

18 March 2020

PROTOCOLS FOR STAFFING RELATED MATTERS AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Introduction and guiding principles

1. The number of people in South Africa who have tested positive for the Coronavirus [Covid-19], are increasing. On Sunday, 15 March 2020, President Ramaphosa announced wide-ranging measures to curtail the spread of the virus. While our national department of health and others have advised the public on certain precautionary measures that may be taken, there are no specific directives for employers managing the health and safety of their employees, customers, business partners and suppliers who may be required to work in close proximity.
2. At this point in time, while Stellenbosch University (SU) has taken the decision to suspend all classes, it has not closed down its operations entirely. While the University remains open, it will as far as possible endeavour to reduce the number of staff required and will look at ways to carry out ongoing activities differently. The University accepts that it needs to implement its activities in a manner that allows it to continue its operations whilst simultaneously taking all reasonable measures possible to ensure the health and safety of staff and students.
3. Where operationally possible, employees should be working remotely. In addition, employees who have any pre-existing condition which makes them more vulnerable to infection, must be encouraged to work from home where operational requirements permit. Where you are granted permission to work from home, please capture leave of absence on the HR leave system for the University to ensure that there is a proper record of your leave.
4. There are a number of queries, concerns and questions which have been raised by staff. While we hope that these protocols address those issues, we accept that it may not answer all the concerns. The underlying principles are maintaining the operational integrity of the University as well as the health and safety of staff and remaining flexible as the situation changes. To the extent, therefore, that these protocols do not address specific situations and scenarios, the appropriate mechanism would be for any staff member to raise this via their line manager who in turn will pass it on to Human Resources (HR).
5. Please note that the measures set out in this document are subject to change as the situation unfolds.
6. We set out below in tabular form several scenarios and the protocol. We attempt as far as possible to do this in an easy-to-read manner. Again, where anything is unclear, please raise your queries via your line manager or HR practitioner for your environment. You may also send your queries to the Client Services Centre at sun-e-hr@sun.ac.za. HR will send out supplementary notifications from time to time that will clarify the implementation of these protocols.

	QUESTIONS / SCENARIO	PROTOCOL
A	Status of the University	
1.	What is the status of the University at the moment? Is it closed?	As of 17 March 2020, the University remains open. Whilst the University has decided to suspend contact classes, both the academic and all its other activities, remain ongoing

2.	What does this mean for employees?	It means that employees have to report for work. Employees will have to carry out their functions albeit that arrangements can be made as to how these functions are performed. Further details are provided below.
3.	Can I decide not to report for duty because I fear that the risk of infection is higher in my workplace?	No, employees cannot simply stay away from work. They will have to request some form of leave. For any other leave than annual leave, they will have to provide proof, as normal, of any other event which they rely on for the taking of the leave, for instance, sick leave and compassionate leave.
B Sick leave		
4.	When will I be entitled to sick leave?	An employee can take sick leave if he or she has contracted the virus. A doctor's certificate will be required that indicates the period of absence. Very importantly, in order for the employee to return to work, the medical practitioner will have to certify that the employee contracted the virus but is now fit to return to work after a further screening by the medical practitioner.
5.	What happens if I have no sick leave days left or not enough sick leave days?	Provided that you produce proof that you have contracted the virus, the University will allow you to take sick leave. This will be subtracted from your next sick leave cycle.
6.	Can I take sick leave to care for a spouse or a child or relative who have contracted the virus?	No, you are not allowed to take sick leave as you are not sick. In these instances, you will have to indicate that you are taking compassionate leave. You are allowed to take a maximum of 23 days over three years with a maximum of 17 days in any year. Please note: All employees qualify for 17 days as of 18 March 2020, irrespective of the number of days used prior to this date.
7.	What happens if I am required to self-isolate due to a concern that I may have contracted or may have been exposed to a third party who has contracted the virus?	In this instance, you will have to indicate whether you are able to work from home. If you are able to do so, you will have to request a leave of absence on the HR system. In the event that you are unable to work from home due to the nature of your work or circumstances at home, you will have to request a leave of absence, indicating that it is for the purpose of self-isolation. Please note that an employee who is isolated, is required to have a medical practitioner indicate that they may return to work after the period of isolation.
C Flexible working arrangements		

8.	Does the University have special flexible working arrangements as a result of this outbreak?	Yes. There are flexible working arrangements. Firstly, in the event that you have to self-isolate or care for a child, spouse, partner or relative who has been infected or themselves having to isolate, it will be assessed whether you can work from home. If this is indeed the case, you will have to capture leave of absence on the HR system. Your line manager must approve this leave.
9.	Can I opt to work from home as a result of my concern of being in contact with too many people at work?	Where it is operationally possible to work from home employees will be allowed to do this with the necessary permission and capture of leave of absence. A proper assessment will be made of your work activities and the risk of your exposure to other persons. Please bear in mind that you are required to report for work and that simply staying away and electing to work from home on your own, is not an option. This must be approved by your line manager.
10.	What if I have to work from home but I am not able to do so, for instance, I do not have internet or sufficient data?	This of course is part of the assessment as to whether indeed you can work from home. Where it is reasonable to do so, SU will assist in setting you up so that you can work from home. However, where this is not possible due to the fact that it is too expensive or there are other technical or operational difficulties, you will not be deemed to be able to work from home. If you then still are required to stay at home, this will come from either your annual leave or compassionate leave, where applicable.
D	Testing	
11.	What is the current NICD testing protocol for COVID-19?	<p>Testing is required in the following circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You must have at least one of the following symptoms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Fever or history of fever ($\geq 38^{\circ}$) ➤ Cough ➤ Sore throat ➤ Shortness of breath <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the 14 days prior to onset of symptoms met at least one of the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In close contact with a confirmed or probable cases of the SARS Co-V-2 infection; OR ➤ Had a history of travel to areas with local transmission

		<p>of SARS Co-V-2 (check NICD for current updates);</p> <p>OR</p> <p>➤ Worked in or attended a health care facility where patients with SARS Co-V-2 were treated.</p>
12.	Who will pay for the costs of testing?	Discovery Medical Aid as well as MediHelp have indicated that they will cover the costs of testing as additional benefits or from your savings account.
E	Exposure	
13.	What happens if I find out that a colleague or a student that I was in contact with has contracted the virus or is in isolation?	In this instance, you are required to disclose this to your line manager as soon as possible. This information will be passed on to HR. You will be requested to immediately leave the workplace and to self-isolate for the required number of days. In this case, your days of absence will be taken as leave of absence as a result of self-isolation
F	Travel	
14.	Will I be allowed to travel in respect of SU related activities?	No. the University has placed a temporary ban on all SU- related travel.
15.	What if I am planning to travel for private reasons?	In this instance, should you be isolated either at your destination or upon return and these days overrun the period of annual leave which you have taken, you will have to take further annual leave. This is because you have taken it upon yourself to travel at a time where there is a high risk of infection, both possibly in your chosen destination or via public places such as airports.
G Immediate health and safety measures		
16.	What is SU doing at this point in time?	SU is taking the measures as indicated in this document. In addition, it will introduce a number of safety measures such as the roll out of disinfectants and sanitisers, educating persons about personal hygiene and reducing the number of contact engagements between staff and students.

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