

SAFETY FIRST!

working and reporting guidelines
for journalists under SARS-CoV-2



NOTE: These guidelines supplement, but do not replace, the South African Government Department of Employment and Labour general workplace safety guidelines for employers, to which a useful quick reference guide is available here: [“COVID 19 What South African employers should do”](#).

The COVID-19 (SARS CoV-2) virus is a new infection.

(SARS-CoV-2 is the virus that causes COVID-19 disease.) What we know about it is growing and changing all the time as scientists conduct more research. So as journalists, citizens and people who want to stay healthy, your first responsibility is to use only reliable information sources to guide your reporting and your actions.

We suggest these as starting points:

The WHO main page
and, both accessible from it:

- [WHO coronavirus questions and answers hub](#)
- [WHO coronavirus public advice and mythbusters](#)

Also useful is the [European CDC site](#)

as well as the [Mayo Clinic public information site](#), usually very up to date and often written in more accessible language.



Don't spread, or act on, unverified (i.e. WhatsApp) information, and source-check everything!



1 But some things we do know.

COVID-19 is not flu, though it spreads in many of the same ways. Though many people may experience only mild effects, the virus spreads faster and wider than flu, and will kill far more people. People can spread infection before they feel sick as well as when they have symptoms, including a small but important percentage of people who never show any symptoms (e.g. are completely asymptomatic). Close contact with anybody is risky. Though older people and those with other health conditions are more at risk, young, fit people can and do die too.

INFO BOX:

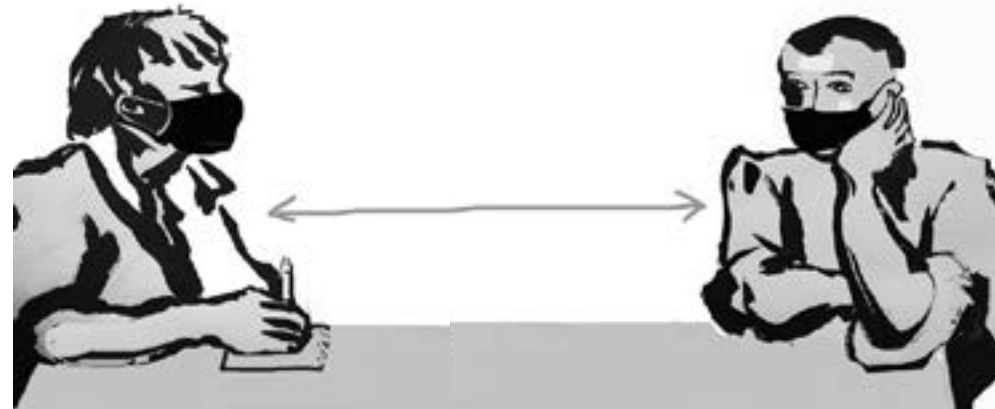
REDUCE YOUR RISK OF INFECTION

Information on how SARS-CoV-2 spreads is constantly being updated as new evidence is assessed. We do know for certain that it is spread through the air (though it is not yet clear if it is only through large **droplets** that quickly fall to surfaces, or also the very much smaller **aerosols** that can stay up in the air for longer periods of time). Reducing risk means stopping people who are infected from spreading it through the test/trace/isolate strategy, correctly wearing face masks, washing hands, and avoiding environments with possible airborne transmission. You may have heard a lot about the infection risk from surfaces – and it's important to keep surfaces as clean as possible – but the evidence now tells us airborne infection is the most important.

Five important steps you can take:

- **Avoid closed spaces** with poor ventilation
- **Avoid crowded spaces** with many people
- **Avoid close contact** with other people (e.g. less than a car-length away)
- **Wear a face mask** correctly when you cannot avoid being in a closed or crowded space, or near other people (It must always cover your mouth **and** nose and not flap loosely)
- **Wash your hands** every time you go in or out of a new space (sanitize when you can't wash them), and after taking off your face mask.

These guidelines are designed to help you navigate the risks and do your job well in new and often difficult circumstances. We look at the kinds of situations you're likely to find yourself in, and suggest safe best practice for these based on the 5 steps.





QUESTIONS TO ASK AN EMPLOYER/ WORK PLACEMENT:

- Do you have a workplace Covid plan in place?
- Who is the Covid officer?
- How are you complying with DEL distancing requirements?
- Is there a written list of protocols covering screening/self-assessment of staff and visitors and sanitising processes? Where can I find it?
- Does the company provide medical testing on suspicion of infection?
- Is there safe company transport to assignments?
- If I don't own a car, am I expected to use public transport?
- Do you provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for me, and if so, what PPE? (Or must I provide my own?)
- Will you permit me to do appropriate parts of my job at a distance from home?
- Do you provide any support/subsidy for home-working equipment and facilities, such as data and wifi link?
- Do you provide insurance cover for staff members who may be infected on duty? Does it cover my job or placement situation?
- What are the conditions/exceptions of that insurance cover?
- If I decline an assignment because of my or a vulnerable family member's health status, what will you do?
- If I need to isolate because of a family member's health status, what provisions do you make?
- If I need to quarantine because of my own suspected exposure or positive diagnosis, what provisions do you make?
- If I contract the virus as a result of work-related activities, what assistance do you provide?
- Will you provide permits for after-hours work during any curfew?
- If I am arrested, or detained in a non-safe space by authorities, what will you do?
- If I find myself in a situation that turns out risky and I can't contact the desk, will you penalise me for withdrawing?

3

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Stay at home if you feel ill
- Inform your employer's Covid Compliance officer of co-morbidities (a health condition that makes Covid infection more dangerous for you) and other risks
- Check your own insurance and medical aid cover to see if it covers 'dangerous situations'
- Carry details of your medical aid cover with you
- Carry all ID and emergency contact details with you (employer/next-of-kin)
- Carry all health information (allergies/pre-existing conditions/medical aid info) with you. (All these can be scanned into your phone's ICE – in case of emergency – information)
- Conduct as many activities as you can outdoors
- Open all windows in indoor locations
- Wear a mask properly
- Sanitise everything you use properly: with a 60+% alcohol spray or swab, or other reliable anti-Covid sanitising solution [<https://www.healthline.com/health/how-long-does-coronavirus-last-on-surfaces#shoes-and-clothing>].
- Maintain a 1.5-2 metre distance (at least a car length) from others
- Avoid crowds
- Leave potentially risky situations – such as where crowds aren't wearing masks or distancing, or where confrontation looks likely – as quickly as possible
- Always research, explain and listen. Don't stigmatise or stereotype people existing in unsafe conditions or living with the virus.
- Remember you're a role model. If you never wear a mask on TV, viewers may assume masks aren't needed for them either.

4





But obviously, not all of these are easy to apply in reporting situations, or when you are live on-air. So what should you do when:

You're in the newsroom

- Wear your mask properly indoors
- Open windows if you can, especially if your newsroom is crowded or stuffy
- Wash your hands immediately when you return from assignment - before you sit down to work
- Wipe down your own workspace surfaces, keyboard etc with a 60+% alcohol sanitiser regularly. (Don't spray directly into equipment, it can cause damage. Spray on a tissue and wipe while the tissue is still wet.)
- Change and wash mic covers after every use
- Don't use shared coffee rooms/catering stations when they are crowded. Wear your mask properly; wash or sanitise your hands before eating, and take your food or coffee to consume outdoors or in a well-ventilated space.
- Prefer stairs to shared lifts. If stairwells are enclosed and stuffy, wait till others have passed before you use them
- Be extremely careful in shared washrooms & toilets. Wear your mask. Wash or sanitise your hands every time you are done with using the washroom or toilet. Always flush with the lid down
- Physically distance from colleagues. If, eg, a technician needs to work on your machine, leave them to it!
- Hold conversations whether with colleagues or visitors (ideally) outside, or in a well-spaced meeting room. Open windows if they are there

You're travelling/to from a work assignment with others

- Wear a mask properly throughout the journey
- Don't overcrowd company transport; keep crew members to a minimum
- Open windows so the air can move around – do not rely on the air conditioning to circulate air
- Work with the same team consistently: it's safer than frequently changing crew partners
- Sanitise your hands after touching any door-handles, escalator rails etc
- Look or wait for a less-crowded taxi, bus or train carriage if you use public transport

You're reporting from a crowded scene

- Wear your mask properly
- Carry your own small sanitising kit everywhere
- Go round the crowd to the focus, don't push through it
- Stand at the edge to do live reporting
- Stay out of the faces of un-masked people shouting or singing; they can spread lots of virus droplets
- Plan interview questions well, so you spend the minimum time interviewing
- Stand obliquely at 45°, not directly face-to-face when interviewing an individual. (You should be doing this anyway).
- Use a mic/ selfie stick or camera boom
- Experiment in advance to see if you can broadcast clearly while still wearing your mask. If you can, always do so.
- Handle your mask carefully. Hold it at the sides if pushing it down/up to speak – the outside surface can carry virus droplets.
- Sanitise your phone immediately after interviewing or recording with it. If you can't, seal it in a plastic bag to clean later.
- If crowd members are challenging you, move backwards, out of the crowd, for discussion
- If crowd members become threatening, don't confront, withdraw!

You're reporting from a health facility, care home or similar

- Seek advice in advance about risk protection and appropriate PPE for that specific situation before you go. Follow that advice. For example, talking to one health professional outside a facility carries less risk than reporting from a ward where patients are being intubated.
- Otherwise, follow the reporting guidelines above.

You share equipment or a workstation with others

- Sanitise your space and equipment properly before you sit down to work or after collecting gear, even if office maintenance staff also sanitise regularly.

You're responsible for looking after your own equipment

- Sanitise – particularly metal – equipment as soon as you get it home. Don't leave it around for others in the household to touch un-sanitised.
- Change and wash/sanitise all your clothes as soon as you return home from work when you've been in a risky situation.

And finally – take care of your own emotional health!

These precautions add stress to what we know is an already stressful job. Use your employer’s counselling services if they exist; take breaks when you can, and remember – there will be a time after Covid!



USEFUL LINKS FOR SOUTH AFRICA AND JOURNALISTS:

- **Daily Maverick article “An experts guide to covid-19 risks in South Africa and how to manage them “**
- **Portal to production/ reporting guidelines for BBC staff**
- **for accurate domestic information sacoronavirus.co.za**
- **and Sanef’s own Covid page**

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