

Update: COVID-19

A multilateral meeting was recently held where the PSA voiced ongoing concerns of members who are at the forefront of the battle against COVID-19. The major issues raised relate to the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and transport for employees, the protocol when handling suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients and disciplinary action against members during this trying time. The employer was reminded that it has an obligation to provide safety to employees in terms of section 8(1) of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act, 85 of 1993* which reads as follows: “Every employer shall provide and maintain, as far as is reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risk to the health of his employees”. In addition, the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations for Hazardous Biological Agents* also outline the necessary equipment and processes that must be in place when faced with a threat to employees’ health and safety.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

The Premier of the Western Cape takes cue from the Department of Health regarding PPE issues. These issues at institutional level and the Emergency Medical Services remain a challenge. Labour cautioned the employer that the PPE policy must be amended to address this evolving threat to employees. The employer informed the PSA that, for now, PPE protocol remains - the provision of masks to frontline staff (clinical and non-clinical) and EMS staff tending to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases remains. The PSA requested a breakdown of the distribution of PPE to ascertain where the actual PPE is. EMS will also be workshopping these issues further at its upcoming PIMLC.

Transport

Public transport remains a challenge. The employer informed the PSA that dedicated transport services have been put in place along various routes. The PSA urges members who are using their own or public transport to have their work permits at hand to observe lockdown protocol.

Danger Allowance

A current Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) Directive 2018 provides a breakdown of occupations and categories of staff that are entitled to a Danger Allowance. This, unfortunately, does not include non-clinical staff such as frontline administration or porters. The PSA has escalated the matter for urgent consideration at national level.

Social media and distribution of false information

Members are cautioned to refrain from social media making comments that bring the employer into disrepute. Follow the correct internal communication channels and do not disclose confidential patient/institutional information.

Disciplinary action

The PSA encourages members to refrain from acts of misconduct or negligence during these trying times. The crisis does not prevent the employer from instituting disciplinary action against staff. The PSA has, however, requested in order to help curb the pandemic, that current disciplinary action be put on hold (*depending on the severity of allegations*).

Dedicated People Management COVID-19 Helpdesk – Circular H22/2020

The employer has established a dedicated helpdesk to assist members with People Management related COVID-19 queries. The helpdesk will be operational as from 8 April 2020 on weekdays from 08:00 to 15:00 on **Telephone: (021) 815 8766/8767**; or **Email: DOH-COVID19.PMHelpdesk@westerncape.gov.za**

The PSA remains vigilant to the call for protection of members' rights. Members are urged to use their Institutional IMLC's to address operational issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The PSA also calls on shop stewards to remain alert and escalate issues to the PSA Provincial Office if needed.

GENERAL MANAGER