



International
Labour
Organization



JOINT SDG FUND



COVID-19: Guidance for occupational safety and health for employers and domestic workers





International
Labour
Organization



JOINT SDG FUND



COVID-19: Guidance for occupational safety and health for employers and domestic workers



Copyright © International Labour Organization, 2021

First Edition 2021

Publications of the International Labour Office enjoy copyright under Protocol 2 annex of the Universal Copyright Convention. Nevertheless, short excerpts from them may be reproduced without authorization, on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to ILO Publications (Rights and Licensing), International Labour Office, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland, or by email: rights@ilo.org. The International Labour Office welcomes such applications.

Libraries, institutions, and other users registered with reproduction rights organizations may make copies in accordance with the licences issued to them for this purpose. Visit www.ifrro.org to find the reproduction rights organization in your country.

International Labour Organization, “COVID-19: Guidance for Occupational Safety and Health for Employers and Domestic Workers

ILO Country Office for Mexico and Cuba, Mexico, 2021. 36 pp.

ISBN: 9789220349915 (print)
9789220349922 (web PDF)

The first edition of this document was researched and drafted by the following team: Helmut Schwarzer, Specialist in Social Protection and Economic Development for Mexico, Cuba, Central America, Panama, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Ricardo Irra, Coordinator of the interagency project *Closing Gaps: Making Social Protection Work for Women in Mexico*, at the ILO Office for Mexico and Cuba, and Rodolfo Arias, external consultant for the ILO Office for Mexico and Cuba. This second edition was prepared by Ricardo Irra and Paula Álvarez, external consultant of the ILO Office for Central America, Haiti, Panama, and the Dominican Republic, under the supervision of María Arteta, Gender and non-discrimination specialist at such Office.

The development and publication of this guide was made possible with the financial support of the United Nations Joint Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Fund.

The designations employed in ILO publications, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the International Labour Office concerning the legal status of any country, area, or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers.

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies, and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the ILO of the opinions expressed in them.

Reference to names of firms and commercial products and processes does not imply their endorsement by the International Labour Office, and any failure to mention a particular firm, commercial product or process is not a sign of disapproval.

For more information visit: ilo.org/publns or contact us at: mexico@ilo.org

Printed in Mexico.



Foreword

The second edition of *COVID-19: Guidance for Occupational Safety and Health for Employers and Domestic Workers*, is the result of the collaboration between the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF) and 29 unions and organizations of domestic workers from 15 Latin American countries, who actively participated in reviewing the first version of this material and contributed with their ideas to the strengthening and relevance of the recommendations contained herein, thus making this document a more consolidated tool, with greater attachment to the context of workers and to the plurality of linguistics in the region.

For the ILO, promoting safe and healthy conditions in the workplace is a core element of Decent Work and is also one of the four pillars established by the Organization since the outbreak of the pandemic to address the impact of COVID-19 in the world of work, especially among the most vulnerable sectors exposed to the disease, such as paid domestic work.

The pandemic has further evidenced poor occupational safety conditions faced by domestic workers, both globally and in Latin America. They have not only been disproportionately affected by job losses and reduced wages but have also been affected by a significant increase in their workload and, with it, an increase in the risk of contracting COVID-19, as well as of suffering occupational diseases, both physical and psychosocial. Likewise, this context has demonstrated the importance of ensuring access to social protection and health services of workers and their employers, making it essential to promote their formal registration to social security systems.

Similarly, this situation has highlighted the importance of addressing safety and health in domestic work from a co-responsibility approach, where employers, by fully complying with their obligations, protect themselves and workers, as well as their families, in the face of the contagion of COVID-19 and other risks that may arise in the spaces where domestic work takes place.

For these reasons, and through its Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean and its Country Office for Mexico and Cuba, the ILO presents this document with the mandate and conviction to contribute to the prevention and mitigation of the risk of COVID-19 contagion as well as to improve occupational safety and health conditions for domestic workers.

Vinícius Carvalho Pinheiro
Regional Director of the ILO Office
for Latin America and the
Caribbean

**Pedro Américo Furtado de
Oliveira**
Director of the ILO Country
Office for Mexico and Cuba



Acknowledgements

The first edition of this document received helpful contributions and comments from Carmen Bueno, Occupational Safety and Health Senior Specialist at the ILO Office for the Southern Cone; Claire Hobden, Vulnerable Work and Domestic Work Specialist at ILO headquarters in Geneva; Elva López, Inclusive Labour Markets Specialist at the ILO Office for Argentina; from the National Union of Domestic Workers of Mexico (SINACTRAHO); the Centre for Support and Training for Domestic Workers of Mexico (CACEH); and Fernando Yllanes, President of the Social Security Commission of the Confederation of Industrial Chambers of the United Mexican States (CONCAMIN).

This second edition is the result of the hard work of 29 unions and domestic workers' organizations from 15 Latin American countries, who -during 16 workshops held between October and December 2020- actively contributed to strengthening the workers' perspective and regional outreach of this material. These organizations constitute the essence of this document and their names are mentioned below: Bolivia: FENATRAHOB; Brazil: FENATRAD; Colombia: SINTRASEDOM and UTRASD; Costa Rica: ASTRADOMES; Chile: FESINTRACAP; Dominican Republic: ATH, FENAMUTRA and SINTRADOMES-CASC; Ecuador: UNTHA; Guatemala: ATRAHDOM and SITRADOMSA; Honduras: RTD and SINTRAHO; Mexico: RMEHAC and SINACTRAHO; Nicaragua: FETRADOMOV and SINTRADOMGRA; Panama: SINGRETRADS; Paraguay: SINTRADA, SINTRADINDI, SINTRADI, SINTRADOP-L and SITRADINI; Peru: CCTH, FENTRAHOGARP, IPROFOTH and SINTRAHOL; El Salvador: SIMUTHRES.

Similarly, this new version, in addition to the workshops mentioned above, resulted from the close coordination and collaboration between the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) and the ILO, particularly with the participation of Carmen Britez, Vice-president of the IDWF (UPACP-Argentina); Andrea Morales, member of the IDWF's World Executive Committee for Latin America (FETRADOMOV- Nicaragua); Carmen Cruz, Executive Secretary of the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Domestic Workers (ASTRADOMES- Costa Rica); Adriana Paz, IDWF Regional Coordinator for Latin America; Fernanda Valienti, IDWF Program Officer; María Arteta, Gender and Non-Discrimination Specialist at ILO Office for Central America, Haiti, Panama and the Dominican Republic; Maribel Batista, Specialist in Activities with Workers at the ILO Office for the Southern Cone and Eduardo Rodríguez, Specialist in Activities with Workers at the ILO Office for the Andean Countries.

▶ Remarks

The feminine term of worker (in Spanish: *trabajadora*) and the pronoun 'she' is used in a general way because this material is focused on a sector made up predominantly by women, although the procedures and recommendations also consider men who are engaged in paid domestic work.

The recommendations presented in this document regarding the prevention of COVID-19 are based on the most recent guidelines and guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO). It is suggested to periodically consult the WHO website and communication channels to keep up to date on new measures or indications in this regard.

▶ Table of contents

Introduction	6
Objectives	7
Target audiences	7
Principles	7
Recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19	9
Recommendations for employers	10
What makes a fair and responsible employer at times of COVID-19?	13
Recommendations for workers	15
General occupational safety and health recommendations	20
General Recommendations for employers	21
General Recommendations for workers	21
Psychosocial risk factors	29
Bibliography	32



Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the world of work. In this context, one of the most affected sectors has been paid domestic work in which around 67 million people are employed globally and 75 per cent of them work in the informal economy. Meanwhile, in Latin America and the Caribbean, 9 out of 10 people doing domestic work are women, and 77.5 per cent of them do so in informal conditions.

Despite the important contribution they make while taking care of people and maintaining homes, 72 per cent of domestic workers globally, and 77 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, have faced a significant loss in their income or have become unemployed, further increasing their poverty situation.

For those people who continue to work, the current situation of the pandemic and the eventual normalization of activities, has also implied an increase in their tasks, the extension of working hours, and with it, an increase in the risk of exposure to both COVID-19 and other physical and mental health conditions related to the activities they usually do.

For this reason, and with the purpose of helping to improve working and occupational safety and health conditions of domestic workers, it was deemed necessary to develop a guide - aimed at both employers and workers - with guidance and recommendations to eliminate, prevent, and reduce the risks of exposure to COVID-19 and other hazards associated with daily household chores during the pandemic, especially in the context of returning to activities after social distancing or suspension of the employment relationship.

This guide includes information and guidance and does not create new responsibilities or replace existing legal obligations regarding occupational safety and health.



Objectives

- To guide domestic workers and those who employ them on preventive measures against the contagion of COVID-19 and other risks associated with the pandemic, within the framework of the return to work activities due to the progressive lifting of restrictions and confinement measures.
- To promote social dialogue and negotiation on occupational safety and health between domestic workers and their employers.
- To offer guidelines and promote safe and healthy work practices, both physically and psychosocially, from a human and labour rights perspective for domestic workers.

Target audiences

- **Domestic workers:** those who perform domestic work within the framework of an employment relationship and may be employed by a single household or by multiple employers –on a regular basis and in exchange for a salary. Their work may include tasks such as cleaning the house, cooking, washing, and ironing clothes, taking care of children, or elderly or sick members of a family, taking care of household pets, and other domestic activities, whatever their hiring status and regardless of whether they work in the formal or informal sector.
- **Employers:** those with whom workers maintain their employment relationship and from whom they receive instructions to carry out their tasks.

Principles

- Employers must provide decent work for domestic workers, which is characterized by being productive, having a decent salary and developing in freedom, equality, and in conditions of respect, as well as ensuring social security protection and the enforcement of applicable labour standards.
- Occupational safety and health is a right of domestic workers and a responsibility of employers, who, in the context of COVID-19, also have the obligation to implement measures to eliminate and prevent the risk of disease transmission, as well as ensuring the worker a safe return to her work activities.



- Employers must ensure that all preventive and protective measures are taken to minimize workplace hazards.
- Workers have the obligation to cooperate in the fulfilment of the recommendations and indications established by employers regarding safety and health measures, including self-care.
- Occupational safety and health should be seen as a fundamental investment to protect workers, employers and their respective families.

The guidelines contained in this guide respond to the principles derived from international labour standards, which prioritize the most effective measures related to occupational hazards. As a result, this guide presents measures regarding, first, risk elimination; second, risk reduction and finally, personal protection.



Recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19



This section presents the main prevention and reduction actions that employers and domestic workers should follow in order to avoid the transmission of COVID-19.

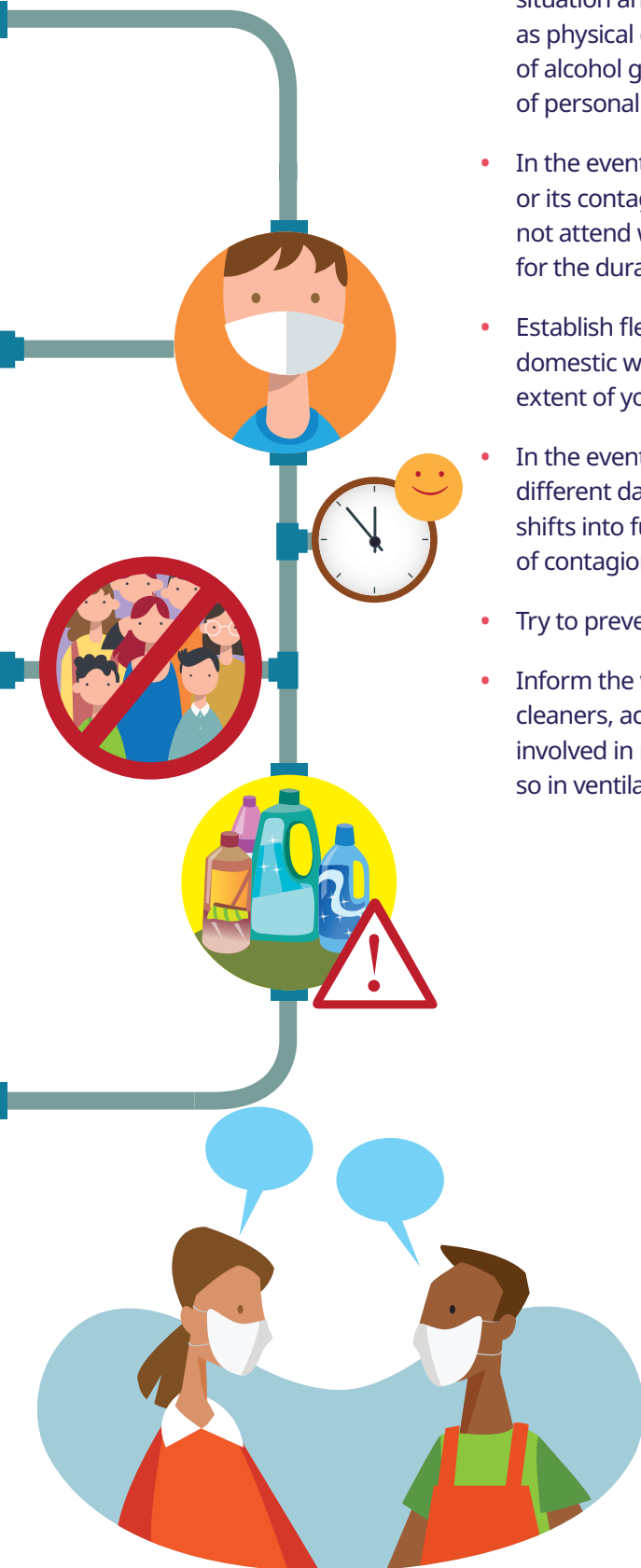
▶ Recommendations for employers

- Maintain constant communication with the worker about the pandemic situation and offer clear and timely information on preventive measures such as physical distancing, frequent hand washing with soap and water or the use of alcohol gel, avoiding touching the eyes, nose and mouth, and the correct use of personal protective equipment.
- In the event that you or someone else in your home has symptoms of COVID-19 or its contagion is confirmed, immediately inform the worker so that she does not attend work. Consider the possibility of granting paid leave to the worker for the duration of the risk of contagion.
- Establish flexible entry and exit times to reduce the risk of exposure of the domestic worker in hours of intense traffic in public transport systems or, to the extent of your possibilities, offer to pay taxi or similar means of transportation.
- In the event that the worker provides her services to the same employer on different days of the week and part-time, it may be advisable to group such shifts into full working days to reduce transfers and, as a consequence, the risk of contagion.
- Try to prevent the worker from doing activities in crowded places.
- Inform the worker about the health risks of the chemicals used (detergents or cleaners, acids, caustic soda, and others in common use) and the danger involved in mixing them. Make sure that when they are used, the worker can do so in ventilated places and spaces.

▶ Remember that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is even more important to:

- Register the domestic worker in a social security system and make the corresponding contributions, according to the applicable legislation.
- Contribute to the access of the domestic worker, as well as her family, to health care services.
- Make sure you and your family are registered in a social security system.

Ensuring social protection of the people who work for you contributes to your own health and well-being.
 SENTENCE IS CUT OFFING.



- Explain in detail the tasks to be carried out, providing the appropriate time and means, avoid excessive tasks that could cause insufficient rest for the worker and respect rest hours and times, especially in the cases of live-in domestic workers.
- Promote autonomy and take into account the suggestions made by the worker regarding the development of her tasks.
- Offer the worker time to attend to personal matters, either to take care of a member of her family or for health problems.
- Make sure that the worker is always treated with respect - free from any form of abuse or violence - from you or any member of your family. Also consider that problems between your family members can affect the worker.
- Respect the privacy and dignity of the domestic worker. Regarding live-in domestic workers, make sure to provide them with a clean, safe, and comfortable room, and that they have access to quality food, and services such as telephone and internet.
- Provide the worker, at no cost, the protective gear (mask), to avoid the spread of COVID-19, according to the guidelines defined by the health authorities. Ask the worker not to share the personal protection gear provided.
- Make sure that you and your family comply with preventive measures such as physical distancing, frequent hand washing with soap and water, avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, as well as using the mask when you cannot maintain a healthy distance.

► **If the worker has the following symptoms - the most common ones - related to COVID-19:**

- Fever, tiredness, or dry cough
- Body ache, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, or diarrhoea

Provide guidance and support the worker to comply with the protocols established by health authorities.

It is essential to promote communication and trust with the domestic worker and avoid any form of discrimination in case of symptoms of COVID-19, or any other disease. If this principle is not applied, barriers to reporting cases may arise, thus increasing the possibility of contagion.

In the event that the contagion of the worker is confirmed, the employer is urged to offer a paid leave during the period of her recovery.





Inform the worker to apply the following measures during the development of her activities:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water or disinfect with alcohol gel, especially when arriving at home, before and after handling garbage, waste or food, as well as after touching surfaces such as handrails, doorknobs/ knobs/ door handles, railings, handling money, keys, having contact with animals, among others.
- Maintain a minimum distance of one meter from anyone and greet without physical contact.
- Provide natural ventilation by opening doors and windows. Avoid the use of air conditioners and standalone fans.
- To clean surfaces and appliances, recommend the frequent use of liquid solutions. For electronic and delicate devices, use alcohol-based solutions that contain at least 70 per cent alcohol. For general surfaces such as doorknobs, household appliances and other everyday use, use 10 per cent chlorine bleach solutions in water. Remind her to keep in mind that the water and bleach solution must be prepared every day, while the alcohol and water solution can be prepared once a week.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth. Cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing into the crease of the elbow or with a tissue. Avoid sharing utensils for personal use (glasses, cutlery, personal hygiene items, etc.).
- When taking care of pets, clean the paws and snout with soap and water after every walk. Do not use any chemical product for cleaning them.
- Stay up to date with the information that the health and government authorities publish on how to protect ourselves from COVID-19.



▶ What makes a fair and responsible employer at times of COVID-19?

Employer: Ask yourself the following questions to find out if you are acting fairly and responsibly with the worker. The more times you answer yes, the fairer and more responsible you will be. If you answer negatively, kindly take actions to improve.

Communication and information to take care of the worker, my family and me

- Do I worry about asking worker every week about her personal and family situation?
- Do I know where the worker lives, what means of transportation she uses to come to work and if this represents a risk to her health and mine in times of COVID-19?
- Do I maintain an open, fluid conversation and seek updated information on the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic in our town, to assess the need to adopt more or new protection measures for both?
- Do I inform the worker about the measures to be taken to promote safety and health during her work and do I respond to her questions and address her concerns in this regard?

▶ Remember that anyone can spread and be infected with COVID-19. Preventing the transmission of the disease is everyone's responsibility.

Adoption of protective measures by the members of my family:

- Do I make sure that my home is a safe space and complies with the necessary measures to protect my worker regarding occupational safety and health?
- Do I comply and demand that all members of my family and even visitors comply with the protective measures when entering the house (wear a mask, wash hands, etc.)?
- Do I avoid social gatherings, parties, and events in my home during the pandemic so as not to put my family and the worker at risk?
- Do I rearrange household chores to avoid the worker coinciding in the same room with a member of the family?



- Do I supply - without any discount from the salary of the worker - personal protection gear to my worker such as masks, gloves, and disinfectant gel as part of her work tools in times of pandemic?
- If it is not possible to maintain the appropriate physical distance, do I make sure that during the worker's working day everyone in the house wears masks, not only the worker, but all the members of the family?
- In the case of a live-in domestic worker, do I provide her with a safe and clean room, where she has privacy and is comfortable? And do I make sure that she has access to quality food and services such as telephone and internet?
- Do I make sure that my family and I maintain physical distance of at least one meter from the worker?
- Do I open doors and windows to maintain good ventilation?
- Do I make entry and exit times more flexible to prevent the worker from coming by public transport during hours of heavy traffic?
- Do I make sure not to increase tasks during the pandemic, to avoid generating more workload and respect her working and rest hours?
- Do I support the worker to cover the payment of a taxi or other form of individual transportation?
- Have I registered my worker to contribute to a social security system as established by law?
- Do I avoid asking the worker to go to crowded places, such as supermarkets, shopping malls, and banks as part of her duties?

If a member of my family tests positive for COVID-19

- Do I immediately inform the worker and ask her not to come to work, but still pay her salary for the duration of the risk of contagion?
- Do I offer support for the worker to get tested for COVID-19?
- Once the COVID-19 contagion situation in my family has been resolved, do I inform the worker for her reinstatement, following all necessary safety measures?
- If the worker tests positive for COVID-19, do I make sure she keeps her job and salary for the duration of the disease? And do I contribute to pay for medical expenses in case she is not registered in a social security system?

▶ Recommendations for workers

During the transfer to and from the workplace:

- Try to respect the recommended physical distance of one meter when using public transport, and keep an empty seat in between, both to your sides, as well as in front of and behind you. **If possible, ask your employer to support you by paying taxi or other forms of individual transportation services for the duration of the pandemic.**
- To the best of your ability, propose to your employer to change the entry and exit times to avoid crowds on public transport during hours of heavy traffic.
- Wear a mask that protects from nose to chin. This gear must be provided by the employers at no cost to you.

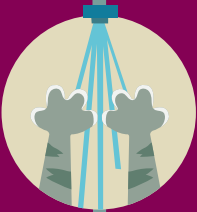
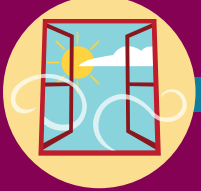
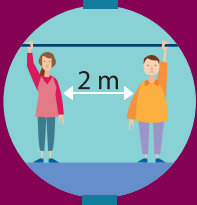
During the development of your activities:

- Consider the preventive measures for occupational safety and health that your employer establishes for the prevention of accidents and occupational diseases, as well as the recommendations to avoid the contagion and spread of COVID-19.
- Maintain a constant dialogue with your employer and request that they provide you with clear and timely information on preventive measures.
- Agree to be tested for COVID-19 as determined by your employer (pregnancy and HIV tests should never be included).



Apply the following measures during your work activities:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, or disinfect with alcohol gel, especially when arriving at home, as well as before and after handling garbage, waste or food; after touching surfaces such as handrails, doorknobs/ knobs/ door handles, or railings; handling money or keys; having contact with animals; before and after wearing gloves or a mask, among others.
- Where possible, keep a minimum distance of one meter with any other person. Greet without any sort of physical contact.
- Carry out your activities with open doors and windows to produce a natural air stream inside the house if the conditions allow it.
- Clean the surfaces with 10per cent chlorine/bleach solutions on water, or with 70per cent alcohol solutions. It is important that the chlorine solutions are prepared every day and to not add any other chemical product. Use gloves to apply these products. (For more information on the safe usage of chemical products for home use, go to page 23).
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Cover your mouth with your elbow or with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing. Do not share gear for personal use.
- Keep up to date with the information provided by the Public Health Authorities on the way to protect yourself and the other against COVID-19.
- Avoid going to public spaces or with high concentrations of people.
- If you are in charge of taking care of pets like dogs, ensure your walks are short, in times and places with few people, and avoid contact with other animals or people.
- Clean the paws and snout with water and soap after every walk. Then, wash your hands with enough water and soap.
- Clean the facemasks and gloves if they are reusable following the instructions of the supplier or manufacturer. If these are disposable, place them in a closed plastic bag and throw them in the trash. With that, you will prevent this gear from become contamination sources.
- Use facemasks (disposable or not), preferably during the whole work shift and whenever you are in closed areas where you cannot keep the minimum one meter distance away from other people and where there is no proper ventilation. These must be provided by the employer, as these are considered as instruments/gear required to work.



- Report to the employer immediately if you or any person living with you shows COVID-19-related symptoms or if the contagion has been confirmed.

► Remember that the most common COVID-19-related symptoms are::

- Fever, tiredness, or dry cough.
- Body pain, nasal congestion, nasal discharge, throat pain, loss of taste and smell, and diarrhoea.



Care for ill people or people with COVID-19 symptoms:

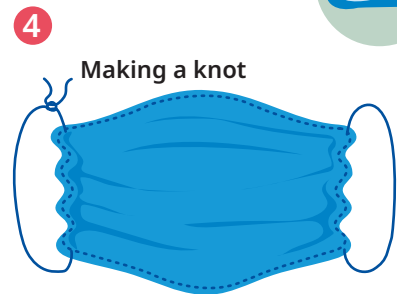
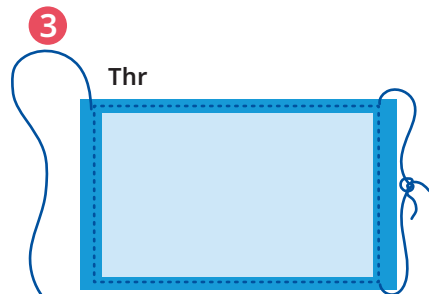
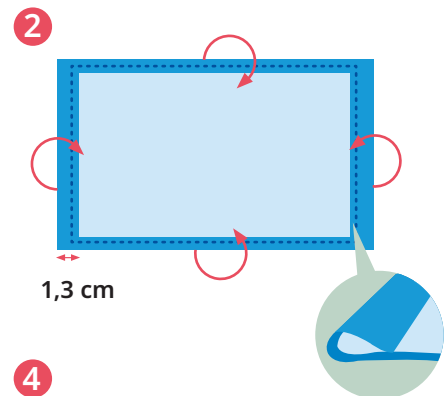
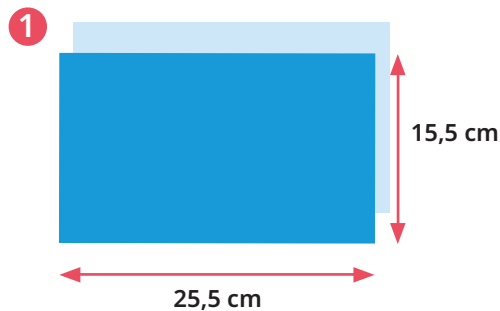
► This activity implies a high risk to COVID-19 exposure, so it is highly advisable to be carried out exclusively by trained workers prepared for when this happens and who have agreed to carry out these functions with the employer.

- Make sure to have gloves, facemasks, eye protection or other personal protection equipment. These must be provided by the employer.
- Reinforce personal hygiene, especially handwashing with water and soap.
- Quarantined people must be isolated in a room with good ventilation.
- If you are not attending the person directly, keep at least one meter of distance. Use a facemask every time
- you are in the same room as the person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Dispose of the facemask after using it.
- When transferring or urgently moving a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, or if you are directly taking care of them (for example, feeding them) use an apron, gloves, facemask, and eye protection. These elements must also be provided by the employer.
- Use 10 per cent chloride solutions to sanitize aprons or other reusable protection gear.
- Place the household waste in trash bags and containers with lids. Always wash your hands afterwards.
- Use gloves when manipulating dirty clothing and wash your hands with water and soap afterwards.



Which facemask can we use?

- It is recommended to use surgical facemasks if you are older than 60 years, suffer from chronic illnesses, have symptoms of illnesses or are taking care of an ill person.
- The use of fabric facemasks is recommended only for people younger than 60 years, and which are in a good medical condition.
- Fabric facemasks can be home-made. It is important these are three-layered: with an inner absorbent layer (for example, cotton,) an external one (polyester) and an intermediate one which enhances filtration (polypropylene¹).
- Avoid using facemasks with exhaling valves.



¹Polypropylene is the most common material in medical facemasks. If you do not have access to this material, it can be substituted with another cotton layer.

How to use facemasks correctly²

- Remember to always wash your hands before putting on the facemask.
- Make sure the facemask is in good condition, for example, without tears and holes.
- Place the facemask carefully over your face and adjust it to avoid spaces between the face and the facemask.
- Make sure the facemask covers the nose, mouth, and chin.
- Avoid touching the facemask while putting it on.
- Wash your hands before removing the facemask.
- Change your facemask when its wet.
- Remove the facemask without touching the front part. Remove the elastic band behind the ears keeping the facemask away from the face and clothing, to avoid touching the surfaces of the facemask which could be contaminated.
- If the facemask is not reusable, throw it away in an appropriate container and do not use it again.
- If the facemask is reusable, place it in a sealed and clean plastic bag where it can be stored until it can be cleaned. Do not place it around the arm or wrist or pull it down for it to rest around your chin or neck.
- You must wash your hands after throwing the facemask away.
- Do not remove the facemask to talk.
- The facemask is a personal element which must not be shared.
- Wash the fabric facemasks with soap or detergent, and preferably with hot water (at least 60° C) at least once a day.

Recommendations on vaccination against COVID-19

Once safe and effective vaccines against Covid-19 are developed, it is important that ALL OF US are vaccinated, following the vaccination strategies and plans determined in every country. Bear in mind: **No one is safe until everyone is safe.**

²OMS "Coronavirus disease (2019-nCoV) advice for the public: When and how to use masks." Visit the WHO website and communication channels to stay up to date on the information and recommendations on prevention against COVID-19.



General occupational safety and health recommendations



This section presents the recommendations that both employers and workers must comply to prevent risks and accidents at work, ensuring most common domestic activities are carried out in safety and healthy working conditions.

General recommendations for employers

As it was previously mentioned in this guide the employers of domestic workers are responsible of facilitating a safe and healthy environment for their workers. Such that employers must provide domestic workers with all the conditions so they can carry out their activities in an adequate and risk-free way to their health and integrity, both physical and mental. This implies ensuring domestic workers have the right tools to develop their activities, and so they can carry them out in a safe environment.

In that sense, and unless there is a special agreement, **the employers is required to identify and correct problems and flaws in the environments of the house where workers carry out their tasks, as well as providing the equipment and tools necessary to carry them out.** Likewise, the employers **must ensure their workers always receive a respectful treatment from all the people leaving inside their house.**

▶ All equipment, utensils, tools, artefacts or materials required by the worker to develop activities must be provided by the employer in good condition and at no cost for the workers.



General recommendations for domestic workers

General cleanliness

General cleaning tasks include the tasks of sweeping, vacuuming, mopping, dusting, taking out the trash, cleaning toilets, cooking, cleaning windows and large windows, among others. Below is a list of preventive measures applicable to the most common risks associated with the development of tasks typically carried out in this activity:

Falling on the same level/slipping

- Review the conditions of both the stairs and floor levels.
- Make sure there is no grease, oil, or unconventional objects on the floor and in the workplaces.
- Identify the risk conditions and situations in the work areas (loose cables, buckets, brooms, toys, among others).
- Use closed and comfortable shoes with slip-proof soles and without heels.





Falling on different levels/fall from heights

- Use double-sided stepladders (lean-to ladders) to reach high objects or to clean windows and walls. If available, use window cleaners or other far reaching tools.
- Review the stepladder before using and use only if they are in good condition.
- Use the stepladder only when it is totally open and perfectly balanced in a flat and firm surface.
- Avoid wearing sandals or flip-flops when going up the stepladder.
- Avoid using chairs, furniture, or boxes to reach high objects or to carry on any other activities in altitude.
- Avoid carrying instruments or utensils on your hands when going up the stepladder.



Hitting against objects

- Keep the workplace tidy and clear.
- Always carry out your activities with proper lighting.
- Make sure the spaces are safe when you walk from one place to another.

Managing and moving objects



- Lift objects by squatting, that is, flex your legs so that your buttocks are near the ground or resting on your heels. With a straight back, place the object near your body. Lift the object using your leg strength and not your back.
- Ask for help when you need to move or lift heavy objects. When possible, use a tugging cart to move heavy objects.
- Avoid excessive physical efforts.
- Rest and make stretching or relaxation exercises when lifting objects is a regular part of your work.

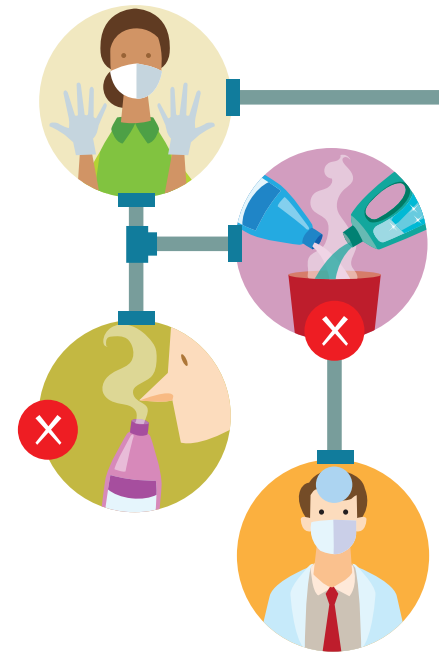
Repetitive movements

- Make sure you vary your daily tasks.
- Make sure you take frequent pauses to rest your arms and feet.
- Make stretching exercises for your arms, forearms, and legs during the day.



Exposure to chemical products (any substance different from water. It can be a liquid, powder, or spray.)

- Use disposable facemasks and latex gloves to be protected when continuously using these products.
- Ask employer to always buy labelled cleaning products.
- Keep the products in their original container with their label. Never change its container.
- Avoid mixing products, as this could cause reactions and produce toxic clouds.
- Avoid smelling to determine if it is a chemical product. If you do not know the product, do not use it.
- Properly ventilate the places where chemical products are used.
- Avoid eating food near chemical products or while you are using them.
- Call emergency medical services for help in case of an emergency.



CHLORINE **AMMONIA**

Mixing chlorine and ammoniac produces a toxic gas which could damage lung and liver issues, resulting in shortness of breath and chest pain.

VINEGAR **HYDROGEN PEROXIDE**

When vinegar and hydrogen peroxide (hydrogen peroxide) are mixed, highly corrosive and dangerous substances are obtained, especially for the skin.

CHLORINE **ALCOHOL-BASED GELS**

By mixing chlorine and alcohol-based gel, chloroform is obtained. This compound can cause respiratory cardiac arrest as it is a highly toxic chemical.

CHLORINE **VINEGAR**

Mixing chlorine with acids such as vinegar or lemon produces chlorine gas which is highly toxic and can cause coughing, breathing problems, and eye burns and redness.

Care of the elderly, sick and children

This activity consists of taking care and providing assistance to elderly, sick, disabled people, and children. Below is a list of preventive measures applicable to the most common risks associated with the development of tasks typically carried out in this activity:

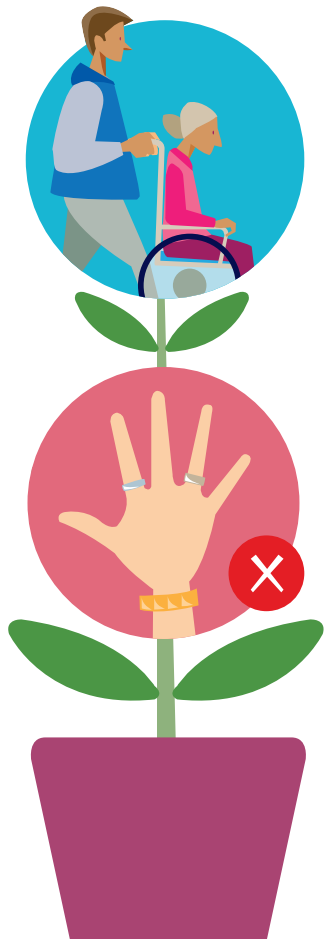
- ▶ Considering the particular functions that the worker must performed to take care of people -especially sick, elderly and people with disabilities-, it is highly recommended that she has special training on how to carry out these tasks.

Excessive efforts and forced postures

- Always move sick, elderly, or disabled people with the help of another person and, if this is impossible, use girdles or other lifting devices.
- When moving or carrying a person you should:
 - Keep the person you are carrying as close to your body as possible.
 - Keep your feet apart, moving one foot forward in the direction of travel to achieve good support.
 - Avoid twisting and keep shoulders and pelvis aligned.
 - Bend your knees slightly, without changing your body's centre of gravity, and maintain the natural curves of your spine.
 - Keep movements smooth, avoiding impulsive movements and jerks.
- Take breaks and do stretching and relaxation exercises after overexertion.

Physical aggression

- Ask the employer for training on techniques for handling conflict and aggressive situations (for example, to learn how to deal with aggressive people in situations of emotional imbalance, techniques for self-protection against aggression and relaxation techniques).
- Take off rings or similar objects from your hands to avoid injury to the person or breaking gloves.
- Keep sharp or corrosive liquids out of reach of children or adults with functional limitations.



Laundry: washing, drying, and ironing of clothes

This activity entails washing and ironing garments and different colour clothes at home. It involves using household appliances, such as washing machines, dryers, irons and, in some cases, conventional washing machines. Below is a list of preventive measures applicable to the most common risks associated with the development of tasks typically carried out in this activity:

Electrical burns and body contact with an electrical source

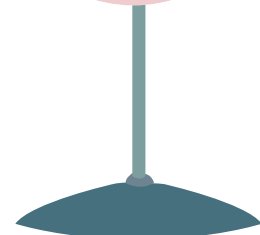
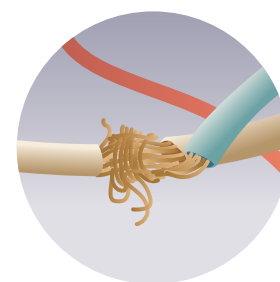
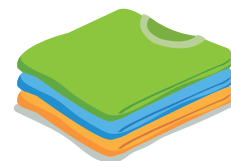
- Avoid operating electrical appliances (washing machines, dryers, and electrical appliances) when your body is wet or when your feet are bare.
- Ask the employer to inform you if any appliances are in bad shape, and advise if you identify any damage to irons, washing machines, kitchen appliances, cables, extension cords or any other equipment.
- Avoid handling electrical appliances in poor condition and do not attempt to repair them.
- Avoid connecting several appliances to the same outlet and make sure that the outlet does not overheat.
- Avoid leaving electrical appliances running unattended.
- Keep electrical appliances well ventilated.
- Use the iron with caution. Avoid contact with the steam from the iron and, when you have finished using it, put it away when it has cooled down. Never leave the hot iron on the ironing surface or any other surface.

Cooking

Preparing food preparation includes washing, cutting, handling, cooking, and preserving food, among other tasks. Below is a list of preventive measures applicable to the most common risks associated with the development of tasks typically carried out in this activity:

Cuts and puncture wounds

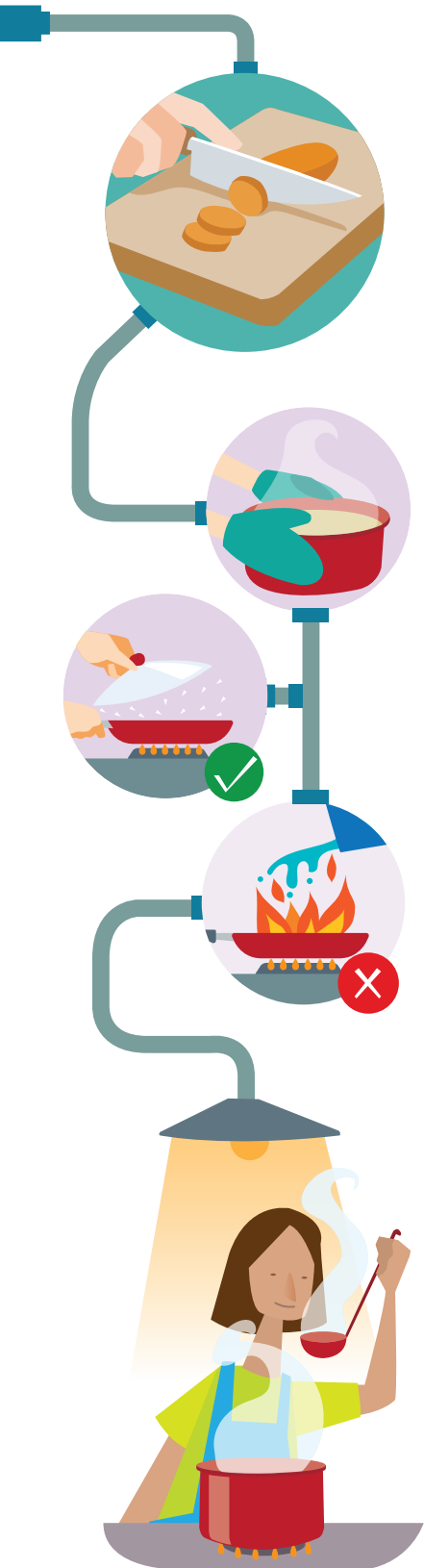
- Make sure there is sufficient lighting when handling sharps.
- Use a stable, smooth cutting board and keep knives and other cutting tools tidy.
- Cut away from your body. Make sure no body parts are in the cutting path.
- Make sure your hands are clean and dry when using knives to prevent them from slipping.



- Avoid using knives for purposes other than those recommended by the manufacturer (e.g., for opening cans).
- Make sure that no part of the knife protrudes from the edge of any surface on which it is placed. Store knives properly when not in use.
- After cleaning, leave knives or sharp objects in the drainer with the tips downwards.

Burns

- Take your time to work; do not work under pressure.
- Avoid using cooking equipment that is in poor condition.
- Use wall- or floor-anchored stoves. The kitchen grill should be in a horizontal position.
- Keep range hood filters clean and in good condition. Tell the employer when they need to be replaced.
- Protect your hands and forearms from heat and splashes of hot water or oil.
- Try to cook on grills or stoves that are farther away from the edge.
- Wear heat-resistant gloves when moving hot containers or handling them inside a hot oven.
- Use wide, wide-based containers that do not tip over easily and have heat-insulating handles.
- Place the frying pan handle inward, making sure that it does not protrude from the grill, to avoid overturning.
- When frying food, use a lid to avoid burns from splashing hot oil.
- If while cooking there is a knock on the door, the phone rings or you need to leave the house, turn off the stove. Never leave food on the stove unattended.
- Do not pour water if there is a fire in the pan, as this will fuel the fire. Cover the pan with the appropriate lid or with a well-moistened kitchen towel.



Gardening

Gardening and landscaping work involve preparing and treating the soil, as well as planting, transplanting, taking care of, maintaining, and pruning trees, shrubs, and bushes. This activity is typically carried out outdoors. Below is a list of preventive measures applicable to the most common risks associated with the development of tasks typically carried out in this activity:

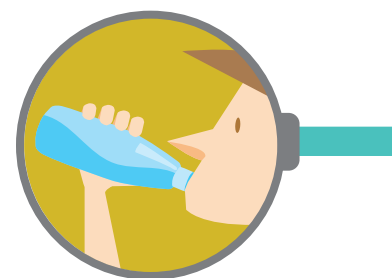
Insect bites

- Use personal protection equipment appropriate to the task, e.g. boots, gloves, insect repellent, and face and head protection, as well as other items that cover arms and legs.
- Stay away from areas where there are many insects such as bees, wasps, or hornets. If an insect attacks you, move away slowly and calmly.



Sun exposure

- Avoid exposure to the sun's rays when they are most intense (commonly between noon and four o'clock in the afternoon) or work in the shade.
- Use sunscreen, wide-brimmed hats, and UV protective clothing, which should be provided by the employer.
- Remember that trees, umbrellas, and awnings do not fully protect against solar radiation.
- Drink water regularly.



Awkward postures

- Avoid awkward postures.
- Take short, frequent breaks. Rest for 10 to 15 minutes every 1 to 2 hours of continuous work.
- Try to stretch your muscles while resting.
- Change your posture, for example, by combining tasks that require movement of different body parts.



Cutting instruments and electrical appliances

- Before using sharp tools, such as shovels, rakes, knives or scissors, check that they are not defective.
- Ask the employer for adequate space to store tools.
- Check that electric cutters have protective shields or guards and that switches contacts are in good condition.
- If you do not know how to use electrical equipment, ask before using them.



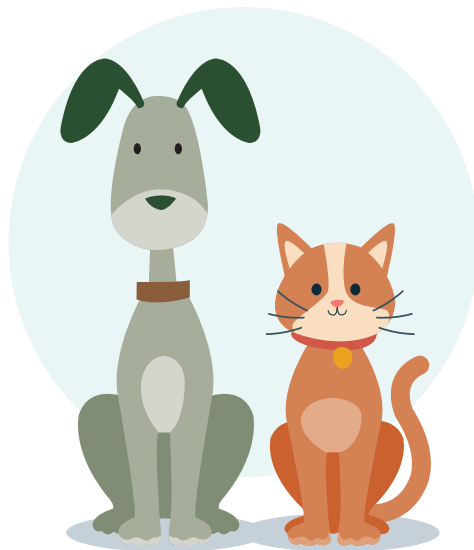


- Avoid using benches, chairs, buckets, or other aids for working at heights. Try to use stepladders (see elevated falls).
- Before pruning trees or other plants, check that the surface on which the ladder is placed is flat.
- Use personal protection equipment, such as eye (goggles) and hand protection.

Taking care of pets

Taking care of pets, mainly dogs, and cats, is an activity that can be included as household work. It is important to know and apply the following measures:

- Check with employer that pets are dewormed and have up-to-date vaccinations.
- When washing pets and using soaps and other cleaning substances, wear protective gloves.
- Use gloves or bags to pick up droppings and dispose of them in the appropriate containers.
- When walking pets, always use a leash to avoid the aggressive responses against other pets or people. Use raincoats or umbrellas in rainy or hot weather.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after walks.



Psychosocial risk factors



Psychosocial risk factors are work-related stress that have the potential to negatively affect an individual's psychological and physical health. The most frequent signs can be low mood and low motivation, as well as anxiety and depression.

Psychosocial risk factors are those that can occur when the dynamics, conditions and work environment, among others, have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of workers, and can result in physical reactions such as digestive problems, changes in appetite and weight, skin reactions, fatigue, headaches or body aches for no apparent reason. Psychosocial risk factors are also associated with increased use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs, and irritability, as ways of coping with problems. In the case of domestic workers, psychosocial risk factors such as long working hours without respecting rest periods; night shifts; physical, psychological and emotional overload; lack of recognition; monotonous and repetitive tasks; unfair, discriminatory and threatening treatment; and working alone can result in work-related stress, anxiety disorders, fatigue and emotional exhaustion, among other ailments.



Prevention and care measures for workers

Prevention and attention to psychosocial risk factors require comprehensive actions, which can be developed individually or with the support of groups, such as workers' organizations or trade unions.

Group measures

To prevent stress:

- Complete work tasks at your pace and based on preferences.
- Leave the hardest tasks for peak performance times, following the indications established by the employer.
- Establish breaks during the workday.

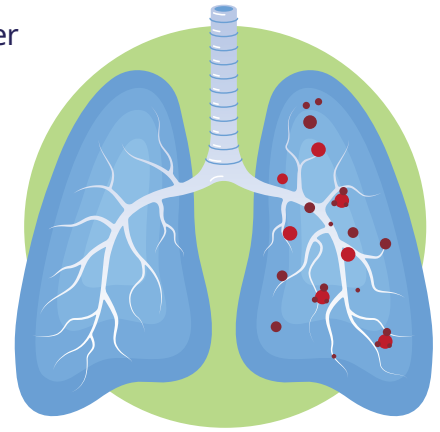
Personal measures

If you think you suffer from:

- Stress:
 - Become familiar with your own reactions to stress. Use them as warning signs.
 - Try to find out the causes and reasons triggering your stress.
 - Bear in mind that some things triggering stress may be minor. Do not overreact to minor things that do not require so much energy and attention.
 - Seek social or, if possible, psychological support.



- Workplace violence:
 - Let your employer know if you are being harassed by a member of the family where you work.
 - If you are assaulted, threatened, humiliated, or injured by another person in the course of your work, report the incident to the authorities.
- Tobacco, alcohol, or drug use:
 - Consider the use of these products as a health problem.
 - Identify the situations in which you feel the need to use these products and avoid them if possible.
 - Seek support for treatment and rehabilitation.



▶ Remember that tobacco use increases the risk of respiratory diseases, heart disease, and cancer.

- Other actions that can help you improve your personal situation include:
 - Keeping a good diet.
 - Being physically active on a regular basis.
 - Getting a healthy and restorative sleep.





Bibliography

- ILO (2020). "Beyond contagion and starvation: giving domestic workers another way forward". May 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_743542.pdf
- ILO (2020). "Managing work-related psychosocial risks during the COVID-19 pandemic". June. 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_748638.pdf
- ILO (2020). "Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on loss of jobs and hours among domestic workers". June. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_747961.pdf
- Ministry of Work, Employment and Social Security of Argentina (2020). "Employment, work and health conditions for Domestic Workers in Private Houses. 2018 ECETSS results". April 2020. http://www.trabajo.gob.ar/downloads/estadisticas/ecetss/ecetss_casas-particulares.pdf
- Health Insurance of Auxiliary House Personnel and Auxiliary Personnel Union of Private Houses (2020). "OSPACP and UPACP care recommendations against COVID-19. Domestic Service Personnel Training School". 2020. <https://www.ospacp.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/RECOMENDACIONES-OSPACP-UPACP-POR-EL-COVID19.pdf>
- ILO (2011). "Domestic Worker Convention. 2011 (num. http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/es/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::p12100_ILO_CODE;C189)
- ILO (2012). "SOLVE. Integrating health promotion into OSH policies in the workplace". Geneva, Switzerland. 2012. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_203380.pdf
- ILO (2017). "Occupational Safety and Health Guide for Domestic Workers of Paraguay". Santiago de Chile. 2017. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--americas/--ro-lima/--sro-santiago/documents/publication/wcms_571357.pdf
- ILO (2020). COVID-19 and the world of work: Repercussions and responses. March 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_739158.pdf
- ILO (2020). "ILO Observatory: COVID-19 and the world of work. Second Edition. Updated estimated and analysis". April 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_740981.pdf
- ILO (2020). Technical report. COVID-19 and domestic work in Argentina, ILO Country Office for Argentina. Buenos Aires, Argentina. April 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--americas/--ro-lima/--ilo-buenos_aires/documents/publication/wcms_742115.pdf
- ILO (2020). "A 10-step tool for a safe and healthy return to work in times of COVID-19". May 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--americas/--ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_745842.pdf
- ILO (2020). "ILO Standards and COVID-19 (coronavirus). FAQ - Key provisions of international labour standards relevant to the evolving COVID19 outbreak. May 2020 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_norm/---normes/documents/publication/wcms_739939.pdf
- WHO "Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19. Interim guidance, 5 June 2020" https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332293/WHO-2019-nCov-IPC_Masks-2020.4-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- WHO "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public: When and how to use masks" (Update, 1 December 2020) <https://www.who.int/es/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks#:~:text=Actualizaci%C3%B3n%20el%201%20de%20diciembre%20de%202020&text=Las%20mascarillas%20deben%20utilizarse%20como,adeuada%20contra%20la%20COVID%2D19.>
- UN Women, ILO and ECLAC (2020). "Domestic workers in Latin America and the Caribbean during the COVID-19 crisis". June 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--americas/--ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_747874.pdf
- WIEGO (2020). "Domestic workers: Fighting COVID-19 together." <https://www.wiego.org/domestic-workers-fighting-covid-19-together-resources>



International
Labour
Organization



JOINT SDG FUND

