

Subject: COVID-19 (UPDATE 35) - PHASE 2: THE RETURN OF STUDENTS AND STAFF TO WITS' CAMPUSES
Date: Friday, 03 July 2020 at 18:36:31 South Africa Standard Time
From: Shirona Patel on behalf of VCO News
To: VCO News
Attachments: COVID-19 Infection Investigation Guidelines for Managers.docx

Dear Colleagues

We hope that you are healthy and well.

At the end of May, we shared information about [Wits' phased approach to the return of students and staff](#) to our campuses.

As we enter the second phase of reopening, it will be necessary for more academic, professional and support staff to return to work on our campuses. A comprehensive workplace plan has been shared with managers. It includes guidelines on the preparation of the workplace before employees arrive; the responsibilities of managers, health and safety officers and employees before returning to work; rules for staff whilst at work; and a protocol to follow when infections are reported.

The SET agreed to the following principles:

- All academic, professional and administrative staff who can work from home, should continue to do so, and should only come onto campus if necessary;
- Staff members who have to deliver essential services that cannot be conducted remotely or from home, are required to report for duty if requested to do so by their line managers. Staff members without an official permit will not be allowed onto Wits' campuses;
- Staff members over the age of 60 or those living with co-morbidities should stay at home where possible;
- All staff who are unable to work during this period, should, where possible, be redeployed to areas where they can make a contribution.

Staff members who have co-morbidities (like cancer, diabetes, asthma or other respiratory illnesses) should voluntarily declare these illnesses to their line manager or provide a valid doctor's letter that indicates specifically why they cannot report for work. Where line managers believe that it is necessary, a second opinion may be obtained from selected healthcare practitioners based at the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre.

Workplace preparation

Line managers should work with health and safety officers, the Services Department and Human Resources personnel to ensure that the following measures are in place:

- The physical distancing of staff and students;
- The adequate provision of sanitisers and/or soap and water;
- The regular cleaning of venues and work spaces;
- The provision of cloth masks (two per staff member) and other personal protective equipment for specialised areas; and
- Protocols to prevent the spread of infection.

It is the responsibility of every staff member reporting for duty on campus to complete the self-screening process via the [Wits LogBox Screening App](#) every day BEFORE entering Wits' premises.

Reporting Covid-19 infections

Managers are requested to report all staff Covid-19 infections to the Occupational Health, Safety and Environmental Management (OHS&E) Directorate via Dept-OHS-Admin@wits.ac.za using the attached reporting form. The form includes a checklist for managers to follow as soon as they are made aware that a staff member has been diagnosed with Covid-19. Amongst other aspects, the checklist places the responsibility on managers to report all cases to the relevant OHS&E and HR representatives (for reporting and management purposes); to Protection Services (in order to block access to campuses); to Services (in order to arrange for the cleaning of possible contaminated areas); and to the Campus Health and Wellness Centre (to follow up on the infected person). Line managers (with the help of the OHS&E Directorate) also need to conduct an investigation in order to try to establish the cause of the infection, to determine whether protective measures are adequate as per regulatory requirements, and whether any other persons could potentially have been exposed. The results of the investigation may make it necessary for the Department/School/University's risk assessment processes and procedures to be reviewed.

As at 3 July 2020, the total number of employees positively diagnosed with Covid-19 is **15**. No fatalities have been reported. The University is investigating each reported case. All infected persons are self-isolating and as at 3 July 2020, none have reported being hospitalised due to COVID-19 complications.

Managing Covid-19 risks

There is some confusion in the public domain surrounding Covid-19. The following article co-authored by several Wits experts, helps to contextualise the pandemic and provides some essential pointers on Covid-19 risks and how to manage them. Read more: [Distance, Dose, Dispersion: Experts' guide on Covid-19 risks in South Africa and how to manage them](#).

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic will be with us for the next few months at least, possibly longer. We know that this pandemic is taking a toll on many. We are with you – we are all facing this scourge together, and it will take our collective care, strength, commitment and humanity to keep this pandemic at bay. Your individual ideas and comments on what else we can do for the Wits community are welcome – please send them to vco.news@wits.ac.za. They will be collated and passed on to the Senior Executive Team for consideration at our next meeting.

Take care and keep well.

SENIOR EXECUTIVE TEAM

3 JULY 2020