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சுவசிரிபாய
SUWASIRIPAYA

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எனது இல) EPID/ 400/2019 NCoV
My No.)

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உமது இல)
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திகதி) 04. 05. 2020
Date)

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சுகாதார மற்றும் சுதேச வைத்திய சேவைகள் அமைச்சு
Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medical Services

Heads of all Institutions, Projects and other establishments in government and private sectors,

GUIDANCE ON CARRYING OUT RT-PCR TEST FOR COVID-19 IN WORK SETTINGS

Growing demand for RT-PCR test for COVID-19 from both government and private sector for their workforce in offices, factories or other worksites is observed in the recent past. One of the main reasons for such requests is to ensure that their staff is not infected with COVID-19 when returning to work after long period of closure of these workplaces. If a member of the staff or a person visited the workplace found to be COVID-19 infected or a close contact of COVID-19 patient also create large pressure for testing the entire workforce in such places. Although some of the requests are justifiable to stop transmission of COVID-19, most of the requests has no rationale but easing out unfounded fear of being infected. Therefore, this guidance is prepared enabling administrators and the working staff of these worksites to better be informed on the usefulness of carrying out RT-PCR testing.

You are expected to carefully follow the attached guidance in case of risk exposure at your workplace. Risk assessment is usually carried out by the Consultant Community Physician, Regional Epidemiologist or the Medical Officer of Health of the area. You are kindly requested to extend your maximum support to conduct the risk assessment by these officers. Any other request to carry out RT-PCR should be forwarded to me for consideration.

Dr. Anil Jasinghe
Director General of Health Services

Dr. Anil Jasinghe
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cc: Hon. Minister of Health and Indigenous Medical Services
Secretary, Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medical Services
Additional Secretary (Public Health Service/ Medical Services)
All Deputy Director Generals
Chief Epidemiologist

GUIDANCE ON CARRYING OUT RT-PCR FOR COVID-19 AT WORK SETTINGS

What is RT-PCR test for COVID-19 infection?

RT-PCR test for COVID-19 is carried out with samples such as swabs obtained from oropharynx and nasopharynx or sputum. This test detects genetic materials of the virus (RNA). Positive test confirms that the person is infected with COVID-19 virus. According to the current treatment guidelines in Sri Lanka all such persons are admitted to one of the COVID-19 treatment hospitals for further management.

However, a negative RT-PCR test does not totally exclude current infection. The reason is that once the virus is entered in to the body (infection) it takes two to fourteen days to appear symptoms (incubation period). Some infected people will never develop signs or symptoms. In both of these categories, during the early phase of infection, virus may not be detected in samples collected. The best assurance for a person that he has no COVID-19 infection after a risk exposure is him to quarantine for two weeks and then testing negative for COVID-19 virus. Quarantining a person for two weeks ensures that if he is infected there is no chance of transmitting the disease to somebody else. Without quarantining, carrying out RT-PCR test has no added benefit and may not exclude infection.

For the staff returning to work after holidays

The current disease pattern strongly suggest that there is no community transmission of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka. Therefore, quarantining people travelling from one district to another is not generally indicated. However, if any member of the staff is from a recently locked down area where COVID-19 cases are reported during last fourteen days, it is advisable for them not to report for work until these areas are declared as having no risk of disease transmission. If such person's attendance is essential, he may need quarantining for 14 days before commencement of work. Doing an early RT-PCR test is not an alternative for quarantining.

Exposure to COVID-19 patient

Either a member of the staff or person who has visited workplace later found to be infected with COVID-19, the course of action is same.

In such an instance promptly inform the health authorities of the area. The Consultant Community Physician, Regional Epidemiologist, Medical Officer of the Health or any other technically competent responsible person will assess the situation and will provide further instructions.

Based on the local conditions exact measures that has to be taken may vary. But will assess the level of exposure depending on the duration of interaction between the COVID-19 patient and other persons exposed to him, the distance between each other, whether there was any physical contact, whether the patient and other person was wearing masks, and other environmental conditions (such as whether the encounter occurred in an open area or closed room etc.) will be taken into consideration to assess the level of risk for each individual.

People who are at moderate or high risk of exposure as evaluated by the health authorities need to undergo quarantine for fourteen days. RT-PCR testing for COVID-19 will be decided by health authorities during quarantining period. It should be noted that those who are not falling into these categories need not to undergo quarantine even if they happen to be in the same premises on a particular day.

Exposure to a contact of a COVID-19 patient

There may be instances where a member of the staff or a visitor to the worksite later identified as a contact of a COVID-19 patient. These incidents also should be promptly informed to the health authorities for risk assessment if needed.

In such instances the first contact person should immediately undergo quarantining for 14 days from the last date of exposure to the COVID-19 patient.

Details of all people who had close contacts with this first contact person should be recorded for future reference. They can be considered as second level contacts of a COVID-19 patient. If the first contact person subsequently become positive for COVID-19, second level contacts may need quarantining. Until it is decided by the health authorities, second level contacts need not undergo quarantining.

RT-PCR is not indicated for second level contacts or any other person for the reason that they were in the same premises.