Safety Note

15 March 2020

Meeting protocols to manage risk of COVID-19

Background

In March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as the disease has spread rapidly around the world.

In order to minimise the risk of transmission it is important to reduce avenues of transmission through direct touch, and practical social distancing.

As a large organisation, there are numerous and frequent meetings where people typically group together to carry out the business of the University.1

Considerations should be given to how we conduct and arrange meetings in the current environment.

Some areas of the University conduct regular meetings and we need to consider minimising risk of transmission via direct touch or close contact. We also need to consider separating people in meetings who are critical to operations due to the position, authority, and corporate knowledge or decision making powers.

Aim

Organisers and participants of meetings should consider the potential risk from COVID-19. The aim of this Safety Note is to provide advice to minimise the risk of transmission at meetings.

Principles

- Practise reasonable social distancing which, in this case, means attempting to keep a distance of at least 1.5 metres between people where possible, or using technology to meet with people.
- Reduce opportunities for direct transmission by avoiding gatherings in enclosed spaces.
- Keep meetings tight and short (keep them well under 2 hours in length – the shorter the better).
- Ensure personal hygiene practices.
- Where possible, avoid unnecessary close contact with others during this period.2

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1 Other groupings at Universities obviously include lectures, tutorials, seminars etc. Separate advice and additional work is being conducted in this space.

2 Public health authorities have definitions of what they consider “close” contact to be. Usually the guidance offered refers to close contact being the sharing of a closed space with a confirmed case for a prolonged period (e.g. more than 2 hours) in the period extending from 24 hours before onset of symptoms in the confirmed case to a meeting room, lecture theatre, communal room); or greater than 15 minutes face-to-face contact in any setting with a confirmed case in the period extending from 24 hours before onset of symptoms in the confirmed case. This guidance may vary as public health authorities learn more about the virus.
Recommendations / Actions for consideration

1. Consider whether a face-to-face meeting or event is needed. Cancel or postpone any non-essential face to face meeting. OR use technology - consider conducting meetings using zoom or teleconference etc.

2. Work out mandatory and most appropriate representation at the meeting to reduce the number of attendees from the one team.

3. Consider spacing within the physical environment. Try and maintain 1.5 meters between attendees and avoid physical contact. For example, keep a spare seat between participants where ever possible. Consider booking a larger space or meeting outside or on a terrace.

4. Reduce length of meetings – have a concise agenda to minimise the meeting duration (meetings should be planned to be well under 2 hours) – Good meetings are short meetings!

5. Avoid sharing equipment as the virus can live on surfaces including pens, keyboards, table tops etc.

6. Remember that it is essential to practice impeccable hand and respiratory hygiene. Avoid touching your face with your fingers. Avoid hand shaking and other unnecessary physical contact.


8. And remember, you should not be at work if you feel ill.

Resource and links

