

WiLAT Chat on COVID-19
30 April
PPE and Hygiene Best Practice

PPE is commonly referred to as equipment worn to minimize exposure to hazards that could cause serious illness. Since the spread of COVID-19 worldwide, advice has been issued on personal protection equipment and this chat session of WiLAT focused on PPE and hygiene best practice. Our guest speaker on this topic is Dr. Mugilarasi Arasarethinam, an expert in nutritional medicine, on what we should do to protect ourselves. This was followed by another presentation by Mrs. Niroza Gazzali, Vice Chairperson of WiLAT Sri Lanka and Chief Process Officer, EFL on how to manage remote working.

There was an overwhelming number of 20 participants from different Territories. Attending the session includes: Dorothy Chan, WiLAT Global Chairperson, Vicky Koo, WiLAT Deputy Global Chairperson, Reshma Yousuf Ghulam, Chair of the WiLAT chat session, Keith Newton, CILT Secretary General, Nurlan Igembayev from Kazakhstan, Amra Zareer, Arsath Hussain, Chathuri Ranasinghe, Dhashma, Finbarr Clearly, Gayani de Alwis, Gayathri, Kelly Lee, Magilarasi, Marina Kuznechevskaya, Nashath, Priyaa, Sahana Vithanagama, Sundaralingam Amilthan, Tusitha.

Characteristics of COVID-19

The first case of COVID-19 was discovered when a cluster of pneumonia cases was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. It is a form of coronavirus virus which can spread in a community and mainly transmitted through droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks. From what we know, a single person with COVID-19 can pass onto 2 to 2.5 persons and this is more infectious than ordinary flu which is about 1 to 1.3. There are only a few countries now where there are no cases of COVID-19 and more information are being collected on the transmission of this virus, the severity of COVID-19 and the population demographics which can cause higher mortality rate. Testing for COVID-19 is now generally available and as more and more mild cases are being picked up, this suggests that there could be many in the community that could be asymptomatic.

Personal protection

The lack of an efficacious vaccine at the moment means that all communities will have to consider how to protect the health of the community, to reduce the stress on the medical and health system and for the community to be aware of the personal protection measures they should adopt.

Dr. Mugil advised that we should build up our external and internal defence system. If we maintain good health, then our internal health system would enable you to build up more resistance to counter the virus. This means we should stay calm and reduce stress during this period which could be difficult when some cities could be completely sealed with limited



outdoor activities. Fear and emotions affect immunity and adapting to a temporary situation which can last for weeks and months asks for mutual understanding and family support.

Wearing masks

A simple mask can contain the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the transmission of microdroplets that linger in the air in a simple conversation. COVID-19 spread by droplets and the smaller droplets can go as far as 1 to 1.5m and therefore social distancing of 1.5m is recommended so that droplets will fall before they reach you. Wearing surgical face masks is important for health workers who could be exposed to high concentration of droplets. Wearing of N 95 is needed for high risks medical workers, but it is not necessary for people in the community who go out to buy things. Given that surgical masks are in short supply, a face mask on cloth could be sufficient used for protection but once you return home, the mask should be put in soapy water for cleansing. However, do not touch the surface of the mask which could be contaminated.

If you put on a surgical mask, again they have to be disposed properly, put in an envelope or bag before disposal. If you wear a mask, then you must know to use it and dispose of it properly. Avoid touching the mask as the surface of the mask could be contaminated and if you touch your eyes and nose after that, you can catch the virus. Surgical masks are made of non-woven fabric which has better bacteria filtration and air permeability while remaining less slippery than woven cloth. Surgical masks should not be subject to continue use and must be changed when they become over. You may need one to two masks every day.

Patients with confirmed or possible COVID-19 should wear a face mask and if they are not hospitalized, they should stay home until they have fully recovered.

Washing hands

Our everyday prevention measures include washing hands which is most important as you can be in contact with the virus by touching objects. Commonly used surfaces include doorknobs, lift buttons, handles, keyboards, remote control and they have to be wiped down with disinfectant. As for washing hands, sanitizer with 70% alcohol is handy when you are in places where there is no water. Alcohol acts on the fatty layer of the virus to disintegrate it but at the same time, it would act on the fatty layer of your skin which may crack with constant use of sanitizers. Hence wash hands with soapy water wherever possible and constantly apply moisturizer to our skin. Cracked skin may expose ourselves to other bacteria and we are recommended to be gentle to our skin. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

A duration of 20 seconds is recommended on washing hands. The diagram below showed seven steps in cleaning hands and if you count 5 seconds for each step, the timing would be good. Some suggested that the duration is similar to when you sing a happy birthday song.



Our eyes also need protection and you can put on goggles or eye shields. However, cleansing of the lens to disinfect them after wearing is needed.

Common places

There are places that put people gaining access into malls or public transport facilities through a disinfecting cubicle. It is not certain whether such measure is effective as the spray could create an aerosol effect. Sri Lanka use ozonated water. There is also no concrete evidence that ozonated water will kill COVID-19 as the virus is so new but as more and more information emerged, there would be better treatment and before vaccines could be applied, herd immunity could become a phenomenon and eventually, 80% of the population may have the virus.

COVID-tests

Testing can identify COVID-19 and includes methods that detect the virus itself and those that detect antibodies. Testing of the virus includes nasal swab or sputum sample. Results are generally available with a few hours to 2 days. Antibody tests show how many people have had the disease including those whose symptoms were minor or who were asymptomatic. An accurate mortality rate and the level of herd community in the population can be determined from the results of this test. An antigen test (part of a pathogen that elicits an immune response) is more accurate as the body takes time, between 14 to 21 days to build up the anti-bodies and the results could be uncertain depending on when the test is taken.

Some countries are beginning large scale surveys of their population using antigen/antibody tests and in this way, they would be able to determine the scale of exposure to COVID-19 and the capability of the work force to resume normal business in good time.

Remote working

Before the world knows more about COVID-19 and the level of immunity in the community, remote working has become the new norm. Assuming a leading role in the process, Niroza Gazzali shared her experience on how digital communication should be promoted and monitored. The key elements are:



- (a) leadership to provide motivation and to keep the momentum on the effectiveness of remote working.
- (b) Basic conditions include good connection, this speaks for the need for good hardware with good audio and visual effects and appropriate prior training so that all staff get to know how to use on-line system and there is no problem in logging on line and finishing meeting on time.
- (c) Setting expectations, remote working does not mean doing away with KPIs, action items have to be updated regularly and employees get to focus on the outcome. Employees must also be given feedback, and this will help to remove the sense of isolation
- (d) Reporting methods would be adapted to suit a bigger group and even the reporting line may change. Must pay attention to sub-ordinates and allow them to respond during meetings.
- (e) A sign of trust for work from home arrangement means in the initial stage of working from home, everyone has to identify a suitable work environment at home, find ways to keep children occupied and maintain the same level of effectiveness while working from home.

It is recommended that companies should develop guidelines and policies on work from home. Flexibility in working hours does not mean long working hours and there is also staff insurance coverage under remote working environment.

Concluding remarks

Dorothy Chan, Global Chairperson thanked the two speakers for a superb session with rich contents and foresight. The question raised at the end of the meeting is when will COVID-19 end. Predictive monitoring of COVID-19 using daily updated figures from different countries to estimate the pandemic life cycle curves seems to indicate that the situation may start turning around in May and may last until June, July and September for different places. As the situation is still fluid, the scenarios for different places may change.

In Hong Kong, the spike that took place at the end of March with residents and students returning from overseas had been dramatically reduced with compulsory quarantine and ban on social gatherings in early April. By the end of April, Hong Kong recorded no new cases for 5 days and 11 days with no local infection. Public exams have resumed and lifting measure would be introduced in phases.

Complete or partial lock down measures could only be interim measures to counteract the health crisis and it is necessary to consider how activities could be restored. We need the support of the global community and as managers in transport, logistics and supply chain, we play a key role in maintaining economic activities and at the same time keeping personal hygiene.



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It is timely that starting from our next session on 21 May. WiLAT is exploring how we can bring passenger transport for a safe return followed by sessions on airport, maritime and port. Please stay connected and tune in to our news.

Dorothy Chan
WiLAT Global Chairperson

30 April 2020

Please join our next session:

WiLAT Chat on Post COVID19: Passenger transport for a safe return
Thu, 21st May 2020 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM (Hong Kong time)

Please join from your computer, tablet or smartphone.

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