



COVID-19 PANDEMIC WORK FROM HOME GUIDELINE FOR CIVIL SERVANTS

2021

1.0 Objectives

- 1.1 The Work-from-Home (WFH) Guideline (Guideline) for civil servants are aimed at containing the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), whilst ensuring continuity of service where possible.
- 1.2 To provide policy direction to Permanent Secretaries on further working arrangements of employees in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and WFH arrangements.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In the interest of enforcing measures announced by the Fijian Government and encouraging physical distancing in the workplace, civil servants undertaking functions that are deemed non-essential by their Permanent Secretaries were asked to work from home during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. This was again activated from 26 April 2021 as part of Fiji's nationwide COVID-19 response
- 2.2 Ministries are required to support their workforce to take these steps through:
 - (i) agreeing to more flexible ways of working (for example: changing start and finish times to avoid busier commuting times, rostering of employees); and
 - (ii) cancelling face-to-face events and meetings and rearranging to remote calling where possible (for example: using video or conference calling technology).

3.0 Definition and Abbreviation

WFH: Alternative working arrangement whereby an employee may remotely carry out the usual functions of his/her work from a home setting, utilising digital communication wherever possible to maintain a connection with colleagues and clients as if they were at the office.

Essential functions: functions of the Ministry or Department that are identified by the Permanent Secretary as being necessary to be carried out from the place of work.

Non-Essential functions: functions of the Ministry or Department that are identified by the Permanent Secretary that can be undertaken by employees through WFH arrangements.

Self Isolation/Isolation: preventative stay- at-home measure mandated by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to contain the spread of COVID-19 to contacts.

4.0 Application

4.1 This policy applies to all civil servants who carry out non-essential functions, as identified by their respective Permanent Secretaries, or for employees affected by announced containment measures.

5.0 Approval

5.1 Any WFH arrangement must be approved by the Permanent Secretary. Employees may be recalled by the Permanent Secretary at any time to work from their respective offices as the need arises, when deemed appropriate, and in alignment with the Government's COVID-19 containment measures.

5.2 Employees who do not have adequate meaningful work to be performed from home, or where WFH is neither practical nor possible, may be asked to take excessive annual leave or any entitled time off in lieu.

6.0 Terms and Conditions

6.1 The terms and conditions of employees on WFH remain the same as stipulated in the employment contract.

7.0 Making the WFH Arrangement

7.1 Before working remotely, employees and the Permanent Secretary should document the arrangement, specifying:

- (i) duration of the arrangement, hours of work, etc.;
- (ii) key responsibilities and outputs;
- (iii) required equipment; and
- (iv) health, safety, wellbeing, and security of Government information and assets, while working remotely; and
- (v) monitoring arrangements.

8.0 WFH Ad hoc arrangements

8.1 The Permanent Secretary may permit an employee to work on projects, tasks, or reports at home on an ad hoc basis.

8.2 Under this arrangement, an employee may be required to report to office on certain days in a week and WFH on other days.

9.0 Employee Responsibilities

9.1 When working remotely, employees shall ensure that they:

- (i) are contactable during the approved working hours;
- (ii) adhere to the Civil Service Code of Conduct;
- (iii) do not, under any circumstances, hold meetings with colleagues or clients at their home;
- (iv) take reasonable steps to keep the Ministry's equipment safe and in working order; and
- (v) safeguard confidentiality of official information.

10.0 Ministry's Responsibilities

10.1. The Ministry shall:

- (i) ensure that employees are working in accordance with their WFH arrangement and adhering to government policies and procedures;
- (ii) monitor and review the WFH arrangement on a regular basis;
- (iii) establish and schedule regular communication (emails, calls and video conferences), to continue the dissemination of information to employees who are working from home; and
- (iv) where practicable, provide equipment and tools required to perform the tasks; and accurately document the ownership and usage of the equipment and assets.

11.0 Monitoring WFH

11.1 Supervisors are required to monitor individual work performance of employees on a regular basis through timesheets and regular reports. Ministries are responsible for developing templates that suit their operational requirements.

11.2 Where required output is not achieved, the Permanent Secretary may decide the appropriate action.

11.3 Individual Work Plans should be updated to reflect WFH arrangements.

12.0 Self – Quarantine/Isolation

12.1 Employees must follow official directives from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, including self-quarantine for the requisite number of days, if he/she is has been informed to do so by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

12.2 Any employee under self-quarantine or isolation, must inform HR, through his/her supervisor and must provide appropriate documentation to confirm the directive from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and confirm clearance before their return to the office.

12.3 Periods of self-isolation, or quarantine mandated by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services or by request by Permanent Secretaries shall be considered as WFH.

13.0 Containment Areas

13.1 Employees who are restricted from physically reporting to their office due to the enforcement of containment zones are considered to be on WFH.

13.2 Ministries are required to assign employees WFH assignments and where practicable, resources, to undertake WFH.

13.3 Civil Servants in containment areas whose nature of work does not support WFH arrangements are deemed to be on call for assistance to the Ministry of Health and Medical and should be deployed as required, with the written approval of their respective Permanent Secretaries.

13.4 Registers of the abovementioned civil servants should be kept by the Ministry and forwarded to the Ministry of Civil Service.

13.5 Any allowances are payable by their respective employing Ministries in line with the General Orders and most recent circulars from the Ministry of Civil Service.

14. Employee Diagnosed with COVID-19 during WFH

14.1 If any employee is diagnosed with COVID-19 while working from home, the employee must immediately inform HR, through his/her supervisor, with a medical confirmation from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

14.2. The employee will be entitled to sick leave, and must strictly follow the directions of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

14.3. Regular monitoring of the employee's health and wellbeing should be undertaken by the HR department and/or the supervisor, and the HR must update the Permanent Secretary accordingly.

Ministry of Civil Service

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