Red Meat Abattoir Association

News Flash
COVID-19

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CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

With the current confirmation of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) also diagnosed in South Africa, it is important for employers to know what their rights and responsibility are towards employees and other persons entering the business premises. The Occupational Health and Safety Act places an explicit obligation on employers to create and maintain a safe and healthy work environment.

Given that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a serious contagious virus and declared an international epidemic, where the World Health Organisation requires an infected person to be quarantined, an employer will be justified given these medical facts to compel an employee to undergo medical testing. However, medical testing can only be done where employees show symptoms of infection.

AN EMPLOYEE IS SUSPECTED TO BE INFECTED WITH THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

The employer has the right to conduct a medical incapacity consultation and request a doctor's report for a formal medical report, as well as whether the employee is eligible for employment. This information must of course be kept confidential, and legislation sets strict guidelines when this process is followed.

A MEDICAL PRACTITIONER HAS CONFIRMED THAT AN EMPLOYEE IS INDEED INFECTED WITH THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Once a medical practitioner confirms that an employee is infected with the Coronavirus (COVID-19), the employee must be placed under quarantine and will this period of absence be considered as sick leave (a medical certificate must be submitted to the employer). If the employee does not have any available sick leave, annual leave and/or unpaid leave will be used. An employee should not be allowed to return to work

until a medical doctor has confirmed that the employee is eligible for employment.

EMPLOYER'S RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS OTHER EMPLOYEES

When there is a confirmed case in the workplace where an employee is infected with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and quarantined, the employer also has a responsibility towards other employees and must the following take place:

- Report the incident to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).

- Compel employees to undergo medical testing (justified by medical facts in exceptional circumstances).

- Depending on the above results and feedback from the NICD, the employer may need to close the business for a specific period.

BE PROACTIVE

An infection control program can be set up in the workplace that addresses the following:

- The development of an infection control plan following a risk assessment.

- Implementing environmental controls, such as ensuring adequate ventilation, cough hygiene, use of ultraviolet light disinfection of the air, facilities to wash hands, etc.

- Identifying employees who may be infected with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and requiring the employee to undergo immediate medical testing for possible diagnosis and treatment.

- Ensure the use of masks, gloves, disinfectants, etc. – any use of equipment or aids is for protection and can help limit the spread of infectious disease/viruses.

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD)'s contact details are as follows:

- The general public hotline number is 0800 029 999 and operates on Mondays to Fridays, during 08h00 and 16h00.

- Further information can be obtained on the website www.nicd.ac.za.

Please contact the LWO for assistance at **086 110 1828** or if you have any queries in this regard. We are available 24/7.

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Download - WHO: Getting the workplace ready for COVID-19