

A workplace policy on HIV/AIDS: what it should cover

A workplace policy provides the framework for action to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and manage its impact. It:

- commits the workplace to take action
- lays down a standard of behaviour for all employees (whether infected or not) and defines the rights of all
- gives guidance to managers and workforce representatives
- assists an enterprise to plan for HIV/AIDS and reduce its impact.

A policy may consist of a detailed document just on HIV/AIDS, setting out programme as well as policy issues; it may be part of a wider policy or agreement on safety, health and working conditions; it may be as short as “This company [or other workplace, e.g. Ministry, hospital...] pledges to combat discrimination on the basis of HIV status and to protect health and safety through programmes of prevention and care”.

It’s important that the policy should promote action, not hold it up. For this reason it may be better to have a simple policy, and include more details in workplace agreements or contracts. In any case, it should be the product of consultation and collaboration between management and workers.

The *ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work* provides guidelines for the development of policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS in the workplace. These encourage a consistent approach to HIV/AIDS, based on ten key principles, while being flexible enough to address the different needs of individual workplaces.

Policies should be developed by the people concerned. No one policy is relevant to all situations, but the sections opposite can usefully be included. Sample language is available in a separate document (see contact details overleaf).

The policy

I General statement

The policy begins with a general statement or introduction that relates the HIV/AIDS policy to the local situation, including some or all of the following:

- The reason why the company has an HIV/AIDS policy and how it relates to other company policies
- Compliance with national/local laws and sectoral agreements

II Policy framework and general principles

The policy establishes some general principles as the basis for other provisions, emphasizing the need to oppose stigma and discrimination (see the ten principles of the ILO Code of Practice).

III Specific provisions

The policy should include clauses on the following areas:

- 1) The protection of the rights of workers affected by HIV/AIDS
- 2) Prevention through information, education and training
- 3) Care and support for workers and their families.

IV Implementation and monitoring

Many policies remain pieces of paper that don’t change anything. It helps to set out the steps that need to be taken to put the policy into practice, in particular establishing structures and appointing responsible persons (see overleaf).

If the policy doesn’t take the form of a negotiated agreement, a short clause could be added where management and worker representatives pledge their full support to the policy.

Companies should make every effort to establish a budget for HIV/AIDS activities but should bear in mind that many interventions can be put in place at little or no cost; that smaller companies can work together to share costs; that services and resources may exist in the community or may be sought, for example through the local UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS or the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria.

Further advice on and examples of workplace policies may be obtained from the ILO (see education and training manual), Family Health International, the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, the US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the World Economic Forum, and the international organizations of employers and workers (IOE and ICFTU).

A workplace policy on HIV/AIDS: putting it into practice

The policy, once drafted, needs to be agreed and implemented. It will be more appropriate and the implementation more effective if it is based on consultation and collaboration between employers and the workforce. Partnership with trade unions can also reduce costs for the company, since unions can help organize programmes and provide trainers and educators.

Note

This guideline supposes a medium-sized or large workplace. In a smaller enterprise there may just be one person with responsibility to act on HIV/AIDS: even so, the same basic steps can be adapted and followed. (A special guideline for smaller enterprises is being prepared.) No committee should try to carry out all the tasks alone – many sources of help are available.

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10 steps to implementation

1. HIV/AIDS committee is set up with representatives of top management, supervisors, workers, trade unions, human resources department, occupational health service, safety and health committee, and persons living with HIV/AIDS. There should be a representative balance between men and women. In smaller workplaces, an existing committee may be used or responsible officer appointed, but regular reports should be made to the highest decision-making body in the workplace.
2. Committee decides its terms of reference: these must be approved by existing decision-making bodies (e.g. workplace committee, executive board).
3. Committee reviews national laws and their implications for the enterprise; this should go beyond any specific laws on HIV/AIDS and could include anti-discrimination laws, for example, and relevant ILO Conventions.
4. Committee assesses the impact of the HIV epidemic on the workplace and the needs of workers by carrying out a confidential baseline study - important for planning a programme and for monitoring the effectiveness of the response. The ILO or UNAIDS office can give advice. For information on local UNAIDS offices, see www.unaids.org, and search under Geographical area/By country.
5. Committee finds out what health and information services are already available - both at workplaces and in the local community: useful in avoiding duplication and reducing costs. Alliances can be made between businesses, as well as links with NGOs.
6. Committee formulates a draft policy: draft circulated for comment then revised and adopted - the wider the consultation, the fuller the sense of 'ownership' and support. The policy should be written in clear and accessible language.
7. Committee draws up a budget, seeking funds from outside the enterprise if necessary and identifies existing resources in the local community; although funds are important, the absence of funding should not mean that no action is possible.
8. Committee establishes plan of action, with timetable and lines of responsibility, to implement policy. It is important to have at least one named HIV/AIDS coordinator/focal point to ensure implementation.
9. Policy and plan of action are widely disseminated (for example, via notice boards, mailings, pay slip inserts, special meetings, induction courses, training sessions) and programmes of information, education and care are put in place. Focal points and peer educators are trained.
10. Committee monitors the impact of the policy and revises it as necessary. The HIV epidemic is evolving rapidly and so is the response. Workplace policies and programmes mustn't stand still. Regular updates on developments concerning HIV/AIDS in the world of work can be found on the ILO/AIDS website.