delivery	*Procurement deviations; *	2	4	2	8	*Procurement to consider actions	Exco
Interrupted supply chains	Orders not being filled due to disruption of supply chains	4	4	16	*Employees not being able to work due to disease burden; *Government intervention to halt certain industries in order to limit transmission.	*Reputational Damage *Financial Losses	*Procurement deviations; *	2	4	2	8	*Procurement to consider actions *Consider remote working requirement to positively impact on the cost benefit balance.	Exco
Inability to timeously pay benefits	GPAA unable to pay benefits on time thus presenting reputational damage to the GEPF	4	3	12	*Spread of diseases; *Any possible shutdown.	*Financial losses; *Litigation; *Failure to deliver.	*GEP Laws and Regulations; *GPAA BCM	2	3	3	9	*Establish a Coronavirus Committee; *BCM mission critical skills must be identified and prioritised and equipment be made available for remote working; *Crisis communication plan must be developed.	Exco