

# GUIDANCE

## ON COVID-19 AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The Minerals Council has developed a **Guidance on COVID-19 and Vulnerable Populations** to guide members in taking informed decisions in managing employees who are vulnerable to COVID-19. The Guidance is based on legislative and scientific information and provides advice on how mining companies can make use of risk-based methods to protect the health of their employees.

The Guidance should be read in conjunction with the Minerals Council Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Addressing Cases of COVID-19 while taking into account the Guiding Principles on Prevention and Management of COVID-19 in SAMI and the Guideline for the Compilation of a Mandatory Code of Practice for the Mitigation and Management of COVID-19 Outbreak, both published by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy.



### WHO ARE VULNERABLE GROUPS?

- People who are 60 years and over
- People of all ages with underlying medical conditions such as:
  - Chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
  - Serious heart conditions
  - Hypertension
  - Immunocompromised individuals as a result of:
    - cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, prolonged use of corticosteroid and other immune weakening medications
- Severe obesity
- Diabetes
- Chronic kidney disease
- Liver disease



### CHRONIC DISEASES IN THE MINING INDUSTRY

Chronic lifestyle diseases have increased in South Africa over the past decade. Hypertension is particularly prevalent, with rates in men in 2008 of 60% in 45-54 year olds and 70% in 55-64 year olds. Similarly, these co-morbidities are prevalent in the mining industry and increase with age.

A 2015 study on chronic diseases prevalent amongst Minerals Council members showed that the most common chronic diseases in the mining industry are **diabetes, hypertension, HIV and TB.**



The occupational medical practitioner (OMP) will decide who is fit for work in the COVID-19 environment following a risk assessment of each employee's individual occupational and clinical circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

Special measures need to be taken to protect vulnerable employees and to mitigate the risk of those employees contracting COVID-19. These measures need to be based on a proper risk assessment on a case-by-case basis.



#### Workplace risk and COVID-19 assessments

A consistent formal approach for workplace risk and COVID-19 risk assessments to allow for employee exemptions to return to work includes:

- 1 Risk assessment per job category, indicating how well the transmission risk can be mitigated through PPE and operating protocols.
- 2 If the risk can be mitigated, the employee will get an exemption, and be permitted to return to work.
- 3 If the assessment outcome shows that the risk cannot be mitigated, then the existing PPE and/or operating protocols will be amended to allow mitigation. This will lead to an exemption so that the employee is permitted to return to work. If these amendments do not ensure that the risk can be mitigated, then no exemption can be attained.
- 4 Assessments to include consideration of other COVID-19 risk factors, including travel-related risks and living condition risks.
- 5 Assessments to support exemptions to be substantiated by auditable evidence.



#### Employees with comorbidities

- Express and informed consent to be obtained from employees for confidential medical information to be disclosed.
- Record of vulnerable employees and relevant risk categories to be compiled.
- Educate employees about importance of disclosing medical conditions.
- Provide at-risk employees with additional education and protection.
- Assess level of control of chronic diseases and assist employees with treatment and control of chronic diseases.
- Prioritise vulnerable employees for prophylactic interventions.
- If possible, offer vulnerable employees jobs working from home or with minimal contact with other people.
- If possible, re-design workplace to accommodate vulnerable employees and/or assign vulnerable employees to temporary alternative functions.
- Identify additional workplace control measures appropriate for vulnerable employees; develop approved individual medical management plan.
- Supplement and enhance control measures identified as critical for workplace to protect health and safety of vulnerable employees.
- Issue vulnerable employees with additional PPE and additional hygiene enablement tools.
- Consider if external risks can be reduced further, e.g. reducing interaction with visitors or use of public transport.
- Monitor vulnerable employees regularly.
- Exercise greater vigilance and early treatment and hospitalisation for employees with comorbidities.



#### Employees aged 60 years and older

Disaster Management Act regulations do not automatically exclude employees aged 60 years and older from returning to work. But, employers must put special measures in place to protect their health and safety.

These criteria apply conditional on the following case-by-case considerations:

- If employee's job or function can be performed remotely, they should do so.
- If employee's job or function is low risk, the employee will be permitted on site for work.
- If the employee's job or function is high risk, the employee will not be permitted on site to for work.

