

**Introduction**

What should you consider if a majority of your employees has to stay at home due to the risk of infection or being contaminated? How do you keep the consequences for your organisation and employees to an absolute minimum? How do you ensure that the continuity of your organisation is not threatened? Now that the entire world is under the disconcerting spell of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and the number of cases in the Netherlands is rising rapidly, these questions are more urgent than ever.

This guide contains up-to-date information, tips and advice on how to keep your organisation operating during this pandemic, giving the virus as little chance as possible.

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## 1. Prevention

### How do you prevent the virus from spreading throughout your organisation?

The coronavirus is transmitted through person-to-person contact via the mouth, nose and eyes. The virus spreads through tiny airborne droplets if a person's mouth is not properly covered while he or she is coughing or sneezing. It is also spread via hands: for instance, by shaking hands with someone who has the virus coughing into their hands. If you then touch your face with your hand(s), you could become infected. Although, as an employer, you cannot entirely exclude coronavirus from your organisation, you can take measures to prevent it from spreading.

#### And these measures start with a safe working environment:

- Make sure your employees observe the hygiene measures prescribed by the [RIVM](#) (Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment), and encourage them to call each other to account about them:
  - Wash hands regularly with soap and under running water or, if soap and water are not available, use disinfectant hand gel;
  - Sneeze into the inside of your elbow;
  - Use paper tissues one time only and always dispose of them in a closed bin;
  - Do not shake hands;
  - Stay at home if you develop any symptoms of a cold;

To better inform your employees, you may use [our posters](#) to communicate these measures.

- Provide sufficient hand soap, disinfectant hand soap and paper tissues at the workplace, placing all of these where they are clearly visible;
- Clean regularly (with regular cleaning agents), particularly surfaces that are frequently touched, such as keyboards, mice, door handles, stair railings/banisters and light switches;
- Introduce no-touch policies for greeting and congratulating one another. Make this clear not only to your employees, but also to customers and visitors.
- Only use the lift with no more than two people at the same time and have everyone use the stairs as much as possible;
- Regularly consult the [RIVM website](#) for further information and updates and your own branch website for any branch-specific instructions;



- Be alert for the symptoms that lead to COVID-19: Fever (higher than 38 °C) along with respiratory complaints like coughing, shortness of breath and pneumonia;
- Change meetings with business contacts to conference calls or video conferencing;
- Postpone business trips to heavily infected areas. Follow the travel advice from the [Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) and make sure the organisation knows when employees have been in contaminated areas.
- Consult your occupational physician. She can advise you on (company-specific) measures to prevent contamination and the appropriate measures to take if one of your employees turns out to be infected.

### **Work from home — whenever and wherever possible or necessary**

- People throughout the Netherlands have been asked to work from home as much as possible or to spread out the working hours. As much as possible, prepare your employees to respond to this appeal. Follow the announcements being made by the central government and the regional safety regions.
- Also, be flexible when employees stay at home to take care of an infected child or other family member. Inform them about any special forms of leave that may apply (i.e. care leave, emergency leave).



## 2. Measures in case of confirmed or suspected contamination

### Preventing the further spread of the virus — What should be done?

The coronavirus appears to be spreading 'under the radar' via people who are infected but do not (yet) show clearly identifiable symptoms. The virus is estimated to have an incubation period of two to twelve days and, during the period between infection and disease, you can transmit the virus unconsciously. What if, despite all precautions, an employee does catch the virus?

### Appropriate actions and reactions to a potential contamination

- Just the suspicion of the virus is basis enough for someone to stay home. Make sure that all of your employees are acutely aware of the importance of recognising the symptoms in themselves. At the slightest hint of danger, have your employees stay inside, follow the advice of the RIVM and, if necessary, call their GP.
- If an employee is experiencing symptoms (a nose cold, cough, sore throat or fever) during working hours, let this employee go home and make sure that he or she avoids social contact. If the symptoms continue to worsen, have the employee contact his or her GP.
- Consider informing the occupational physician of this situation, also to discuss any further steps to be taken.
- If an employee is found to be infected with the coronavirus, immediately inform (within the confines of the GDPR) colleagues that they may have been exposed to the virus, letting them know what they can do.
- Pay attention to the possible consequences for vulnerable employees, such as older employees and employees who have chronic medical conditions.



### 3. Impact of a pandemic

The World Health Organisation officially declared the outbreak of the coronavirus to be a pandemic on 11 March 2020. While public life is slowly resuming in China, Italy is now under lockdown and ski resorts are set to close in Austria. Air travel has sharply declined, the markets are plummeting, events are being cancelled and the US has closed its borders to air traffic from Europe. It is indisputable that an outbreak like this makes a deep impact. An outbreak affects not only the public's health, but it also has an economic impact.

#### **Side effects business may have to contend with include:**

- The potentially disrupted supply of materials necessary for ongoing activities.
- The availability of services from suppliers may be limited which could affect the maintenance of important equipment, for example.
- The demand for services and products you provide may come under pressure, such as travel or event organisation, or it may increase sharply if, for example, you provide work-from-home facilities or produce hand gel.

### 4. Business Continuity Plan (BCP)

#### **Be prepared for everything**

Corona is not the first virus to cause major damage on multiple fronts, nor likely to be the last. Organisations, however, are far from always being sufficiently prepared for the outbreak of a pandemic. Having a solid Business Continuity Plan with accompanying scenarios will help to avoid unpleasant surprises due to a pandemic. You can consult a BCP to determine:

How to continue operating if a significant number of employees are unexpectedly no longer available; What is a pandemic's expected impact on logistics processes and the chain in which they operate; Which measures can be taken in order to limit the damages.



### A step-by-step plan for a Business Continuity Plan

1. Crisis team - Assemble a crisis management team to prepare an action plan for the pandemic emergency, including the actions to be taken. Include your existing crisis team in this pandemic crisis team. Engage the occupational physician for medical advice. Make sure that all the stakeholders and your employees are aware of the relevant names, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.
2. Communication - Identify the tasks and roles of internal and external communications before, during and after a pandemic and determine the appropriate channels for each step.
3. Key activities - Inventory the critical processes in your organisation: Which processes absolutely cannot fail? Which processes cannot fail for longer than two weeks or three months? Examine supporting processes like ICT, facility services and HR; and look at dependencies, such as temporary employment agencies and the supply of goods. Create an overview of the measures necessary to take to safeguard the continuity of critical processes. From emergency procedures to fall-back options.
4. Indispensable employees - Compile a list of the employees whose presence is vital to ensuring the continuity of your business. Safeguard who can replace them, if necessary.
5. Suppliers and distributors - Determine which suppliers and distributors are required to keep your business running and make clear agreements with them about the minimum amount of services and/or products to be provided during the outbreak. Encourage them to draught and maintain and up-to-date Business Continuity Plan, just like your organisation has.
6. Special attention for high-risk groups - The coronavirus seems to be particularly devastating for the elderly and people with underlying health issues. Ensure that you have a good idea about who is most at risk in your organisation and take extra measures to protect them. Include the occupational physician in this process: he or she is familiar with the employee medical records. In cooperation with an occupational hygienist, good advice can be provided about protecting your at-risk employees.



7. Employees who become infected - Establish clear agreements about how you will act should an employee become infected and, in particular, coordinate with the occupational physician on this. How do you arrange workplace absenteeism support and monitoring? How do you deal with colleagues who are, or were, in close contact with the infected employee? Is a pandemic absenteeism protocol called for and what would it entail?
8. Resources - Consider which resources to use to protect your employees, such as tissues, disinfectants and soap; be sure to calculate how much you need. In the plan, do not forget to account for how you will store and distribute these resources.
9. Checklists - Create a checklist of the actions required at each phase of the pandemic.
10. Resumption of business activities - Establish criteria for returning to standard business operations and describe the processes for your organisation's resumption of business as usual. Including the after-care.
11. Do you still have time? - Next, test your plan in advance using a periodic exercise to verify whether what you have devised on paper actually works in practice. Given the rapidly proliferating coronavirus, that test could be the immediate actual application. Even in this instance, you can still adjust, sharpen and improve in the meantime, so that your organisation gets through this outbreak as best it can. And so that you will be well prepared in the future.



## 5. Support

### **First aid measures for your Business Continuity Plan**

No two businesses are alike. Therefore, a Business Continuity Plan must be customised. Arbo Unie is happy to support you in: identifying the risks to your organisation's in case of a pandemic, drawing up the Business Continuity Plan and introducing measures and procedures to protect your employees and organisation. For questions or additional information, please contact: [informatie@arbounie.nl](mailto:informatie@arbounie.nl).

### **More information**

For general questions about the coronavirus, you may contact [the RIVM](#).

The RIVM is available by telephone via the special number: 0800-1351.

### **Disclaimer**

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