

## FAQ

### **Keeping the Netherlands healthy and safe at work** Frequently asked questions about the new coronavirus (COVID-19)

This document was last revised on 16 March 2020.

## Employer questions

### **Should I allow my employees to travel abroad still?**

For the time being, we strongly discourage any and all international travel. Our reason for this is the possibility of official government and RIVM information being less than perfectly up to date. This pandemic has presently reached a phase in which the number of infections is expected to rise at an increasing rate, a consequence of which is local governments taking additional precautions including instituting long-term quarantine and “lock-up” measures. This means your employees, should they travel abroad, might find themselves unable to return home for an extended period of time.

Please be sure at the very least never to travel to high-risk areas. The most recently updated travel advisories can be found with [RIVM](#), the [Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) and [LCR](#).

### **Whom should be requested not to come to their usual workplace?**

To protect the health of your employees and visitors, you can ask the following persons to work from home or to turn their meetings into meetings by telephone.

- Anyone who has travelled through a risk area in the past fourteen days.
- Anyone who has mild respiratory complaints (rhinitis, coughing, sore throat) and/or fever.
- Anyone who has had close contact with a person with a confirmed corona infection.

### **What should I do if one of my employees has been infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

If you have a person within your organisation who meets the case definition of COVID-19 of the WHO and/or has been confirmed to be infected by the GGD, we recommend the following measures:

- Send the employee in question home immediately; the employee may return if he/she is completely symptom-free for 24 hours.
- Ventilate the room(s) where the employee has been for half an hour.
- Clean and disinfect contact surfaces (e.g. keyboard, stair railings, lift buttons) with alcohol-based wipes.
- Consult with the GGD.
- Inform your company doctor.
- If possible, make a log of persons with whom the employee in question has had close contact (within
  - two metres and longer than fifteen minutes).
- Make an anonymised announcement to all employees with:
  - An extra call to be alert for respiratory complaints.
  - Information about the measures taken/to be taken by you.
- If possible, have employees with whom the person has been in close contact work at home for a preventive period of fourteen days.

- Pay special attention to concerns among vulnerable employees, such as chronically-ill and pregnant employees (see 'Vulnerable workers' mentioned above).
- If there is much unease among employees, consider a short-term (preventive) closure of the site.

### **Are there any preventative measures we can take?**

We wrote an employer advisory, which contains several preventative measures. Among them are:

Inform employees about personal hygiene measures:

- Touch the eyes, nose, and mouth as little as possible.
- Provide resources for good hand hygiene:
  - Regularly wash hands with water and soap and dry with disposable paper towels. Call attention to the washing instructions of the RIVM.
  - If no facilities for hand washing are available, disinfect the hands with rubbing alcohol. It is preferable to use a rubbing alcohol solution that includes a hand moisturiser. This helps prevent the skin from becoming dry.

Post reminder notices at the entrance, lunchrooms, and toilets.

- Cough and sneeze on the inside of the elbow.
- Use paper tissues only; discard them immediately after use.
- Be mindful when washing tableware and cutlery with water and soap; preferably use high temperature in the dishwasher.
- Clean with regular cleaning products several times a day:
  - Handles, handrails, light switches, lift buttons, counters.
  - Keyboards, computer mice, telephones.
  - Taps, soap holders, sinks, toilets.
- Ensure good ventilation and complete the required upkeep on your air conditioning system. In theory, virus droplets are too heavy spontaneously to enter the air conditioning system.
- Wearing mouth masks is not protective, except in some specific cases (such as for sick people or medical staff).

### *Social distancing: reducing contact with others*

- Preferably maintain a distance of two metres where possible.
- Do not shake hands. Hands are a known carrier of pathogens.
- Avoid public transport during rush hour.
- Limit travel movements.
- Spread employees across workstations, so that they can keep sufficient distance from each other.
- Talk to employees in non-critical positions, such as interns.
- Avoid crowds in the staff restaurant by introducing flexible lunchtimes.
- Avoid crowds at the office by spreading working hours.
- Use the telephone, video conferencing, etc. for business contacts.
- Limit meetings in time, frequency, and the number of participants, so that participants can keep a distance of preferably two metres.
- Use the lift with no more than two people at the same time or avoid the lift and encourage stair climbing.
- Cancel all events or allow them to continue without an audience.
- Maximize working from home, in shifts/a fixed schedule if necessary.

- Do a trial with minimum occupancy/mass working from home with all employees for whom this is possible, to find the weak spots within your organisation.
- Check to what extent digital working/education is possible, using, for example, the temporarily free software from Microsoft Teams or Google Hangouts Meet.

### **Would it be advisable to have my employees tested preventatively?**

Preventive testing for the coronavirus is not useful. In the absence of symptoms, there is not enough virus present yet to be able to exclude or demonstrate the virus. For this reason, people without symptoms are rarely tested. Moreover, the number of tests is scarce in the Netherlands. As a result, testing is done very selectively.

There is a reporting requirement for the coronavirus in the Netherlands. This means that a suspicion by a doctor is always reported to the Municipal Health Service (GGD). The GGD determines to what extent testing is done and further measures must be taken.

*In regards to temperature checks:*

*Temperature checks are introduced several times worldwide, including at airports in case of virus outbreaks. However, these temperature checks have not proved useful in the detection of sick people during a virus outbreak. In Asia, these checks are still applied as a reassuring but ineffective measure. Performing such temperature checks also encounters privacy objections from the GDPR.*

### **When may a previously ill employee return to their usual workplace?**

If a person does not present with any symptoms during the incubation period, it is to be assumed that there is no longer any risk of infection. The same applies to employees who are symptom-free for 24 hours after the disease has been cured.

Should these employees return to work, however, their colleagues may still experience anxiety. Please pay attention to this, by informing said colleagues beforehand and comforting them. If necessary, call in the help of external professionals, such as a company doctor or company social worker.

### **Would wearing a face mask protect against contracting coronavirus?**

Wearing mouth masks is not protective, except in some specific cases (such as for sick people or medical staff).

### **Am I obligated to inform anyone if my employee should have contracted coronavirus?**

In fact, it is the employee's responsibility to contact their own GP, by telephone, if they have contracted or fear they may have contracted coronavirus. The Netherlands has instituted obligatory reporting of the suspicion of coronavirus: any doctor is obligated to communicate any suspicion of coronavirus infection to GGD. It is GGD which then decides which measures and/or tests are to be taken.

If a coronavirus infection should be confirmed, you should inform your company's medical officer.

### **What should I do if one of my employees needs to care for an infected person?**



Should your employee be called upon to care for somebody who has contracted the coronavirus infection, please make them aware of whatever relevant options for special leave are available to them, i.e. care leave or calamity leave.