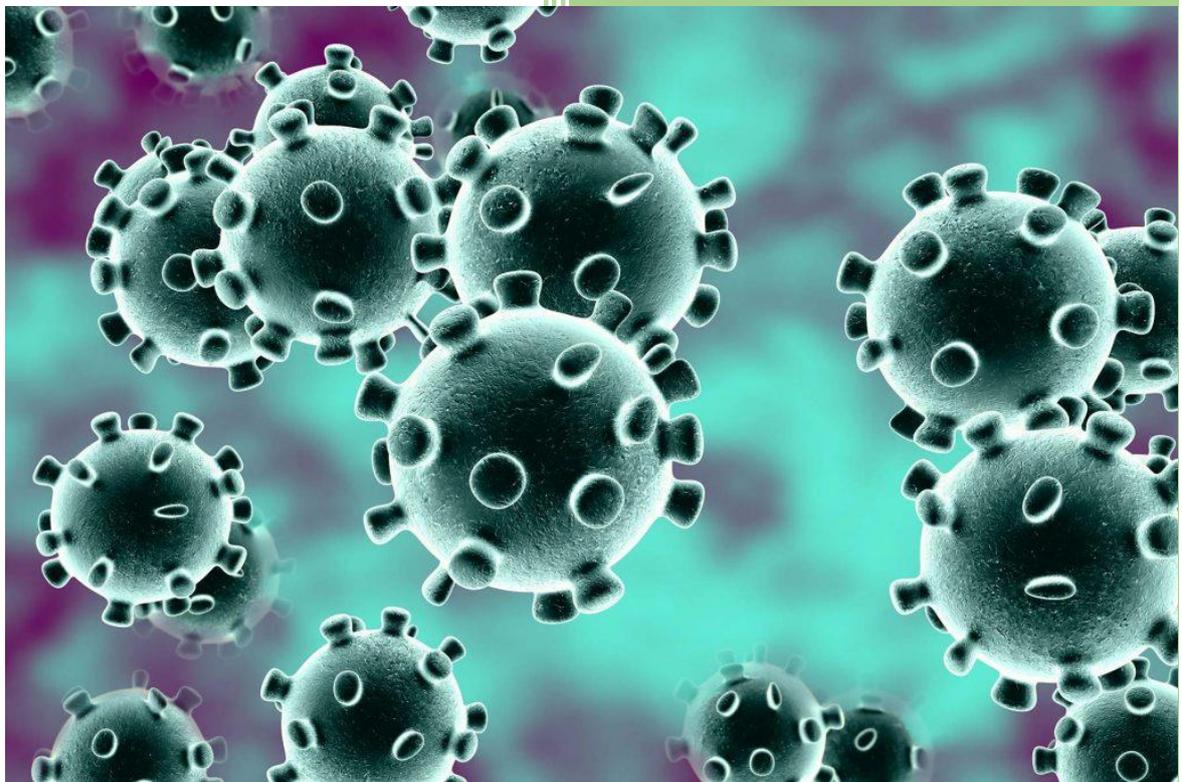




2020

COVID-19 OHS STATMENT



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For IOPSA & Members
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COVID-19

What are Coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people.

What is COVID-19?

A novel coronavirus is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. The 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is a coronavirus identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, China.

How can you get COVID-19?

Since this novel coronavirus was only recently identified, there is currently limited information regarding the modes of transmission, clinical features and severity of disease. Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through:

- The air by coughing and sneezing
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands
- Faecal contamination.

What are the signs and symptoms?

There is limited information regarding clinical features, and severity of disease at this stage. For confirmed COVID-19 infections, reported illnesses have ranged from infected people with little to no symptoms to people being severely ill and dying.

Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath.

Symptoms may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 days after exposure.



COVID-19

What is the treatment for COVID-19?

Treatment is supportive as no specific therapy has been shown to be effective. People who think they may have been exposed to COVID-19 should contact their healthcare providers immediately.

How can you reduce the risk of exposure?

There are certain steps you can take to reduce your exposure to COVID-19:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Cover your mouth and nose with your flexed elbow or a tissue. Throw the tissue away immediately and wash hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are frequently touched.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has a fever and cough.
- Seek medical care early and share your previous travel history with your healthcare provider, especially if you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing.
- When visiting animal markets in areas currently experiencing cases of novel coronavirus, avoid direct unprotected contact with live animals and surfaces in contact with animals.
- Avoid the consumption of raw or undercooked animal products. Handle raw meat, milk or animal organs with care to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods.
- Avoid travel if you have a fever and cough. If you become sick while using public transport, inform the personnel and seek medical care early.



COVID-19 and Plumbers

Since there is little known about the current COVID-19 outbreak, the need for vigilant exposure awareness is crucial, especially to those working in areas that pose an immediate threat to this exposure.

So what can you do as a plumber who will work in areas that may contain or have the potential to contain the COVID-19 virus?

Start by ensuring you have the necessary protections against any type of virus or pathogen you may encounter, such as when working in a sewer or waste pipelines. The need to know the environment and area you are working in then, is of vital importance.

SAFETY FOR PLUMBERS – WASTE PIPES / SEWERS

These areas can be particularly dangerous to your health due to the exposure or potential exposure to hazardous chemical substances or hazardous biological agents and COVID-19

If you are unsure about the atmosphere or area you are going to work in, ensure the facts are checked and proper monitoring has been done prior to accessing the area.

You must follow all precautions before entering a space that has the potential to expose you to hazardous elements such as COVID-19.

If you are working with a waste pipe and will use certain chemicals or substances then follow these tips:

- Eliminate - remove the risk altogether if this is at all possible.
- Substitute - find a safer substitute e.g. such as a different working method.
- Safeguard - put technical solutions in place that protect the worker e.g. mechanical ventilation, machinery guards, remote controls etc.
- Warn and Educate - implement worker training and install suitable alarm and warning systems.

*Always ensure fresh air is pumped into the area.

It is important to care for your hygiene while working in these areas and where there is a risk to exposure to COVID-19. Thus you must set aside time for the proper care of yourself and the tools, equipment and PPE you are using.

Here are some guidelines to follow when working in an area where COVID-19 is a possible exposure:

- Wash your hands regularly and follow the guidance and technique set out for correct hand cleaning methods. Perhaps carry around some hand sanitiser in your toolbox if you cannot get to an area where hand soap is available.
- Keep tools and equipment clean, especially after using them. Try not to share tools or equipment where possible to eliminate the possibility of cross contamination.
- When cleaning or washing your PPE, be sure to keep it away from other clothing or personal household items and store them in a clean area away from the elements such as rain, dirt or sun.
- If you feel sick or know of someone in your team is feeling sick, report it as soon as possible and get the needed medical attention required.



Personal Protective Equipment

PPE – Personal Protective Equipment is important for any task that is performed where there is a potential exposure to the COVID-19 virus.

When we look at the COVID-19 virus, we should not think that just because we know little about the virus, its symptoms or even how to prevent it, that we cannot protect ourselves and those who may be affected by our tasks.

Treat any and all potential areas with the risk of exposure to COVID-19 as a Hazardous Environment and plan accordingly. Ensure you have the correct PPE to prevent the exposure levels.

The incorrect specification of protective gear risks putting personnel in danger and at the very least will negatively affect their productivity. To complicate matters, some of the risks that are presented by certain COVID-19 are not necessarily immediately apparent. The consequences of exposure to these can manifest themselves several years down the line, long after the point of encounter.

So great care must be exercised in the specification of suitable workwear against known or anticipated risks. The use of PPE (unless mandatory) must be dictated by the **risk assessment** for the activity or environment concerned and this must include giving due consideration to the crucial issue of user comfort. PPE that is difficult to put on or take off, that is uncomfortable to wear, that prevents or limits movement or unduly restricts work activities will always meet user resistance. Selecting user-acceptable PPE can be every bit as important as, and even more difficult than, selecting the appropriate technical specification.

While PPE should only be relied upon as a last line of defence, its use is essential when working where exposure to COVID-19.

It must always be remembered that PPE only protects the individual wearer, it does not tackle the cause of the risk exposure. It is important that all possibilities of removing the hazard altogether are exhausted before considering ways of limiting operator exposure.

What type of PPE should I get?

Safety Goggles – Ones that cover the eyes and to protect eyes from splashes of human waste or sewage.. 3m GoggleGear 500 is the type mostly recommended as they have a Scotchguard Anti-Fog application for best control. Look for something similar to this.

Safety Shoes – When selecting safety shoes or boots, it is best done by understanding what you will be standing or walking through. In a sewer you will preferably be looking for Rubber boots to prevent exposure to human waste or sewage. – Look out for something like the Stimela XP from Pienaar Bro's.

Protective face mask or splash-proof face shield - N95 respirators and surgical masks (face masks) are examples of personal protective equipment that are used to protect the wearer from airborne particles and from liquid contaminating the face.

Liquid-repellent coveralls - to keep human waste or sewage off clothing. Look for a Tyvek disposable or reusable suite depending on the amount of exposure times.

Waterproof gloves – Latex or Nitrile gloves. These thin, moisture resistant gloves protect against exposure to infectious, and other biologically hazardous materials.



End Note

Neither IOPSA nor OHSS Consulting are experts on the COVID-19 virus and are not Expert Health practitioners.

The information contained in this statement has been researched by OHSS Consulting using industry standards, as well as current know information regarding the COVID-19 virus and may change at any time.

Please take care to look after the Health and Safety of yourself, your team and those who may be affected by your scope of work.

Please find some additional information by following these links:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

<https://www.wef.org/resources/onlineeducation/webcasts/ArchivedWebcasts/CoronavirusWebcastArchive/>

Thank you for taking the time to read this statement.

Regards

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