OSH Considerations During COVID

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The status of OSH before COVID

- Estimated 2.3M deaths/yr due to occupational injuries & diseases worldwide (ILO, 2019)

- Severe under & non-reporting by many developing countries

- Estimated cost of 4% of global GDP (ILO, 2019) up to 20% for some developing countries (PAHO, 1994)

- Since 1970, more than 1,500 new pathogens have been discovered, of which 70% are zoonotic, (WHO, 2018) with some having significant implications for OSH

- Globally, women perform 76.2% of total hours of unpaid care work (ILO, 2018)

Impact of COVID

"The COVID-19 economic crisis is hitting young people – especially women – harder and faster than any other group."
Guy Ryder, ILO's Director-General

- Projected job loses worldwide : 25M (ILO, 2020)

- More than one in six young people have lost their jobs; 15-24 age group; already had highest unemployment rate in 2019, 13.9% (ILO, 2020)

(https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_745879/lang--en/index.htm)

- Countries such as Italy and China have reported that health care workers accounted for about 20% of the total number of cases confirmed positive (The Lancet, 2020). (https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30644-9/fulltext)

- Up to mid - April death rates were higher among social care workers than HCW in UK (ONS, 2020) (https://www.bbc.com/news/health-52616080)

Apt Description by the Director General

- "This is no longer only a global health crisis, it is also a major labour market and economic crisis that is having a huge impact on people."

Guy Ryder, ILO's Director-General

COVID and its Associated Occupational Hazards

- **Biological**
- Ergonomic
- Psychosocial
- Chemical
- Physical (e.g. heat stress due to PPE; ventilation control)

Challenges in establishing work-relatedness, except for frontline workers who meet a set criteria (OSHA, 2020)

The Role of OSH Management System

Components

- Policy
- Organising
- Planning and implementation
- Evaluation
- Actions for improvement
    - Preventive & corrective actions
    - Continual improvement

(ILO, 2009)

(https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_107727.pdf)

Clear procedures on emergency preparedness, planning responses for different scenarios, should form part of the risk prevention/control measures of the OSH-MS.

Ensuring OSH at work during COVID-19

- **Highly dependent on the pre-COVID OSH culture within the organisation/workplace**

  - Having a comprehensive emergency preparedness plan (EPP) crafted to address health crises including epidemics/pandemics

  - Having a business continuity plan (WCP); the more comprehensive the better

  - Plans informed by information and/or contribution from credible sources; external bodies, to facilitate a quick and effective response

  - Worker involvement in the planning process, and worker training

Ensuring OSH at work during COVID-19

- Continuous monitoring of OSH conditions and appropriate **risk assessment** required to ensure that control measures related to the risk of contagion are adapted to the changing circumstances during the critical period of contagion and afterwards.

- Process is greatly enhanced by the involvement of OSH professionals, occupational health services (OHS), local health authorities and other partners.

Adequate Assessment for Controlling the Risk of Contagion

Occupational risk is the combination of the probability of an occurrence of a hazardous event and the severity of injury or damage to the health of people caused by this event (ILO, 2001).

- **Probability of being exposed to contagion**

  - characteristic of the infectious disease (i.e., transmission patterns)
  - possibility that workers may encounter infectious persons/contaminated environments/materials **in the course of their work**

    -Consult with workers!

- **Severity of the resulting health outcomes**

  - individual affecting factors
  - measures available to control the impact of the infection

ILO's Prevention and Mitigation of COVID-19 at Work - Action Checklist: A Management Tool

- Risk assessment and control
- Physical distance
- Hygiene
- Cleaning
- Training and Communication
- Personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Response

(https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/safety-and-health-at-work/resources-library/publications/WCMS_741813/lang--en/index.htm)

Special Attention for High Risk Workers for COVID Transmission

- Emergency responders: Healthcare, laboratory, deathcare workers, etc

- Emergency transport workers

- Cleaners and waste management workers in health-care and emergency facilities

- Essential services and workers in high-density workspaces

Applying the Hierarchy of Controls for COVID-19

Most Effective

Elimination
Social Isolation

Substitution
Not applicable

Engineering Controls
Ventilation, physical barriers

Administrative Controls
Work from home, stagger schedules, hand hygiene

PPE
Masks, respirators, gloves

Least Effective

Koehler, K & Rule, A. (2020)
Adapted from NIOSH

Considerations in the Use of Respiratory PPE

- Appropriateness and adequacy for the airborne hazard
        - Surgical/Homemade masks vs N95 Respirator -
- Use of other types of respirators
- Training of respirator wearer and programme administration
- Fit-Testing (Quantitative and qualitative) & frequency
- Strategies for optimizing the supply of N95 respirators

Respiratory protective devices must be worn properly for them to be effective

Teleworking and Some Related Challenges

- Eurofound and the ILO (2017) study found 41% of persons who worked from home considered themselves highly stressed, compared to only 25% of those who worked only on-site. (https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_544138/lang-en/index.htm)

- Working from home due to COVID can result in feeling isolated, working longer hours, increased family demands and blurring the lines between work and family life (ILO, 2020 (https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_742463.pdf)

- Increased potential for ergonomic hazards and accidents with limited/no potential for workplace liability insurance coverage.

COVID_19 Related Stress

(https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_742463.pdf)

Conclusion

- COVID-19 represents a global health crisis as well as a major labour market and economic crisis that has major implications for OSH- the world of work may never be the same.

- Workplaces that had OSH MS and/or comprehensive emergency plans are believed to be among the best prepared to respond to the emergency

- It, however, presents an important opportunity for the recognition of the importance of OSH and the need for its greater inclusion in efforts at national development at all levels.