



Novel Coronavirus Q&A for HN employees in Belgium

This document will continue to be updated as information changes due to further U.S. and Host Nation guidance or as the situation evolves.

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A. GENERAL

Q1: What should employees do if they show symptoms of Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)?

A: Employees who show any symptoms of fever, cough, or difficulty breathing are directed to 1) seek medical care right away. Before going to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about any recent travel and symptoms; 2) avoid contact with others; 3) inform supervisors and keep them abreast of any ongoing developments; 4) do not travel while sick; 5) cover the mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve (not hands) when coughing or sneezing; and 6) wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds to avoid spreading the virus to others.

Q2: Where can I get more information about 2019-nCoV in Belgium?

A: The leading health authority in Belgium is the "Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment". Comprehensive information about 2019-nCoV may be found at www.info-coronavirus.be. The Federal Public Service states on its website that all Belgian general practitioners (GPs) and hospitals know how to quickly recognize a patient who may be infected with 2019-nCoV and what to do in such cases. A reference laboratory at the Leuven University is able to quickly identify the virus. The Sint-Pieter's Hospital in Brussels and the University Hospital in Antwerp are the two identified hospitals where patients will be medically treated.

US TRICARE beneficiaries should call the Nurse Advice Line at the following toll-free number for Belgium: 0800-81933

Q3: What precautions is Army taking?

A: The Army is taking a proactive approach to curtailing the coronavirus update, including certain closures for on base installations and limiting congregation for employees and their families. These precautionary measures are location specific and employees are encouraged to monitor email activity and check the Army website specific to their post for any announcements.

Q4: What further precautions are required to prevent the spread of the virus effectively?

A: You can protect yourself and help prevent spreading the virus to others if you wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub, cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or flexed elbow when you cough or sneeze, avoid close contact (min 1.5 meter or 4 feet) with other people, stay home as much as possible, telework if possible and self-isolate from others in the household if you feel unwell. Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth if your hands are not clean.

Q5: Do I have to wear a face covering when I am outside or when I go to the public areas?

A: There is currently no mandatory obligation to wear cloth face (mouth-nose) covering in Belgium. However, scientists and Government leaders highly encourage the use of cloth face covering, as an additional measure to avoid the spread of the virus. Therefore, it is recommended to wear a mask (or cloth face) when you go to public areas. On all military installations, to the extent practical, all individuals must wear cloth face (mouth-nose) coverings when they cannot maintain six feet (approx. 2 m) of physical distancing in public areas, customer service areas and work areas (Garrison EXCHANGE, commissary, food court, shopette, post office, etc.). This measure does not replace the need for physical distancing and effective hygiene practices.

Q6: How do I get a cloth face (mouth-nose) covering?

A: Type II, Type III and surgical masks are currently difficult to procure and primarily reserved for health care employees. However, other “cloth barriers” also provide better health protection by intercepting droplets produced when speaking, coughing, or sneezing. Consequently self-fashioned face coverings, like scarves, shawls, cloth cuttings, and other tightly woven cotton fabrics, can also be used. Tutorials on how to do your own mask are also available on different websites, to include the US Army Garrison BENELUX website: <https://home.army.mil/benelux/index.php/my-fort/coronavirus-information>

Q7: What should employees and managers do if given instructions by local authorities?

A: Employees and managers are directed to follow the instructions of local health, safety and labor authorities as applicable. Health authorities in Belgium can impose strict controls on travelers coming back from areas at risk. Labor authorities provide general information for employers on www.emploi.belgique.be about preventive measures to undertake. For more specific questions and issues concerning the special status of HN workforce the local CPAC should be consulted.

Q8: Can a manager mandate that an employee be sent home/tested if he/she shows symptoms of infection?

A: Employees are encouraged to exercise caution and report to their physician as soon as they suspect they may be infected. Managers may send employees home and ask them to contact their Family Physician. If the employees refuse to follow employer's recommendation, management can request an appointment with the Labor Physician, who will determine further steps to be taken.

Q9: What can managers do, if they hear an employee comes back from holidays spent in an area, seriously affected by 2019-nCoV?

A: According to latest requirements of the Belgian Government, persons coming back from seriously affected areas have to isolate themselves for a period of 14 days, starting on the day they come back to Belgium. In order to meet the above mentioned requirements, HN employees shall telework, if their duties can be performed from home. If it is not the case and telework is not possible, they shall be placed on admin leave.

Q10: Can the employer, in order to prevent the spread of the virus and to protect the employees as much as possible, decide to impose the measure of body temperature?

A: The employer is responsible for the health and safety of all employees; particularly in the current Corona extraordinary situation, employers are more than ever asked to stay vigilant and to minimize as much as possible any risks for their employees. Therefore, in the spirit to implement all helpful measures and to protect employees to maximum extent possible, the employer can direct the measure of body temperature for all employees, before they enter the military installation, provided the following prerequisites are met:

- The respective board for prevention and safety at work shall be consulted and may provide an official statement,
- All employees and Elected Representatives shall be informed in advance on all concrete steps concerning the measure of body temperature,
- No personal employees' data shall be registered,
- The measure of body temperature is limited in time; it shall be introduced only during the Corona extraordinary situation, as long as it is officially considered as pandemic by the Belgian Government,
- The measure of body temperature shall be processed by means of a touch free fever thermometer and if temperature of more than 37,5° C is ascertained, the employer shall send the employee home and ask him to contact his family physician. The employee should contact his family physician first via telephone and discuss with him the further steps to undertake.

The measure of body temperature is considered as an additional measure; it doesn't replace the usual social distancing measures, established and recommended during the corona pandemic.

Q11: What else can managers and employees do to prevent the spread of 2019-nCoV?

A: Managers and employees are encouraged to practice “social distancing” by limiting the amount of direct contacts with each other and the public at large. Canceling or postponing social gatherings, using telework to the maximum extent possible, conducting meetings electronically instead of in person, planning for liberal work leave policies, and encouraging good personal hygiene can all help to limit the amount of physical contact and the spread of 2019-nCoV.

B. TELEWORK

Q12: May HN employees in Belgium telework?

A: Employees who have already signed a telework agreement or are in the process of obtaining telework may continue to perform their duties from an alternate location or from their home. Maximum flexibility of telework should be utilized. Therefore, if duties and responsibilities can be accomplished on teleworking, employees and supervisors should sign as soon as possible individual telework agreements, in order to make telework possible. Employees are asked to sustain the process of obtaining and implementing telework.

Q13: To which extent can the employer impose telework?

A: According to relevant Belgian legislation, telework is always implemented on a voluntary basis. However, in the current emergency situation employers are asked to offer telework and employees should consider the advantages of teleworking, as it is currently highly recommended by the competent Belgian Labor authorities in order to reduce the spread of the virus.

Q14: What can be done for employees with duties which cannot be performed on telework?

A: Some employees having duties and responsibilities not suitable for telework may be asked to attend their workplace, but they should work keeping a distance of at least 1, 5 meter from other colleagues or customers. With supervisor’s approval they could get some specific tasks, which could be performed from home, provided personal and safety requirements are fulfilled.

C. ANNUAL LEAVE, SICK LEAVE, PREVENTIVE LEAVE, ADMIN LEAVE

Q15: What is the status of an employee who is unable to report to work due to contracting 2019-nCoV?

A: The employee is entitled to use an unlimited amount of sick leave.

Q16: What can employees do if a family member contracts 2019-nCoV?

A: At this time employees can take up to 10 days of unpaid leave for emergency reasons or annual leave. If at a later stage, the Belgian social security system officially recognizes 2019-nCoV as eligible disease for preventive leave, then such leave can be granted.

Q17: What is the status of an employee who is unable to report to workplace due to being isolated or quarantined?

A: Under the direction of competent health authorities in Belgium, employees, who are healthy and are not displaying any symptoms, but who may have been exposed to 2019-nCoV, can be put into quarantine. This means that they will be medically isolated and their movements and contacts to others will be restricted. Employees who are subject to quarantine measures and who have already signed a telework agreement may continue to perform their duties from the place of their medical isolation, provided the required technical and data protection conditions are fulfilled. Those employees who have not signed any telework agreement will be placed on Administrative Leave until their attending physician confirms that there is no risk for contamination.

Q18: What do employees do if their command has closed their facility?

A: Employees should contact their supervisors as they may be required to telework or report to an alternate duty location. If no work is available the employee may be granted Administrative Leave until the facility reopens.

Q19: What are the rights of parents having school-age children?

A: Belgian authorities have already directed the shutdown of schools and other educational institutions. Employees with children at school age are strongly encouraged to adhere to telework. Additionally, they are entitled to take annual leave, provided they have enough days. Employees can take leave without pay as well, which is limited to 10 working days per year.

Q20: What is the status of an employee being in holidays abroad but unable, because of cancelled flight, to report timely to his workplace?

A: In the current critical situation employees are highly recommended to stay within Belgium and not to travel abroad. If for any private reasons employees have to do so, they shall be highly recommended to plan carefully their journey, especially their return options. For those who may be currently outside of Belgium and are not able - due to a cancelled flight (or other travel arrangement) - to attend their workplace at the day and time, agreed before starting holiday, it shall be possible to take additional annual leave or alternatively to take leave without pay. With supervisor's approval teleworking may be also an option, provided all technical requirements are met.

Q21: How shall supervisors manage cases of unused annual leave, carried over from the past year in the current annual leave year?

A: Employees and supervisors are recommended to establish annual leave schedules and to ensure employees are taking continuously their paid days off. In some exceptional circumstances employees may carry over unused annual leave days up to 31 March of the following year, if they were not able to use them due to mission requirements. In the current situation, it may happen that some employees may not be able to take their carried-over leave as planned (e.g. they have particular skills and are needed at their workplace). In such cases, the supervisors shall approve an extension beyond 31 March of the current year, in order to allow these employees to take their annual leave from the last year. The number of days to carry over the 31 March shall not be restricted.

Q22: An employee does not want to start already approved annual leave due to the Corona pandemic. He/She prefers to give back his/her approved annual leave and to telework instead. Is this possible?

A: Annual Leave is scheduled at times agreed upon by employees and supervisors, taking into consideration both, employee's preferences and organizational needs. Consequently, the decision to give back the already approved annual leave cannot be taken unilaterally. Again, it can only be a common agreement between the employer and the employee to set back the approved annual leave, taking into consideration the interests of both sides.

D. DISTRIBUTION OF MANPOWER

Q23: Can work schedules of the HN workforce be changed?

A: The employer has the right to determine content, place and time of work performance at his reasonably exercised discretion as long as employment contract, conditions of employment and labor laws do not guarantee specific work conditions. Therefore, management can modify work schedules temporarily, especially in emergencies, but always acting in respect of relevant Belgian legislation.

Q24: Can HN employees be directed to work at a different worksite?

A: HN employees can be directed to work at a different worksite within their military community or can be sent on TDY to any other duty station within Belgium with an appropriate compensation. However, on a case by case basis, if this change of worksite results in a significant modification of their employment conditions, management shall ensure that Belgian legal requirements in this matter are considered.

Q25: In case of manpower shortage, can management direct employees to support other branches?

A: As a general rule, the employer has the right, especially in cases of emergency, to reorganize the work, to assign new duties and ask employees to help their colleagues. However, when assigning new tasks, the employer shall always watch out for staying consistent with contractual obligations, meaning that new or additional duties are appropriate and comparable with original contractual duties and employee's qualifications. Furthermore a comprehensive memorandum shall be prepared and addressed to the employee, stating the exact duties and supervisory chain to follow.

E. EMPLOYEES WITH THE POTENTIAL FOR SEVERE COURSE OF ILLNESS

Q26: Who is employee at a higher risk of developing a severe course of 2019-nCoV?

A: According to Leading Health Authorities and based on current knowledge, the following groups of persons are at a higher risk of developing a severe course of 2019-n CoV:

- The risk of a serious illness increases steadily with age. Senior people can become more seriously ill after an infection due to the less responsive immune system. Since unspecific disease symptoms such as fever are the immune system's response to an infection, they can be weaker or absent in advanced age, which sometimes means that sick people only consult their physician later.
- Independent of age, people with various underlying diseases, such as:
 - ✓ cardiovascular disease,
 - ✓ respiratory system disorders,
 - ✓ a chronic disease of the liver or kidneys,
 - ✓ diabetes,
 - ✓ cancer,
 - ✓ a weakened/compromised immune system (for example, due to a disease that is accompanied by an immune deficiency or by taking medication, which weakens the immune system, including cortisone).
 - ✓ patients in advancing age with one of the above noted diseases or those with several identified diseases (multimorbidity) are at higher risk than if there was only one underlying disease.

Q27: Are there any specific measures to be implemented at the workplace for employees with the potential for a severe course of illness?

A: If managers have employees from the above mentioned groups in their teams, they should communicate with them and look for ways to reduce any contamination risks for them. General preventive measures, recommended for the protection of all employees, shall be particularly considered for the needs of employees at a higher risk for severe course of illness. The underlying "social distancing" measures, adapted on a case by case basis, shall be implemented for the safety of the concerned employees to the maximum extent possible:

- Provide options for home office to the largest extent possible while meeting operational and organizational requirements,
- Minimize the need for close contacts by ensuring adequate distance from other employees (space between worksite desks)
- Assign alternate work schedules resulting in affected employees performing their duties when a minority of co-workers are at work, particularly if considered to be mission essential,
- Management may also direct the employee to work at a different worksite within the military community.
- Assign alternative work, if possible.

Q28: What can managers do for employees with dependents, working in high risk areas for contamination (e.g. dependents who are nurses, physicians, dentists and other medical personnel)?

A: Employees with dependents working in high risk areas (e.g. medical sector) shall be put in quarantine at their home or other place. If possible, telework shall be provided. If it is not an option, then they will be placed on admin leave.

Q29: How shall managers behave, if an employee gets ill at the workplace?

A: Supervisors are responsible for the safety and health of employees under their supervision, assuring also that first aid is rendered in any critical situations.

- If an employee shows symptoms of illness at his workplace, but he still feels able to go home by himself, then the supervisor will ask him to return home, preferably without using public transport.
- If the employee seems sick and the supervisor is not sure if he can let him go home alone, then he can seek a solution in coordination with employee's family members.
- If the employee seems seriously sick and obviously needs urgent help and medical care, then the supervisor could contact the emergency medical assistance service.

