Back to Work Plan

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COVID-19 is likely to stay with us for a long time. The Government is calling people to go back to work with necessary precautions.

Our institution’s core business is research and we need to position ourselves into this new era and avoid suffering from financial consequences of self-imposed lockdown.

The following areas have been identified as essential for consideration as we plan to go back to work. We need to assign members in each of the areas to review the situation and develop guidance for the institution. We will then deliberate on their recommendation before producing one consolidated plan that would be presented to the management.

**Number of workers in IHI offices (Dar es salaam, Ifakara, and Bagamoyo)**

The risk of transmitting diseases will be higher is a large number of workers return to work all at once. We have to think about how we are going to manage the numbers. The issues that need to be discussed.

* Consider staggered return and how this should be done while considering the functions and roles of each group of employees in this phased approach
* Consider the rotation of staff and maintaining only a minimum effective number of staff at a time.
* Consider reducing the number of staff per office to avoid congestion.
* Consider maintaining a certain cadre of staff to work from home, eg senior scientists, IT teams, and data management teams.

**Physical space set up**

As we are planning to get back to work, we should still observe the regulations governing social distancing, employee gatherings, and hygiene practices.  Our original setup may not be suitable for the new way of life after the COVID-19.

The following should be discussed.

* Consider reconfiguring office spaces and sitting arrangements ( The feasibility of maintaining 2 meters distance between workers).
* Consider reconfiguring places such as meeting rooms, cafeteria, and dining spaces to conform to current recommendations.

**Routine environmental cleaning**

With COVID-19 in our community it is important to review our cleaning procedures.

* Consider the frequency of cleaning the surface routinely touched such as door handles, countertops, toilets, etc.
* Consider providing disposable wipes to workers to clean surfaces such as doorknobs, remote controls, and desks.

**Guidance on facemasks**

The institution should come up with the guidance of facemasks.

* Clearly describe what type of masks staff should wear and where, and for how long.
* Consider the use of facemasks in all situations while at work and when using public transport
* Consider the development of clear guidance on how to put on the mask, use it, and dispose or clean it.

**Finance, Transport and communication activities**

To reduce the risk of transmission and maintain efficiency, we need to:

* Consider limiting face to face meetings where possible and only focus on online meetings.
* Provide a guideline for face to face meetings (number of people, the maximum time of meetings, etc)
* Consider reducing the number of contacts with the clients from outside IHI by leveraging technology such as online payments.
* Consider guidelines on IHI vehicle use, for instance the use of face masks, open versus closed windows, the maximum number of passengers per vehicle, and frequency of regular cleaning of vehicles.

**Required infrastructure changes:**

We need to determine the following;

* What changes do we need to make regarding the infrastructure to ensure the staff are well protected. For instance do we need to rearrange our offices and installing barriers to protect staff from droplets (such staff at the reception or finance department)? Do we need to restructure/create the windows to allow them to stay open and stop the use of AC machines in small offices with poor circulation?

**Activities in the laboratory/insectaries**

We need to develop guidelines for staff working in the lab with regard to the use of PPEs, staff numbers, and rotations.

**Activities in the Clinical trial facility**

IHI clinical trial facility deals with people from the community who come at the facility for study procedures that might include clinical examination, sample collection, and even on-sight observation for a period of time.

* Consider developing guidelines to ensure increased protection of staff and volunteers.
* Consider the number of staff per office, wearing of masks and opening of windows.
* Studies to consider reducing the number of visits, or the number of volunteers allowed per day at the site.

**Activities in the Clinics/Hospital**

* Develop or adopt to strengthen the current guidelines for staff who interact with patients.
* Consider requesting studies to reduce the number of visits, number of volunteers coming reducing the number of visits or number of patients seen at the clinic per day.
* Consider changing the frequency of medication refills.

**Activities in the field**

* Consider developing safety guidelines for staff as they engage with the community.
* Consider reducing the frequency of contacts, exploring the use of mobile technology, and conducting meetings in the open space (under the tree) versus in the office.
* Consider door to door sensitization meetings versus large community meetings.