

Reference Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health for Work From Home Formulated and announced under OSHA of Ministry of Labor Letter Lao-Zhi-Wei (I)-Zi No. 1101032036 dated June 23, 2021

I. Introduction

In order to ensure continued business operations and prevent further community transmissions during the COVID-19 epidemic, The Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) has released the " Guidelines for Enterprise Planning of Business Continuity in Response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)", which stipulates the diversion of personnel to work off-site to continue business operations, and adjusting worker attendance or business trip arrangements to avoid cross-transmission between employees. It is an important part of workplace epidemic prevention and response management. Employers and workers shall enter into an agreement to engage in working from home arrangements within a specific period of time to ensure continued business operations. ILO defines “working from home” as a work arrangement whereby workers may complete tasks assigned by employers at home with the use of information and Communication Technology (ICT).

However, the mode and environment of working from home is often not comparable to the normal facilities and environment of an office, etc.

The purpose of this guideline is to provide enterprises with guidance on occupational safety and health issues that should be considered when adopting work-from-home measures, and that within a reasonable and feasible scope, enterprises should identify possible hazards and implement risk assessment for working environments from home or assigned tasks.

Enterprises should also take appropriate control measures according to the assessment results. In addition, attention should be paid to the physical and mental health of the workers working from home, and that rolling evaluation reviews should be conducted to adjust appropriate practices as necessary.

II. Identification and Assessment of Risks from Working from Home

Employers should consult with personnel working from home in identifying and assessing potential hazards to their physical and psychological health with respect to their work environment and duties performed.

This should serve as a basis for subsequent planning. Some examples are listed below:

1. Review if the tasks assigned to the worker appropriate for performing outside the original workplace in a working from home work arrangement or not. If not, consider work off-site or alternating working hours in the original workplace.
2. Evaluate the health status of workers working from home to ensure that they

can work properly with the appropriate environment and equipment support to maintain occupational safety and health.

3. Evaluate if the surrounding environment, space, lighting, ventilation, passageways, electrical equipment and facilities of the home office are appropriate or not.
4. Evaluate the work patterns and conditions for workers working from home, including prolonged hours of work, excessive workload, or solitary work. Determine factors such as social alienation and inability to achieve work-life balance may affect the worker's physical and mental health.
5. Any other factors that may jeopardize the occupational safety and health of workers working from home.

III. Key points of occupational safety and health management

Employers should take into account the labor characteristics of work-from-home jobs and the results of their hazard risk assessment, and should, as far as reasonably practicable, adopt necessary preventive measures and equipment. The checklist of occupational safety and health management precautions is shown in the annex.

The key points are summarized as follows.

1. Necessary equipment, measures or resources
 - (1) Employers should prioritize the elimination, replacement, engineering control, administrative management and use of personal protective equipment to address workplace hazards in the performance of worker's duties, and take into account existing technical capabilities and available resources to adopt, as far as reasonably practicable, to effectively reduce risks through control measures.
 - (2) Employers shall provide those working from home with necessary equipment, facilities, or allow those working from home to move work equipment such as computers, monitors, keyboard, mouse, and printer from the workplace to the home office on a temporary basis.
 - (3) If the work environment at home is not as adequate as the work environment at the office so far as equipment and facilities are concerned, or the operation of ICT tools may be of concern to occupational safety and health, employers shall furnish all necessary resources and assistance.
2. Work area in the home office
 - (1) Encourage those working from home to conduct self-assessment and maintain a suitable work environment at home. Employers shall provide all appropriate guidance or assistance.
 - (2) Verify the safety, health, and comfort of the area of a home office and the

surrounding environment, space, temperature, light source, and ventilation, while maintaining tidiness and hygiene.

- (3) Keep the floor, passageway or staircase of the work area free of clutter and dry to avoid falling by tripping or slippery floors.
- (4) Avoid noises and commotions that interrupt work, cause distractions at work, or cause detrimental effects to health.

3. Work related facilities

- (1) The desk and chair used in the home office should be appropriate in terms of type and height. The monitor, keyboard, mouse and related facilities should be of ergonomic design.
- (2) Arrange appropriate space for stretching in the layout of facilities and maintain proper posture when working to avoid muscle skeletal hazards.
- (3) Provide support in using computer and audiovisual equipment and software for assuring stable functions of the Internet, telephone and other communication facilities.
- (4) Assure the normal functioning of the electrical sockets and equipment without damage or wear to avoid the hazards of electric shock or overvoltage.

4. Physical and psychological health management

- (1) Avoid prolonged hours of work or excessive workload while working from home. It is recommended to set routine break times such as standing up, moving, and stretching once every half an hour.
- (2) Workers usually work alone when working from home, and shall take appropriate measures or arrange appropriate activities to avoid feelings of isolation, depression, anxiety or the risk of excessive pressure in mental health due to the decreased interactions with colleagues and customers.
- (3) Those who work from home should pay attention to their physical and mental health, and maintain regular exercise, good dietary habits and adequate sleep.
- (4) Those who work from home shall pay attention to the balance between work and daily lives and establish proper boundaries with spouse, children, or roommates.

5. Education and Training

- (1) Employers shall provide workers with necessary training associated to the nature of the duties to perform and the results of the risk hazard assessments, so as to reinforce their awareness of risk hazards and nurture fundamental knowledge and skill in handling occupational health and safety issues.
- (2) Supervise those who work from home in assessing risk hazards, and install appropriate work equipment and facilities.
- (3) Provide information on the types of occupational musculoskeletal disorders

that are more common in work from home and how to adopt preventive measures.

- (4) Establish procedures for reporting and response measures to an occupational accident or suspected musculoskeletal disorders during the duration of working from home.
 - (5) Supervise those who work from home to plan for appropriate work hours and break time and keep sound physical and mental health.
 - (6) Provide those who work from home with assistance in training and advice pertinent to the use of data communication equipment or tools.
6. Communication management
- (1) Ensure those who work from home can maintain sound communication channels with their supervisors and colleagues through videoconference, telephone, or email at regular intervals or at any time as required.
 - (2) Support and encourage employees to maintain informal exchanges and solidarity by arranging online events at regular intervals or through social media for interactions.
 - (3) Those who work from home may have to look after their spouses who also work from home, or children engaged in distance learning, or children in infancy, family members who are elderly or suffering from chronic illness, employers shall allow for flexible adjustment of work hours and work progress. It is also important for work from home workers to have a clear understanding of employers' expectations of job output in order to foster their awareness of necessary adjustment and adaptation to short-term working from home arrangements.
 - (4) Employers shall set up an appropriate tracking management system and occupational safety and health audit mechanisms, and also consider feedback from employees who work from home for timely assessments with rolling reviews and revisions.

IV. Reference information

1. Guidelines for Enterprise Planning of Business Continuity in Response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (2020), Central Epidemic Command Center.
2. Guidelines for Workplace Safety and Health Protection Measures in response to Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) (2020), Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Ministry of Labor.
3. An employer guide on working from home in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 (2020), ILO.

4. Protect Home Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers> (2021), HSE.
5. Occupational Safety and Health Checklist for Working from Home/ Environmental Risk Assessment Form for Working from Home (2020), Safety and Health Technology Center.

Annex

Work from Home Occupational Safety and Health Management Checklist

1.1 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there any appropriate assessment of the risk of potential hazards inherent to working from home? Are there equipment or measures for the effective reduction of risk in place?

1.2 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is any necessary equipment, facility provided for workers working from home? Are workers who work from home permitted to move the equipment at the workplace to the home office such as computers, monitors, keyboards, mice, and printers on a temporary basis?

1.3 ☐ Yes ☐ No: For workers from home who have concerns about the operation of ICT tools or about occupational safety and health, are necessary resources and assistance being provided?

2. Home office

2.1 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is the space for the home office sufficient with proper space for stretching?

2.2 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is the temperature, light source, and ventilation of the home office adequate?

2.3 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is the home office being kept clean and tidy? Are there any obstacles on the floor or blocking the staircase or are the floors slippery?

2.4 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there any noise or commotion at the home office that affects your physical and mental health?

3. Work related facilities

3.1 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Are the desk and chair for workers working from home suitable for such purposes? Is the chair mounted with arms and back support?

3.2 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is the height of the monitor, and the positions of the keyboard and mouse appropriate?

3.3 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is the space for the home office appropriate and easily accessible?

3.4 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there any assistance and resource provided for computers, audiovisual equipment and software to ensure stable operation of the Internet, telephone and other communication equipment?

3.5 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Ensure the normal functioning of electrical sockets and equipment for

electrical appliances, and verify they are free of damage or wear to avoid the danger of electric shock or overvoltage

4. Physical and psychological health management

4.1 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Assess if there are prolonged hours of work or excessive workload for those working from home or not. Are necessary adjustments adopted?

4.2 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Verify if those who work from home have properly planned work and rest periods (such as break time at regular intervals, or stand up for stretching once every half an hour) or not.

4.3 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Are there any measures for alleviation of stress or proper activities to revitalize physical and psychological health arranged for those who work from home?

4.4 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Verify if those who work from home engage in exercise at regular intervals and have healthy dietary and sleep habits or not.

5. Education and Training

5.1 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there any necessary education and training provided for those who work from home on the basis of the nature of their duties and the result of hazard risk assessments?

5.2 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there necessary advice and assistance given to those who work from home in the assessment of hazard risks?

5.3 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is counseling and consultations provided on hazard prevention for the types of occupational musculoskeletal disorders that are more common in the workplace?

5.4 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there any training or education on the procedure for reporting or responding to occupational accidents or occupational musculoskeletal disorders while working from home ?

5.5 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there necessary education or training provided for those who work from home in the proper planning of work and rest and keeping good physical and mental health?

5.6 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there any training, advice, or assistance given to those who work from home in the use of related information and communication equipment or software tools?

6. Communication and management

6.1 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there any plan for the proper communication and liaison between the supervisors or the workers and those who work from home?

6.2 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there any online exchange or supportive events being organized or are the employees provided with support to organize such events?

6.3 ☐ Yes ☐ No: Is there any necessary and flexible adjustment of the work hours and progress given to those who work from home but have to look after spouses who also work from home and family members (such as children engaged in distance learning,

infants who need nursery care, elderly or those who suffer from chronic diseases)?

6.4 ☐ Yes ☐ No: For occupational safety and health management of workers who work from home, has an appropriate tracking management and audit mechanism been established and adjusted on a rolling basis taking into account the feedback from workers who work from home?