



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Health

THE **NEW** NORMAL

**REOPENING GUIDELINES
FOR BUSINESSES
FACILITIES AND
INSTITUTIONS**

MAY 2020

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1. Background

Pandemics such as COVID-19 have the potential to destabilize and disrupt health systems and may have a profound effect on all aspects of a country's economy and the mental and physical health of the population.

As a result, a recovery plan with a phased ease of restrictions utilising appropriate guidelines for the reopening of businesses, institutions and facilities is a tool utilised for mitigating the risk of the transmission of COVID-19.

2. International Context

On March 11th, 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the 2019-nCoV to be a Pandemic and as at May 20th, 2020, there were 4,789,205 confirmed cases with 318,789 deaths across 213 countries (WHO Situational Report No. 121).

The WHO has developed strategic advice for countries considering lifting restrictions noting that this is not the end of the Pandemic but just the beginning of the recovery phase. Notably, these Guidelines were developed using WHO/CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) interim guidance for businesses and employers responding to COVID-19.

The key objectives of this phase are to educate, engage and empower people to change their behaviour based on public health guidelines. In this instance, the criteria for lifting the restrictions are as follows:

- The transmission of COVID-19 is adequately controlled;
 - Health system capacities are in place to detect, test, isolate and treat every COVID-19 case and trace every contact;
 - Outbreak risks are minimized in special settings like health facilities and nursing homes;
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- Preventive measures are in place in workplaces, schools and other public places;
- Importation risks can be managed; and
- Communities are educated, engaged and empowered to adjust to the “new normal” with the following protocols:
 - Wear masks when you go out in public;
 - Keep your distance from others (6ft);
 - Stay home if you are ill;
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol based sanitizer;
 - Cough into a tissue or into the crook of your elbow;
 - Avoid touching your face; and
 - Clean then sanitize surfaces (e.g. table tops, door knobs and cell phones).

These guidelines were sourced from WHO and CDC interventions for COVID-19 and the key source documents were derived from the following links:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>;
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html>; and
- <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-COVID-19.pdf>

3. Local Context

On January 31st, 2020, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GoRTT) proclaimed COVID-19 as a dangerous infectious disease under the Public Health Ordinance, Chap. 12 No. 4. This intervention was necessary in order to trigger the special provisions under the Ordinance that are pertinent to the curtailment and management of infectious diseases such as notification, special inspections and offences.

Trinidad and Tobago's main goal is to control the disease progression by slowing down transmission and reducing mortality associated with COVID-19, with the ultimate aim of reaching a state of low level or no transmission.

In light of the above, during the period February to May 2020, Trinidad and Tobago, similar to other countries, instituted several containment measures against COVID-19, which included the initial travel bans to China, Italy, Iran, Spain, Germany, Singapore and South Korea and ultimately closing its borders on March 22nd, 2020.

Other significant measures included the issuance of stay at home orders for workers in non-essential services and cessation of mass gatherings in public spaces; the sequential closure of schools; gatherings at houses of worship, bars, cinemas, restaurants and fast-food outlets and the limitation of operating hours for commercial retail and wholesale outlets, on April 6th, 2020.

As at May 20th, 2020, there were 116 positive cases and eight (8) deaths with over 2,700 tests being conducted since the inception of the virus. As the country moves into another phase of combating this Pandemic, it is important that critical public health and social precautionary measures such as wearing mask in all public spaces; physical distancing, staying home when ill and the adoption of personal protective recommendations (hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette) are continuously highlighted. Further, the public health and social measures that were implemented, including movement restrictions, closure of schools and businesses and border control measures, reinforced the public health measures.

Ideally, there should be a balance in the level of restrictions and the economic costs of these measures to ensure an equilibrium between the benefits and the potential harms of adjusting these measures so as to not generate a reappearance of COVID-19 cases locally. In this regard, the Ministry of Health has taken the approach to institute these Guidelines based on scientific evidence, lessons from other countries, economic factors, security-related factors, human rights considerations, food security and public feeling and adherence to measures. As such, these Guidelines are aimed at adjusting public health and social measures while managing the risk of resurgence of cases in businesses/facilities/institutions after the lifting of restrictions which were implemented in Trinidad and Tobago.

4. Objectives of the Guidelines

To provide businesses/facilities/institutions (private and public sectors), in Trinidad and Tobago that are accessed by the public, with a suite of core, and selected sector-specific guidelines with complementary/supplementary measures aimed at preventing and controlling the transmission of COVID-19.

5. Key Stakeholders and Users of the Guidelines

These Guidelines directly apply to all businesses/facilities/institutions (private and public sectors), across Trinidad and Tobago including but not limited to groceries and supermarkets, stores, churches, banks, homes for the aged, offices, schools, public and state sector agencies.

6. Key pre-requisites and assumptions for the implementation of the Guidelines

- i. It is acknowledged that the Guidelines cited below are generalised, setting out basic parameters for the conduct of business;
- ii. The basic measures of physical distancing, personal hygiene, wearing of face masks, and staying at home if one has symptoms of acute respiratory infections, and the inherent individual responsibilities, remain the cornerstone of any preventative actions taken by businesses/facilities/institutions;
- iii. The various business models that are applied by businesses/facilities/institutions makes it impossible to specify guidelines for each type of entity. Within this context, these businesses/facilities/institutions would need to develop contextualised plans, informed by these Guidelines, and may submit same for review and guidance to the Office of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO); and
- iv. Given the above, and with recognition of the fundamental role of individual responsibility, regardless of whether one is a customer, owner, proprietor, government agency, or any other category of stakeholder, the success of these Guidelines is dependent on a robust communication strategy to inform the wider public on their own planning for reopening business.

7. Implementation of the Guidelines

Given the existing network of County Medical Officers of Health (CMOHs), and the Public Health Inspectorate across Trinidad and Tobago, individual establishments are advised to submit tailored plans, inclusive of protocols for re-opening, to the relevant offices of the CMOHs within their respective regions for review and guidance, under the authority of the Office of the CMO. Following which the Public Health Inspectorate shall support the translation of said plans into action within the establishments through continuous assessment and reporting on the adherence of these Guidelines and plans, under the terms of the existing legal frameworks.

7.1 Core Recommendations Aimed at Preventing and Controlling COVID-19

Employers must promote physical distancing practices for employees and frequent and adequate employee handwashing; ensure continuous facility and surface sanitation; control customer flow and ensure sick employees stay home or go home if they feel ill. Employers must also provide basic workplace hazard education about COVID-19 and how to prevent transmission in the language best understood by the employee. The following are the guidelines in specific areas:

7.1.1 Physical Distancing

All persons must keep at least six feet away from each other (this includes co-workers, suppliers and customers). In order to achieve this, the following measures should be implemented:

Business Operations

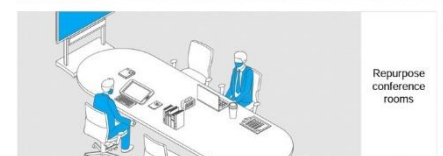
- Set work stations further apart or reduce the number of work stations in use at a given time;
- Adjust certain tasks or meetings to times or locations that require the presence of fewer people;
- Control the number of persons entering the building or office;
- Stagger work schedules so workers don't crowd when they arrive or leave work;

Ensure physical separation within the office space

Separate seating arrangements



Limit larger gatherings/ meetings of employees



Repurpose
conference
rooms

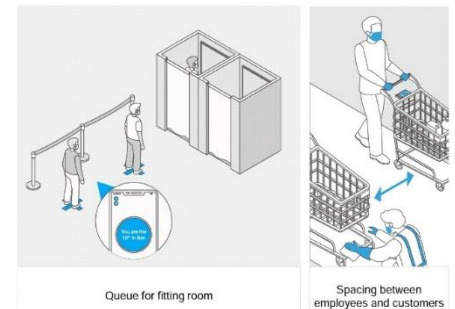
- Make provisions to prevent close contact between workers and others (e.g., co-workers and the public) when transferring items, tools, or materials. For example, require one at-a-time access at designated drop-off/pick-up points;

Install plexiglass barriers between employees and customers



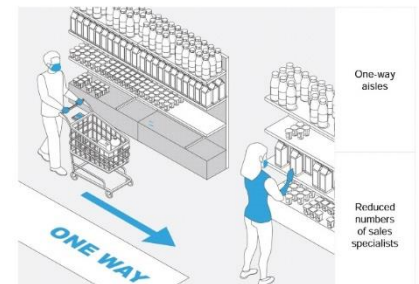
- Ensure physical separation between customers by using dividers / barriers or floors markings to distinguish appropriate spacing for people waiting in lines or in front of service counters;

Ensure physical separation between customers



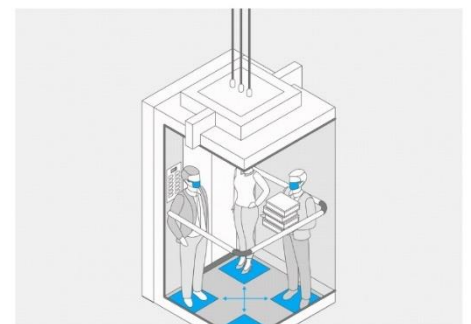
- Establish within lanes and aisles a one-way system with fewer sale specialists;

Implement one-way store aisles with fewer sales specialists



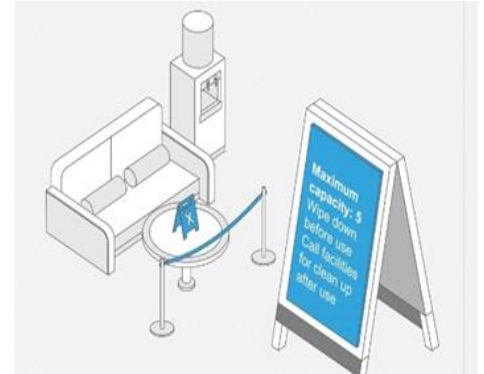
- Limit the capacity in elevators to accommodate physical distancing depending on the size of the elevator car;
- Implement curb-side pickup, delivery or use of mail services where appropriate;

Limit capacity in elevators



- Use one or more employee(s) as a “physical distance monitor” similar to a safety monitor to ensure physical distancing practices are consistently followed.
- Break Areas and Meeting Rooms

Close common areas and provide strict protocols for when they reopen

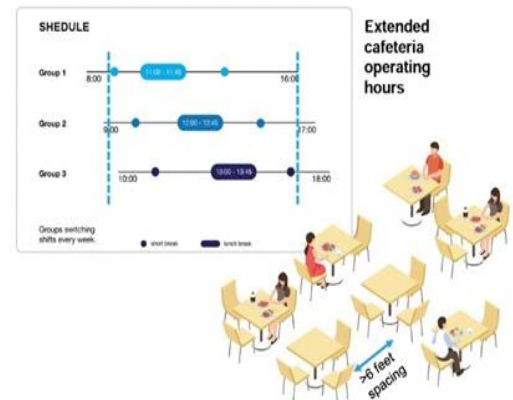


- Where it is necessary to hold gatherings, do so in larger spaces or outdoors where workers can readily practice social distancing;
- Stagger break and lunch schedules to minimize occupancy; or limit and monitor occupancy based on the size and layout of the room;

Stagger lunch hours and time spent in common areas

- Set up rooms to facilitate appropriate distancing; for example, provide a limited number of chairs, each at an appropriate distance apart;
- Utilize virtual meetings and other communication methods instead of in-person meetings where feasible.

Staggered lunch schedule



7.1.2 Sanitisation

Frequent cleanings followed by thorough sanitisation should be done throughout the day, and not just at the end of the day.

- Establish a housekeeping schedule to incorporate routine cleaning and sanitisation with regular, frequent, and periodic cleaning during the day / night¹;
- Provide appropriate and adequate cleaning and sanitisation supplies for scheduled and, when necessary, spot cleaning and cleaning after a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case;

Emphasize high-frequency, high-visibility cleaning (2/2)



- Ensure that floors, counters, and other surfaces are regularly cleaned and sanitised with water and soap, or other cleaning liquids to prevent build-up of dirt and residues that can harbour contamination;
- Ensure that high-touch surfaces (door knobs, elevator buttons, handles, rails, telephone, desks, mobile devices, countertops) and shared spaces (lunch rooms, washrooms, change rooms, locker rooms) are properly disinfected on a frequent or periodic basis using a bleach solution using 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) per gallon of water or 4 teaspoons

Emphasize high-frequency, high-visibility cleaning (1/2)



¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cleaning-disinfection.html>

bleach per quart of water² or 70% alcohol solutions or other EPA-approved disinfectant³;

- Ensure that shared work vehicles are regularly cleaned and disinfected;
- Ensure that contracted service providers are competent to clean and sanitise adequately and that they have arrangements in place regarding their workers' health status;
- Ensure that employees follow effective cleaning procedures and use protective gloves and eye/face protection (e.g. face shields and/or goggles) when mixing, spraying, and wiping with liquid cleaning products, like diluted bleach.

7.1.3 Personnel Hygiene

- Provide an adequate supply of 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer or hand washing facilities or stations (fixed or portable) at workplaces and jobsites so employees and the general public / visitors / customers can wash their hands frequently with soap and running water. It would be ideal to have easy open-close taps or pedal actuated or hands free taps;

Encourage frequent and staggered sanitization breaks for all employees



- Endorse and encourage proper mask etiquette within the establishment. Refer to section 7.1.5 below for further details;

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html>

³ <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

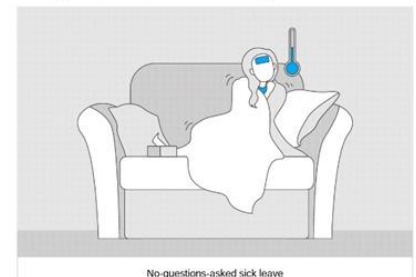
- Ensure an adequate supply of soap, water, and disposable towels. Set up a schedule for frequent restocking of supplies and emptying of trash;
- Require workers to wash hands frequently and effectively when they arrive at work, leave their workstations for breaks, use the bathroom; before and after they eat or drink or use tobacco products; and after touching any surfaces suspected of being contaminated;
- Provide clean water and soap in portable containers to facilitate more frequent handwashing or supplemental hand sanitizer (minimum content of 60% alcohol) stations, wipes or towelettes, for use after handling objects touched by others;
<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/show-me-the-science-hand-sanitizer.html>
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) may be provided but must also be washed regularly to prevent the spread of the virus.

7.1.4 Procedures to Address Sick Persons

Employers must establish procedures to:

- Establish systems which allow ill workers to stay home and seek medical attention if required;

Issue clear guidance on sick leave, compensation and related policies



- Ensure immediate and proper cleaning and sanitisation of the area after the ill person has vacated the establishment;

- Conduct daily checks of employees, contractors, suppliers, customers and visitors for COVID-19 symptoms as they enter the worksite. For example, a brief questionnaire or thermal scanning may be employed;
- Encourage workers to report concerns and use paid sick leave according to the guidance of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development.

7.1.5 The Use of Masks and PPE

The WHO has issued specific guidelines advising on the proper use of masks and other PPE, which include but are not limited to the following:

- Before putting on a mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water;
- Cover mouth and nose with mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask;
- Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water;
- Replace the mask with a new one as soon as it is damp and do not re-use single-use masks; and
- To remove the mask: remove it from behind (do not touch the front of mask); discard immediately in a closed bin or put to wash; clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.

These guidelines may be accessed by using the web link below: -

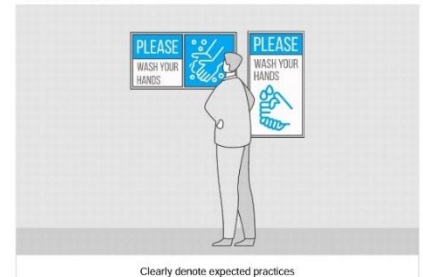
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

7.1.6 Information and Health Education

Employee education, as well as education of the other persons utilising the establishment, is important and must be provided to employees in a manner in which they will understand. The risk must be communicated to them and they must know the risk, signs and prevention precautions for COVID-19. The information must be communicated through readable and highly visible signs and messages. Employees should also be able to provide feedback to help improve safety at the establishment.

- Promote healthy personal habits through the use of high visibility signage and internal media campaigns;

Promote healthy personal habits with high-visibility signage and media campaigns



- Display posters promoting hand-washing, proper uses of mask and gloves – ask your local public health authority for these or look on www.WHO.int;

Highlight new workplace safety processes and policies through prominent displays

Informational materials in displays and advertising



- Implement communication measures such as offering guidance from Occupational Health and Safety Officers and briefings at meetings;
- Circulate information on the intranet to promote hand-washing and good hygiene measures such as proper cough and sneezes etiquette.

8. Guidelines for Specialised Establishments

i. World Health Organization (WHO) Operational Considerations for COVID-19 Management in the Accommodation Sector (Hotel and Tourism)

This WHO document details information in the following areas for the accommodation/tourism sector: -

- a. Guidelines for the Management Team;
- b. Reception & Concierge;
- c. Technical & Maintenance Services;
- d. Restaurants, Breakfast and Dining Rooms and Bars⁴;
- e. Recreational Areas for Children;
- f. Cleaning & Housekeeping; and
- g. Handling COVID-19 cases in hotels and tourism accommodation establishments.

These guidelines can be accessed by using the web link below: -

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331937/WHO-2019-nCoV-Hotels-2020.2-eng.pdf>

ii. CDC Guidelines on Manufacturing Workers and Employers

As at May 14th 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued Interim Guidance for manufacturing workers and employers. The manufacturing work environment entails the production of items through assembly lines and other areas, where workers have close contact with co-workers and supervisors, which may contribute substantially to workers' potential exposures. The risk of occupational transmission of COVID-19 depends on several factors which include; distance between workers, duration of contact, type of contact and the ergonomics within the workplace. Therefore, measures for controls must be instituted for engineering, facilities and administration within the working environment.

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/restaurants-and-bars-decision-tree.pdf>

The details of these guidelines can be accessed through the following link:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-manufacturing-workers-employers.html>

iii. World Health Organization (WHO) Getting the Workplace Ready for COVID-19

This WHO document gives advice on:

- Simple ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in your workplace;
- How to manage COVID-19 risks when organizing meetings and events;
- Things to consider when you and your employees travel; and
- Getting your workplace ready in case COVID-19 arrives in your community.

These guidelines can be accessed by using the web links below: -

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/advice-for-workplace-clean-19-03-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=bd671114_6&download=true

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-manufacturing-workers-employers.html>

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

The CMOHs and the Public Health Inspectorate will provide continuous assessment and reporting to the Chief Medical Officer on the implementation of these Guidelines through continuous site visits and inspection of premises. This is to ensure the strict adherence to the Guidelines for the reopening of businesses, institutions and facilities, as this is critical to the continued mitigation of the risks associated with COVID-19.

10. References

- i. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 14th, 2020, 'Businesses and Workplaces- Plan, Prepare and Respond'.
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- iv. McKinsey & Company, April 24th, 2020, 'Workplace Return.: COVID-19 is, first and foremost, a global humanitarian challenge'.
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<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-COVID-19.pdf>
- vi. World Health Organisation, April 7th, 2020, 'COVID-19 and Food Safety: Guidance for Food Business'.
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