

HR LEAVE PROTOCOL RELATED TO COVID-19

1. Introduction

Following a national lockdown effective 27 March 2020 to 30 April 2020 only essential services determined by Government were allowed to work. Notwithstanding that Government has eased some of the nationwide lockdown regulations after 30 April 2020 it is in the best interest of limiting the risk across the University community that not all staff return to campus immediately.

Physical distancing and good hygiene are important preventative measures that will curb the transmission and spread of the virus. All staff and students, without exception, must wear a mask at all times when on campus.

It is within this context that this framework has been developed and should be read in conjunction with the following: -

- 1) RU COVID-19 Institutional Framework
- 2) RU COVID-19 Institutional Plan
- 3) RU COVID-19 Health and Safety Protocol
- 4) RU COVID-19 Access Protocol
- 5) Support Staff Leave Policy
- 6) Academic Leave Conditions and Leave of Absence Protocol
- 7) Staff Disciplinary Code
- 8) Conditions of Service (unless not conducive to business continuity and the Alert Level restrictions)

2. Purpose of this document

To provide guidelines for staff members' absence from work within the context of the COVID-19 and the statutory obligation that both employers and staff members have in terms of health and safety in the workplace. This protocol provides guidelines regarding leave arrangements when there is reasonable apprehension and/or evidence that staff members have been or are very likely to have been exposed to COVID-19 or the staff member has been tested positive for COVID-19.

3. Terminology

Confirmed Case (as per the NICD)

"A person with laboratory confirmation of SARS-CoV-2 infection, irrespective of clinical signs and symptoms". (<http://nicd.ac.za>)

Direct/Close Contact

Direct/close contact means that you had face-to-face contact within 1 metre or were in a closed space for more than 15 minutes with a person with COVID-19. This contact happened while the person with COVID-19 was still “infectious”, i.e. from 2 days before to 14 days after their symptoms began. For example, you may be someone who: -

1. Lives in the same household as a person with COVID-19.
2. Works closely in the same environment as a person with COVID-19.
3. Sat in the same classroom as a person with COVID-19.
4. Attended the same gathering as a person with COVID-19.
5. Provided direct care for a person with COVID-19 in a healthcare setting without using the proper personal protective equipment.
6. Sat within two seats (1 metre) in any direction of a person with COVID-19 in any kind of vehicle including buses, minibus taxis, etc.

PPE

Personal Protective Equipment.

Quarantine

These are healthy people who either self-quarantine or are requested to quarantine by the employer because **one or more** of the risk criteria exists (see point 5). After 2 weeks the staff members may return to work provided that they have not experienced any symptoms associated with COVID-19 (see point 5.3).

Isolation

This is for people who have been **diagnosed** with COVID-19. Isolation means that a person **may not leave their home/place of isolation at all** (or you are in hospital or a quarantine centre) until they have been declared fit to leave.

Social/Physical Distancing

Social/physical distancing is the practice of maintaining a greater than usual physical distance from other people or of avoiding direct contact with people or objects in public places during the outbreak of a contagious disease in order to minimise exposure and reduce transmission of infection. In the case of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), a minimum distance of radius 1,5m to 2m is recommended.

Vulnerable Staff

Staff who have pre-existing health conditions related to their immune systems, i.e. they are already immunocompromised (as defined by the World Health Organization Report of 2019) or are 60 years or older.

4. Applicability

This protocol is a temporary protocol and remains valid for as long as the lockdown at its various levels remains in place.

This protocol applies to all staff members at Rhodes University who are employed on a permanent or temporary basis regardless of whether they are full-time or part-time.

Academic staff leave is guided by the Academic Leave Conditions and the Leave of Absence Protocol; and this Protocol should be read in conjunction with both the Leave of Absence Protocol and Academic Leave Conditions.

Support staff leave is guided by the Support Staff Leave Policy and this Protocol should be read in conjunction with the Support Staff Leave Policy.

5. Guiding Principles

- a) There should be as few people on campus and in the workplace as possible, no more than a third of our total staff for Alert Levels 3 and 4 and 66% of our staff at Alert Level 2. Only at Alert Level 1 will all staff be permitted to return to the workplace. Staggered working hours, rotation, coming into the workplace briefly to fetch and drop off things so that the staff member is able to continue working remotely, all assist to ensure that a minimum number of staff are on campus and assists with physical distancing.
- b) Staff who are able to work productively at home should do so.
- c) Staff who are not able to work remotely and who are required to be at the workplace are expected to come to work when asked to by their HoD or Director/Line Manager.
- d) Special measures to be put in place for vulnerable staff. Such measures may be: -
 - Working remotely.
 - Changing the staff member's role or responsibilities to enable them to work remotely and/or differently.
 - Adapting their work space by putting in place physical barriers, additional hygiene enablement tools and providing specific PPE appropriate to the risk identified.
 - Ensure that face-to-face interaction is kept to an absolute minimum.

6. Guidelines for leave

Staff fall into the following categories outlined below: -

6.1 Staff members who are able to work productively remotely. The following applies: -

- a) The leave policies of the University are applicable and should staff require leave they need to apply for leave as per the applicable leave policy for Academic and Support Staff respectively.
- b) Staff members who are not able to work due to illness (not COVID-19 related) must advise their HoD or Director/Line manager and apply for sick leave as per the applicable leave policy.
- c) Staff members who are not able to work due to COVID-19 quarantine as a precaution (either self-imposed or imposed by the University) because there is a reasonable risk as per the Risk Assessment below (see point 8 below) should apply for COVID-19 special leave.
- d) If a staff member tests positive for COVID-19 they must apply for sick leave as per the relevant support staff leave or academic leave policy. If a support staff member does not have sick leave available, they should apply for special sick leave as per the support staff leave policy.
- e) Staff who work remotely are expected to come into work if asked by their HoD or Director/Line Manager unless they are on approved leave.
- f) Staff members may not unreasonably refuse to come to work and if they do so it is a disciplinary matter.

6.2 Staff members who are not able to work remotely because the nature of their work does not allow them to work remotely. The following applies: -

- a) The leave policies of the University are applicable and should staff require leave they need to apply for leave as per the applicable leave policy for Academic and Support Staff respectively.
- b) If a staff member is not on approved leave they will be expected to be able to come to work at short notice if requested by their HoD or Director/Line Manager. Staff members are not easily able to come to work because they are away/out of town must apply for annual leave.
- c) If a staff member is ill and not able to come to work due to illness (not COVID-19 related) they must advise their HoD or Director/Line manager and apply for sick leave as per the applicable leave policy. If staff have not advised their HoD or Director/Line Manager that they are ill as per the applicable leave policy, they will be expected to come to work should they be requested to do so. It will not be acceptable for staff to advise their HoD or Director/Line Manager that they are ill only after they are asked to come to work.
- d) Staff members who are not able to come to work due to COVID-19 quarantine as a precaution (either self-imposed or imposed by the University) because there is a reasonable risk as per the Risk Assessment below (see point 8) must notify their HoD or Director/Line Manager and should apply for COVID-19 special leave.
- e) Staff members who have tested positive for COVID-19 must apply for sick leave as per the relevant support staff leave or academic leave policy. If a support staff member does not have sick leave available, they should apply for special sick leave as per the support staff leave policy.
- f) Staff members may not unreasonably refuse to come to work and if they do so it is a disciplinary matter.

7. Guidelines when staff who have been absent from work whether as a result of COVID-19 or a non-COVID-19 related illness return to work

- 7.1 Staff returning to work after illness (not COVID-19 related) should provide their Line Manager and HR with the relevant sick leave certificate as per the applicable leave policy.
- 7.2 Staff returning to work after having tested positive for COVID-19 may return to work after 14 days if they are not ill, have no symptoms and/or if a medical practitioner declares them fit to return to work. The Department of Health has provided the following additional guidelines: -
 - a. People who are asymptomatic may de-isolate 10 days after testing
 - b. People who have mild symptoms may de-isolate 10 days after the onset of symptoms
 - c. People who have severe symptoms may de-isolate 10 after clinical stability is achieved
- 7.3 Staff are required to complete the Daily Self-Assessment Screening Questionnaire or the HIGHER HEALTH Integrated Digital COVID-19 Screening System (“Health Check”) each time they come to work.

8. Risk Assessment

In order to minimize spreading COVID-19 and assess the risk the following **minimum criteria (but not limited to these, as these may change as the context changes)** should be considered when assessing whether there is potential risk that a staff member has been exposed to or could be exposed to COVID-19: -

- 8.1 A staff member has travelled to a **country or province** where there is a **high incidence** of COVID-19 and is returning to Makhanda either because they live in Makhanda or work in Makhanda. An up

to date list of countries and provinces within South Africa with **high incidences** of COVID-19 can be found at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019> and <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/category/press-releases-and-notices/>

- 8.2 A staff member has been in **direct/close contact** (see definition under point 3) with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 and/or has been in close proximity/contact with someone who has come from a country or province where there are **high incidences** of COVID-19 and has not been tested for COVID-19 and declared negative.
- 8.3 A staff member is displaying flu-like symptoms such as sore throat, a dry cough, a fever and difficulty breathing.

Should **one or more** of these criteria above exist **and/or** there is **reasonable evidence** that one or more of the criteria exist the staff member should not come to work until such time as s/he has been in **quarantine** for 2 weeks and does not display any of the symptoms associated with COVID-19.

In instances where the staff member has been in **direct/close contact with someone who has been tested positive for COVID-19** they should immediately **self-quarantine** and contact their doctor or the HCC for further advice with regards to testing. **In all instances staff should notify the Acting HR Director (susan.robertson@ru.ac.za or 0825760172) and students should notify the Director: Student Affairs (n.mrwetyana@ru.ac.za or 0824850271).** The highest standards of confidentiality in the handling of such information will be observed.

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