



**GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS ON FLEXIBLE WORK
ARRANGEMENTS AND OTHER GOOD WORKPLACE
PRACTICES IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19**

Interim guidance to support employers – public and private¹

What you need to know about flexible work arrangements and how you can strengthen and accelerate best practices.

A family friendly workplace or employer is one whose policies and practices make it possible for employees and/or workers to more easily achieving work-life balance, and to fulfil both their work and family obligations. These policies may include, but are not limited to, childcare, breastfeeding rooms, flexible work arrangements, paid leave, safe transport, parenting education and so on.

In Mongolia and various other countries, authorities have enforced kindergarten- and school closure policies as part of the preparedness and response to contain the COVID-19 epidemic. In addition to the impacts on children's education, there are concerns about children's protection and well-being as children are left alone or without adequate care as many parents still need to go to work. COVID-19 may also have negative effects on mental health and wellbeing of patients (if any), caregivers, children and adolescents and the public², such as experiencing fear of the consequences of infection with a new virus, and triggering stigma. Those placed in quarantine (or self-isolated) may experience boredom, loneliness, and anger.

By promoting flexible working arrangements such as adjusted working hours, working from home and/or support childcare, your employees will be in better position to address any childcare challenges and not be distracted by concerns about their children's safety and wellbeing at home.

Key steps to take

- I. Understand the situation – what are the needs of all of your workers/employees.
Carry out a rapid needs-assessment in close and direct consultation with your employees. The goals of the assessment include:
 - a. reveal if the current workplace and policies are supportive enough to working families during COVID-19;
 - b. identify the most pressing needs of parent workers
- II. Identify which improvements can be made such as introducing flexible work arrangements and/or support to childcare, promotion of messages to workers who are parents (activities, psycho-social well-being), promotion of hygiene messages.
- III. Apply the best practices when introducing new policies (see list), make sure all of your employees know about them, understand them and feel comfortable using them (no reprimanding or retribution if employees apply the new policies)

¹ This is an interim guidance note, developed on request in a fast evolving situation. It should not be seen as promoting particular work arrangements generally, but provides guidance to support partners (employers) in relation to the unusual work situation created by the COVID-19 outbreak. As such information may date quickly and you are advised to check the sources and online information (via links) regularly.

² YT Xiang et al. Timely mental health care for the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak is urgently needed. *Lancet Psychiatry*; published online 4 February. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30046-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30046-8).

Flexible work arrangements

Flexible work arrangements are alternate arrangements or schedules from the traditional work setting. In short, workplace flexibility arrangements are expected to create a win-win working relationship, which simultaneously recognises and realises the needs of both employers and employees. Participation in such arrangements is purely voluntary for all parties. Not all jobs or circumstances allow for Flexible Working Arrangements.

Flexible Working Arrangements should be viewed as a balanced agreement between managers and staff in which the needs of both sides must be assessed. This is not a benefit, but more of a way to increase productivity and efficiency in offices.

Examples of flexible work arrangements

Flexible Work Arrangement for Employees		
Flex Time	Flex Time Off	Flex Location/Roles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Banking of working hours ✓ Compressed work week ✓ Flexible working hours ✓ Job sharing ✓ Switch shifts ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Extra or prolonged holiday or personal leave ✓ Long-term leave with position being kept ✓ Reduced hours (part-time) with the same hourly rate ✓ Paid lactation breaks ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Telework or telecommuting ✓ Temporary remote work for caring purposes ✓ Job sharing ✓ Change of responsibilities ...

Best practices:

Successful flexible work arrangement policies should take the following elements into account:

- ✓ **Needs-based:** Workers' needs can vary greatly under different circumstances and there are many types of flexible work arrangements available. Not all types are manageable or worthwhile for all sizes and types of organisations, so every employer considering flexible work arrangement should undertake an organisational assessment to determine whether and what kind of flexible scheduling will meet their needs the best.
- ✓ **Non-interference and non-discrimination:** Make sure that all your workers and employees can benefit from flexible working time, and that no one is discriminated against or penalised for using flexible working arrangements.

- ✓ **Well-defined responsibilities:** No matter which programme or how many options are available, the duties, expectations, and deadlines should be clearly outlined by the supervisor and agreed upon by both the employer/supervisor and the employee/worker.
- ✓ **Wage and benefits compliance:** Workers' participation in flexible work arrangement should not have negative impacts on their employment and career. For instance, workers taking flexible working hours or working from home should receive the same amount of payment in a timely manner; overtime carried home should be calculated and compensated; annual bonus distribution should not be negatively affected in an excessive way, etc.
- ✓ **Make it business friendly:** Any flexible worktimes need to fit your business schedule. For a factory with a production line or frontline shop workers, flexible time is trickier than for office workers. Practically this means, if you are bound to production lines and shop times you can support a balanced time management to e.g. allow certain leaves with sufficient notice, inform employees well in advance about overtime hours, have a range of multiskilled workers who can replace colleagues at different positions.
- ✓ **Make sure to properly document it:** it is important that the agreement to apply flexible work arrangements is documented and (electronically) signed by supervisor and supervisee. This helps avoiding misunderstandings later on. Related to this, relevant co-workers need to be informed as well in order to understand who is in the office, who is not, and how to reach each other.
- ✓ **Manage expectations:** under normal conditions when kindergartens and schools are open, the expectation should be that the employee will be equally productive working from home as from the office. However, when kindergartens and schools are unexpectedly closed as is the case with the COVID situation and young children are home with the employee, the employee will need to pay some attention to the children throughout the day, which may affect the overall productivity.

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Appendix I

Other practical steps to take in the workplace

Practical steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace – inside offices, transport hubs, , plantations, factories, project sites, shops and all retail environments:

<p>1. Provide workers with hand washing stations, soaps and hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rubs for adequate handwashing and hygiene practices in the workplace</p>	<p>1.1 Clean toilets and equipped with clean water and soaps.</p> <p>1.2 Hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rubs are not mandatory but strongly encouraged.</p> <p>1.3 Clean breastfeeding rooms where women can express milk. The rooms should be equipped with disinfecting wipes, trash bin with lid, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, and access to hand washing facilities.</p> <p>1.4 Safety and health standards are applied to ensure breastfeeding children and mothers are not exposed to the virus, as well as to chemicals and toxins.</p> <p>1.5 Clean on-site childcare facilities, which are equipped with clean water, soaps and hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rubs.</p>
<p>2. Provide workers with guidance to encourage hygiene practices in the workplace and post visible messages on COVID-19 prevention measures</p>	<p>2.1 Messaging should follow WHO advice for the public. See also UNICEF Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): What parents should know and How to protect yourself and your children.</p> <p>2.2 Distribution of educational leaflets for workers to support hygiene practices and other protective measures for them and their families.</p> <p>2.3 Display banners on walls with protection advice.</p> <p>2.4 Recruitment of a HR/health specialist to raise awareness of basic measures to protect workers and others from getting sick.</p> <p>2.5 Working mothers should be encouraged and supported to continue breastfeeding. Adequate facilities for breastfeeding or milk expression should include the necessary items for adequate hygiene including disinfecting wipes, trash bin with lid, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, and access to hand washing facilities.</p> <p>2.6 In case meals are offered at the workplace, practice food safety (including advising workers with appropriate precautions for handling raw meat, milk or animal organs, to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods, as per good food safety practices and WHO guidelines).</p>

<p>3. Protect the workplace against discrimination and social stigma</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Develop a corporate policy against workplace discrimination in the workplace. 2.2 Provide trainings to workers to reduce social stigma and prevent discrimination among them. 2.3 Encourage workers to be pro-active in reporting incidents of inappropriate, discriminatory, harassing or abusive behavior to your supervisor, HR department, union, or management. 2.4 Take steps to ensure that the reporting mechanism is confidential, gender-sensitive and safe. Encourage the wide and non-discriminative use of such service and ensure that it is easily accessible by all, including people with disabilities. 2.5 Identify cases of discrimination and promptly act upon them.
<p>4. Provide workers with flexible work arrangements in situations of sickness or sickness in the family</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Provide flexible work arrangements for workers to avoid exposure to risks in affected areas³, such as teleworking, ensuring working conditions are met for workers. 4.2 Provide flexible time for workers in situation of sickness or sickness in their families. 4.3 Support workers spend more time with their children, as they can be more affected by stress than adults. 4.4 Ensure working parents have enough time to spend with their children to cope with stress. In case family separation occurs due to hospitalization, ensure flexible time for workers to keep regular contact.
<p>5. Travel advice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1. Management and workers should consider the various restrictions put in place by air lines and some countries before planning for their trips. Employers may consider canceling or post-poning non-essential travel to affected areas, to avoid being quarantined or denied re-entry into their country of residence. Kindly refer to the WHO website for updated information in this regard: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports as well as IATA's up-to-date list of countries and restriction measures: https://www.iatatravelcentre.com/international-travel-document-news/1580226297.htm 5.2 If travelling, take precautionary hygiene measures inside airplanes as per the WHO advice for public.⁴

³ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

⁴ Cabin crew and airport workers have specific IATA guidance and responsibilities based on country updates. More at: <https://www.iata.org/en/programs/safety/health/diseases/#tab-2>

6. Support workers in case of fever, cough and difficulty breathing in seeking early medical care

- 6.1 Provide workers with guidance on where they can be referred for symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (e.g. address and phone number of local hospitals, health authorities, emergency hotlines), and safe transport support for referral wherever needed.
- 6.2 Asymptomatic workers with travel history to affected areas should follow the same precautions as everyone else (i.e. guidance/support for referral). However, depending on policies of local health authorities, they may be placed in quarantine – and thus require support for continued access to food, water, accommodation, telecommunication services, medical services, psychosocial support, etc. See https://www.who.int/ith/Repatriation_Quarantine_nCoV-key-considerations_HQ-final11Feb.pdf?ua=1.
- 6.3 Ensure that workers presenting with any symptoms are also provided with psychological support.

7. Support workers coping with stress during COVID-19 outbreak

- 7.1 Provide workers with special HR support in case they feel stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis. Such support could include peer-support groups or staff counseling, if available and according to needs.
- 7.2 Access information about the outbreak from reliable sources and do not pass on unverified information from mass media and social media posts. Contribute to reducing stress by re-posting evidence-based information from reliable sources such as Ministry of Health, WHO and UNICEF.
- 7.3 Advise workers to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- 7.4 Gather information that will help workers under stress to accurately understand and cope with risks.
- 7.5 Support workers in helping their children cope with stress during the COVID-19 outbreak (spending more time with them with love and attention, as well as encouraging play and relax).
- 7.6 Ensure working parents have enough time to spend with their children to cope with stress. In case family separation occurs due to hospitalization, ensure flexible time for workers to keep regular contact.

Employers are encouraged to download videos and graphs available at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public> for use in internal communications with workers (intranet, alerts in apps, SMS). Digital communication is highly recommended in EAP workplaces.

What employees should do?

Employees can take some steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19, following [WHO Guidance for the Public](#).

- When to use a mask:
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>
- Advice for parents:
<https://www.unicef.org/stories/novel-coronavirus-outbreak-what-parents-should-know>
- Myth busters:
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>
- Advice for health workers: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-rights-roles-respon-hw-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=bcabd401_0

Flexible work arrangements examples

Flex time

Flex time is an arrangement where employees work a full day but they can vary their working hours. These arrangements are usually established with specific guidelines so that a "core" working day exists. The total hours of work are not usually affected by this arrangement.

For example, a factory may start to apply multiple day shifts in parallel, 7:30AM-3:30PM, 8:30AM-4:30PM, 9:30AM-5:30PM, 1:30PM-9:30PM, and ask workers to register with the most suitable shift. This way, both the factory and workers can achieve their daily quota, avoid peak-hour inconveniences, and worker's personal schedule could also be satisfied.

Reduced hours/Part-time

Employees may choose to work fewer than the standard 37.5 or 40 hours work week. These arrangements may be on a temporary or permanent basis depending on individual circumstances. It may also be considered in some cases for employees with health problems or disabilities. Employee benefits and qualification for government programs (such as employment insurance or pension plans) may be affected, and should be examined thoroughly before commencing. Prolonged unpaid maternity leave, working 80% hours with 80% pay, are examples.

Compressed work week

Compressed work week occurs when an employee works for longer periods of time per day or shift in exchange for a day off. Employees may start earlier or finish later than the normal workday. Compressed work weeks are often initiated by the employee, but sometimes the employer may initiate the option to improve operational efficiency, to maximize production (reduced daily start-up costs) or to establish longer business hours which can enhance customer service. Common arrangements for a 40-hour work week are working 10 hours per day, 4 days a week; working an extra hour a day with 1 day off every 2 weeks; or working an extra half hour a day and having one day every 3 or 4 weeks off.

Banking of Hours/ Annualized hours

This arrangement allows employees to choose, within negotiated boundaries, their days and hours of work to the maximum for a set period of time. This period of time may be weekly, monthly or yearly. Such arrangements are often a combination of flex time and compressed work week and can help reduce the amount of overtime hours required. These arrangements may be suited to fields where there is variation in demands such as peak hours or seasonal peaks.

Job sharing

Job sharing occurs when two or more people share one or more positions or set of duties. It should be clear before starting how these arrangements affect pay, benefits, and holidays. It is very important that those in a job-sharing arrangement work effectively as a team, and communicate well. Job sharing may be an option when few part-time positions are available within the company.

Teleworking within and outside from the duty station

Teleworking is working away from the staff member's office, either from home or from any other location, including from a different country. Teleworking can be conducted on a regular basis, i.e. on (a) designated day(s) of the week/month, or on an ad-hoc basis. The staff member is normally responsible for making the administrative arrangements (office space, internet, phone, computer, etc.) and for maintaining a safe work environment at the remote workplace. However, it's desirable that offices make the necessary equipment available. Offices may prescribe core hours - the time when all staff members must be present, except in the cases for staff on authorized absences or sick leave.

Appendix II

Facts and Myths

“Flexible working arrangements decreases productivity.”

Fact: Research shows that the use of Flexible Working Arrangements (FWAs) leads to a more productive workforce, more efficient business processes, enhanced business continuity and helps attract a diverse pool of top talent. Furthermore, the use of Flexible Working Arrangements significantly increases staff members’ motivation and engagement with the Organization, reducing absenteeism and overhead costs and creating a “greener” and more sustainable environment. Agencies are encouraged to support the use of Flexible Working Arrangements as a means to deliver high quality work while also helping staff members achieve balance in their work and personal lives.

“Use of Flexible Working Arrangements is a form of special treatment.”

Fact: Flexible Working Arrangements is not a form of special treatment but a viable option for all staff that the organization offers and encourages.

“If managers approve telecommuting for their staff, they will not be able to effectively supervise the staff's work.”

Fact: Responsibility and productivity are the result of attitudes, dedication, work ethic and trust between managers and their staff, not the result of physical location or particular working hours or days. Responsible workers will work anywhere, while irresponsible workers will shirk work anywhere. The focus should remain on productivity. Staff members utilizing Flexible Working Arrangements will continue to be guided by the clearly identified goals and actions in their work plans. Managers can assess staff members’ outputs and quality of work against their work plans, whether they are working from the office or elsewhere, using staggered working arrangements, utilizing the 9-days in 10 option or scheduled break for external learning activities.

“Staff members will ask for Flexible Working Arrangements if they need them.”

Fact: Surveys show that one of the factors that deter staff members from applying for Flexible Working Arrangements is a perception that their reputation will be tarnished and they will be seen as “weak” or “problematic” staff members. Those in management positions can actively dispel these fears by publicizing, encouraging and endorsing Flexible Working Arrangements, and by facilitating the use of these options by staff. In the best case scenario, managers can utilize the options themselves. In other words, managers can lead by example.

“Flexible Working Arrangements are for female staff with young children.”

Fact: Flexible Working Arrangements are equally available to and appropriate for all staff. The utilization of work-life policies and practices by senior level staff can positively impact their work-life balance needs as well as set an example and pave the way for junior staff to such policies. While Flexible Working Arrangements can be of particular benefit to those with care responsibilities and staff with study commitments, they can also benefit staff with other considerations related to a healthy work-life fit and well-being. Women may historically have undertaken most family-related care responsibilities, but men are increasingly taking on these tasks. The fact is that today both men and women are looking for tools to better balance their lives, attain improved worklife fits and enhance quality and productivity in multiple activities, especially work.



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