

NB: This is NOT an official translation but intended to give an idea of the content of the German standard. Translator's notes prefaced with 'NB:'

The website of the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs can be found at:

<https://www.bmas.de/EN/Home/home.html>

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SARS-CoV-2 Occupational Safety Standard

I. Working during the pandemic - health and safety at work

The Corona (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic affects social and economic life, both for the employed and non-employed. This pandemic is a threat to the health of a large number of people and at the same time to public safety and order. It has a significant impact on the life of every individual. It affects all economic activity and therefore the whole world of work. Health and safety and economic recovery can only work in harmony if a stop-and-go effect can be avoided.

The special occupational health and safety measures described below aim to protect the population by interrupting the chains of infection, to safeguard the health of employees, to restore economic activity and, at the same time, to establish in the medium-term a lasting state of flat infection curves. The order of priority ranges from technical to organisational and personal protection measures and must be observed.

Two clear principles apply:

- Regardless of the corporate infection prevention concept, in cases of doubt, where the minimum distance cannot be safely maintained, mouth-nose covers (*NB: this term in German usually refers to surgical masks*) should be provided and worn.
- Persons with respiratory symptoms (unless they have been cleared by a doctor, e.g. as representing a cold) or fever should generally not stay on the premises. (Exception: employees in critical infrastructures; see RKI (*NB: the German CDC*) recommendations). The employer must (e.g. within the framework of "infection emergency plans") establish a procedure for clarifying suspected cases (e.g. in the case of fever; see RKI recommendations).

II. Corporate concept for temporary additional measures to protect against infection from SARS-CoV-2 (SARS-CoV-2 occupational safety standard)

The responsibility for the implementation of the necessary infection protection measures is borne by the employer according to the result of the risk assessment. The employer must seek advice from the occupational safety specialists and company doctors and coordinate

with the company's interest groups (*NB: This refers to groups like the worker's council, etc.*).

If the company has an occupational health and safety committee, this coordinates the implementation of additional infection control measures in a timely manner and assists in monitoring their effectiveness. Alternatively, a coordination/crisis team can also be set up under the direction of the employer or a person commissioned in accordance with § 13 ArbSchG/DGUV regulation 1, with the involvement of the worker's council, occupational safety specialist and company doctor.

Special technical measures

1. Workplace design

Employees should keep a sufficient distance (at least 1.5 m) from other people. Where this is not possible even through measures of work organisation, alternative protective measures must be taken. Transparent partitions are to be installed where interactions with the public occur and, if possible, to separate workplaces where a sufficient distance cannot be otherwise ensured.

Office work should be carried out from home if possible. Otherwise, for office workplaces, the capacities are to be used fully and the work is to be organised in such a way that multiple occupancy of rooms can be avoided or sufficient protective distances are provided.

2. Sanitary facilities, canteens and break rooms

Liquid soap and towel dispensers that are gentle on the skin should be provided for cleaning the hands. Sufficient cleaning and hygiene measure must be provided, if necessary the cleaning intervals must be adjusted. This applies in particular to sanitary facilities and common rooms. Regular cleaning of door handles and handrails also helps to prevent infections. In break rooms and canteens, sufficient distancing must be ensured, e.g. by not placing tables and chairs too close together. Care should be taken to avoid queues at the food counters and at the checkout. If necessary, the cafeteria and food distribution times must be extended. As a last resort, the closure of cafeterias should also be considered.

3. Ventilation

Regular ventilation serves the purpose of hygiene and promotes air quality, as the number of pathogens in the indoor air can increase in closed rooms. Ventilation reduces the number of fine droplets containing pathogens that may be present in the air.

Special notes on ventilation systems (VS):

The risk of transmission via air conditioning can be classified as low overall. It is not advisable to switch off VSs, especially in rooms where infected persons are treated or where infectious materials are handled, as this can lead to an increase in the aerosol concentration in the air and thus to an increased risk of infection.

4. Infection prevention measures for construction sites, agriculture, field and delivery services, transports and journeys within the holding

Even in the case of work-related (customer) contacts outside the premises, distances of at least 1.5 m must be maintained as far as possible. The working procedures for these activities are to be checked to see whether solo-work is possible, provided that this does not cause additional hazards. If this is not the case, the smallest possible fixed teams (e.g. 2 to 3 persons) must be used in order to reduce the number of changing contacts within

the staff during travel and work outside the premises. In addition, facilities for frequent hand hygiene must be provided near the workplaces for these activities. Furthermore, additional equipment for company vehicles with utensils for hand hygiene and disinfection and with paper towels and refuse sacks must be provided. In the case of journeys required for operational purposes, the simultaneous use of vehicles by several employees must be avoided wherever possible. In addition, the number of persons using a vehicle together - simultaneously or consecutively - must be limited as far as possible, e.g. by assigning a vehicle to a designated team. The interiors of company vehicles must be cleaned regularly, especially if they are used by several people. Journeys for procurement or delivery are to be reduced if possible, tour planning is to be optimised accordingly.

In the case of transport and delivery services, possibilities for the use of sanitary facilities must be taken into account in route planning, as hand hygiene is only possible to a limited extent due to the current closure of many publicly accessible toilets and washrooms.

5. Infection prevention measures for shared accommodation

For shared accommodation, teams should be as small as possible, fixed and should work together. If possible, these teams shall be provided with their own communal facilities (sanitary facilities, kitchens, common rooms) in order to avoid additional stress due to shift use and necessary cleaning between uses by the individual teams. In principle, individual occupancy of bedrooms should be provided. Multiple occupancy of sleeping rooms is generally only permitted for partners or close family members. Additional rooms must be provided for the early isolation of infected persons. Accommodation rooms must be ventilated and cleaned regularly and frequently. Dishwashers must be provided for kitchens in the accommodation, as disinfection of crockery requires temperatures above 60°C. Washing machines must also be provided or a regular laundry service must be organised.

6. Working from home

Where possible, office work should be carried out at home, especially if office space would have to be used by several people with insufficient safety distances. Working from home can also help to enable employees to fulfil their care obligations (e.g. children or relatives in need of care). On the topic page of the New Quality of Work Initiative (www.inqa.de), recommendations for employers and employees on the use of the home office are listed.

7. Business trips and meetings

Business trips and face-to-face meetings should be reduced to the absolute minimum and technical alternatives such as telephone or video conferences should be made available as far as possible. If face-to-face meetings are absolutely necessary, there must be sufficient distance between the participants.

Special organisational measures

8. Ensuring sufficient safety distances

The use of traffic routes (e.g. stairs, doors, lifts) must be adapted so that sufficient distance can be maintained. Where experience has shown that crowds of people accumulate (time recording, cafeteria, tool and material dispensaries, lifts, etc.) protective distances of the standing areas should be marked, e.g. with adhesive tape. Even when several employees work together, e.g. in assembly lines, the minimum distance between employees of 1.5 m should be ensured. Where this cannot be guaranteed from a technical or organisational point of view, alternative measures (wearing mouth-nose covers (*NB: surgical masks, see above*)) should be taken.

9. Work equipment / tools

Tools and work equipment are to be used on a personal basis wherever possible. Where this is not possible, regular cleaning must be provided, especially before handing over to other persons. Otherwise, suitable protective gloves must be used when using the tools, provided that this does not result in additional hazards (e.g. capture by rotating parts). In this connection, limits on the wearing time and the individual disposition of the employees (e.g. allergies) must also be taken into account.

10. Organisation of working time and breaks

Occupancy rates of work areas and shared facilities shall be reduced by spreading out working time (staggered working and break times, shift operation if necessary).

When drawing up shift schedules, care should be taken to assign the same persons to common shifts, if possible, in order to further reduce internal personal contacts. At the beginning and end of work, suitable organisational measures must be taken to prevent close contact between several employees (e.g. time recording, in changing rooms, washrooms and showers etc.).

11. Storage and cleaning of work clothing and PPE

Particularly strict attention must be paid to the exclusively personal use of all personal protective equipment (PPE) and work clothing. It must be possible to store work clothing and PPE separately from everyday clothing. It must be ensured that work clothing is cleaned regularly. If there is no possibility of additional risks of infection and/or hygiene deficiencies (e.g. due to soiling) and if, at the same time, personal contact can be avoided, employees must be allowed to put on and take off their work clothes at home.

12. Access to workplaces and company premises by persons not belonging to the company

Access by external persons should be kept to a minimum if possible. Contact details of external persons as well as the time of entering and leaving the place of work / the company premises must be documented as far as possible. External persons must also be informed about the measures currently in force in the company to protect against infection with SARS-CoV-2.

13. Instructions for action in suspicious cases

Company regulations for the rapid clarification of suspected cases of COVID-19 disease must be established. In particular, fever, cough and shortness of breath can be signs of infection with the corona virus. For this purpose, body temperature measurement without contact must be provided during operation, if possible.

Employees with corresponding symptoms are to be asked to leave the company premises immediately or to stay at home. Until the suspicion has been clarified by a doctor, the employee must be assumed to be unfit for work. The persons concerned should immediately contact a doctor or the public health department by telephone for clarification. The employer should make arrangements in the company pandemic plan to identify and inform those persons (employees and, where possible, customers) in the event of confirmed infections who are also at risk of infection through contact with the infected person.

14. Minimize psychological stress due to corona

The corona crisis not only threatens and unsettles companies, but also generates great fears among many employees. Other aspects to be considered with regard to psychological stress include possible conflicts with customers, long-term high work intensity in system-

relevant (*NB: the German term for 'critical'*) industries and requirements of social distancing. These additional psychological stresses should be taken into account in the risk assessment and appropriate measures taken.

Specific personal measures

15. Mouth and nose protection and personal protective equipment (PPE)

In the event of unavoidable contact with other persons or if protective distances cannot be maintained, PPE should be provided and worn in particularly hazardous working areas.

16. Instruction and active communication

Comprehensive communication within the company must be ensured about the preventive and occupational safety measures that have been introduced. Instructions for managers ensure that actions are safe and should be centralized as far as possible. Designated contact persons should be available and the flow of information should be ensured. Protective measures must be explained and instructions must be clearly explained (also by means of signs, notices, floor markings, etc.). Attention must be drawn to compliance with personal and organisational hygiene rules (distance requirement, "cough and sneeze label", hand hygiene, PPE). Information from the Federal Centre for Health Education is also helpful for instruction. (*NB: BZGA, www.bzga.de*)

17) Occupational medical precautions and protection of particularly endangered persons

Occupational medical precautions must be made possible or offered to the employees. Employees can obtain individual advice from the company physician, including advice on special hazards due to a previous illness or individual disposition. It must also be possible to address fears and psychological stress. The occupational health doctor knows the workplace and suggests suitable protective measures to the employer if the normal occupational health and safety measures are not sufficient. If necessary, the doctor may also recommend a change of job to the person concerned. The employer only learns about this if the person concerned expressly agrees. Occupational medical precautions can be taken by telephone; some company doctors offer a hotline for employees.

III. Implementation and adaptation of the common SARS-CoV-2 occupational health and safety standard

It can be assumed that the pandemic will pose a challenge to infection control at work over a longer period of time. In order to meet these special challenges and to enable a uniform approach throughout Germany and across sectors, the

- the BMAS (*NB: the Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs*) to set up a temporary **advisory group on "Protective measures at the workplace to prevent SARS-CoV-2"** in order to be able to react promptly and in a coordinated manner to the further development of the pandemic and to make any necessary adjustments to the existing occupational health and safety standard. Members should include representatives of the BMAS and the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and Occupational Medicine (BAuA), Robert Koch Institute (RKI), two representatives each of the German Trade Union Federation (DGB), the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), accident insurance institutions (UVT), the federal states and experts.

- the present SARS-CoV-2 occupational health and safety standard is **specified and supplemented as** required by the accident insurance institutions and, if necessary, by the supervisory authorities of the federal states on a **sector-specific basis**.
- the German government **publishes** the **SARS-CoV-2 occupational safety standard** and refers to the industry-specific concretisations and supplements. It asks BAuA, BDA, DGB, DGUV and the occupational health and safety administrations of the Länder to use their networks for communication in the same way. The measures described are a contribution to ensuring a flat curve of (new) infections. The Joint German Occupational Safety and Health Strategy (**GDA**) supported by the Federal Government, the Länder and accident insurance companies will also support the dissemination and application of the SARS-CoV-2 occupational safety and health standard and its further sector-specific concretisation in the workplace.