



## **ALERT TO ALL SHERIFFS**

### **THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC - LOCKDOWN**

**ISSUED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN BOARD FOR SHERIFFS**

**24 MARCH 2020**

#### **Introduction**

In light of the increase in reported **Coronavirus** cases being confirmed in South Africa, the sheriffs' profession will need to be more stringent in their approach to managing what the World Health Organisation ("**WHO**") has declared to be "**a global health pandemic**" in the execution of their daily duties. Last night our government of has declared a lockdown for South Africans which will impact the sheriffs work and duties adversely.

We are aware of the challenges you will face for the next few weeks and thought it prudent to share some insight and to assure you that the South African Board for Sheriffs will support you and your staff through this difficult period in a responsible way. We acknowledge that you, as the head of your business, have already put measures in place to guide and protect your staff and for this we are most grateful to you.

Our office will be operational remotely during the lockdown period. When dialling our office line 0214260577, calls will be diverted to our core staff members.

***Herewith some of the key members of staff that can be reached as follows;***

**Finance and Compliance:** Mr Andrew Simon - Cell 0651776168

**Training and Communications:** Mr Vincent Nel - Cell 0823392334

**Legal:** Mrs Reesha Kasipershad - Cell 084 509 8059 / 072 742 0029

**Human Resources:** Mr Grenville Miller - 0735212354

**Complaints:** Mr Amish Gopie 0791687969 / 0678193885

**Claims:** Mrs Alicia Opel: 0722260018 / 0670943407

## **Suggested Guidelines during the “lockdown” period**

We urge you to be alert to the following so that you may be prepared for any emergency;

- 1. Have deputies on standby**
- 2. Place notices of closure on your doors, at the courts, etc. informing ALL stakeholders of reliable contact numbers they may call during an emergency**
- 3. Leave a detailed message on your answering machine or telephone system. Should you not be able to leave a message for callers, have the call diverted to your or a responsible office head’s cell number. Distribute these details to YOUR stakeholders before Thursday**
- 4. Do not refrain from serving urgent matters, be wary of matters that may be prescribing. There is no excuse for prescribed matters and/or matters being postponed due to omissions from the sheriff’s office**
- 5. Also analyse the new incoming work. Check court dates, check for prescription and prioritise the documents received electronically**
- 6. Stop all evictions during this period**
- 7. Make plans immediately to STAY auctions until at least 17 April 2020, in line with the lockdown period**
- 8. Sheriff’s must go through their work and get to know which matters are URGENT, eg. Return dates and so forth and prioritise them before Thursday**
- 9. Update Attorneys of the matters that have been in the office for a while and not yet served and/or executed.**

## **Efforts to access various funding assistance**

The Board is concerned about the physical and financial wellbeing of your families and staff.

We include the following contact numbers should you require financial assistance due to the lockdown instruction. We cannot guarantee that you will receive the required assistance at once, due to the fact that all industries are affected. However, as announced by the President of South Africa last night, possible financial reprieve may be available to small business.

Please see below:

- The Solidarity Fund – <https://www.solidarityfund.co.za/>
- Unemployment Insurance Fund - <https://www.ufiling.co.za/uif/> - 012 337 1680 or 0860 345 464
- Department of Trade and Industry - <https://www.thedti.gov.za/>  
Contact details for the Incentive Development and Administration Division can be accessed at: [https://www.thedti.gov.za/financial\\_assistance/incentive\\_units\\_contact.pdf](https://www.thedti.gov.za/financial_assistance/incentive_units_contact.pdf)
- South African Revenue Service - <https://www.sars.gov.za/Pages/default.aspx> 0800 007 277  
Please note that SARS has indicated that they would be lenient in respect of contributions at this time – please contact SARS directly should you require further detail

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### ***What should Sheriffs be doing?***

As the employer, like any other risk, the responsibility will fall on you to ensure that the office has an appropriate risk management plan in place to deal with the effects of the pandemic which will require leadership from the top. Sheriffs have an obligation to provide and maintain a safe, healthy work environment and to use reasonable endeavours to limit risk to all their employees and the public in general. In the context of the Coronavirus, Sheriffs should be looking to do as much as is reasonably possible to ensure that its workforce is not susceptible to outbreak.

A primary concern is guarding against the infection by Sheriffs, their staff, clients, their respective families and the public at large.

A secondary concern is the impact on the administration of justice and the commercial activity in general, face with potential for significant disruption over an extended period. ***It can't be business as usual.***

The nature and extent of risks will differ from one sheriff's office to another. With the impact on movement and the potential health risks to sheriffs themselves, their staff, clients and public in general, sheriffs will need to assess and address the potential in their individual offices, as they will need to do in order to safe-guard themselves from infection.

Sheriff's offices must ensure that they have updated their ***business continuity management and risk response plans*** in order to manage the outbreak and spread of the pandemic.

In developing their risk management framework sheriffs must take cognisance of all the factors (internal and external) that will impact on their respective businesses and how it will impact on the businesses commercially.

The potential impact of this pandemic on the sheriffs' profession may in certain circumstances be severe in the event that there is **no appropriate risk response plan.**

### ***Potential Impact on the Sheriff's Profession***

The full impact of the pandemic on the sheriff's profession will only become known with time.

Some of the sheriff's offices operate in economically depressed geographical areas and do not have access to the resources and infrastructure required to deal with a pandemic of the magnitude of coronavirus. It is unfortunate that these affected offices, when affected by the ***Coronavirus***, are unable to attend to their respective duties for an extended period, it will have major consequences for the continued existence of the respective offices. We urge you to note the contact details for further assistance, on page 2.

With the pandemic having a significant impact on international organisations, governments, corporate entities of all sizes and locations and private citizens, it will surely affect the sheriff's profession as part of the global community.

Sheriffs, as Officers of the Court, are required, as their core function to interact face-to-face with members of the public including Courts for which all the precautions must be taken. The pandemic will, in some way or another, affect the Sheriffs' profession and all other stakeholders, including the legal practitioners, their staff, clients, service providers, the court and all other aspects of the

administration of justice and the civil service. Due to the impact, sheriffs cannot go about the pursuit of the duties as a sheriff/deputy sheriff as if they are immune to being infected or affected by it.

The impact on the overall duties of sheriffs can prove serious such as the failing to serve and file a document at Court can have serious consequences for sheriffs and legal practitioners and their clients, urgent services wherein the claim is prescribing can lead to damages claims in substantial sums be claimed from the sheriff. We therefore suggest that you place a deputy or two on standby during this period.

### **Suggested risk management measures**

A useful starting point for all sheriffs is to get as much credible information as possible on the virus and its potential impact. All staff of the office should also be educated on the pandemic, the risks it poses and the measures that can be taken to avoid or mitigate the risk of infection. The Board suggests that the following measures be implemented to protect the workforce and help ensure its continued productivity.

1. Establish a strategy that enables employees to continue to function without endangering them.
2. Have a plan to isolate employees should the threat of possible infection arise.
3. Ensure employees can effectively work from home.
4. Verify that you have the tools, technology, capacity, and security measures in place to support a large remote workforce.
5. Review your HR policies to ensure employees will not be personally impacted if they must be quarantined for an extended period and modify any policies as appropriate to give greater flexibility to normal working arrangements.
6. Determine your priorities and the minimum staffing requirements to support these priorities, in case you need to function with a significantly reduced workforce.
7. Identify key employees and ensure other staff members have received appropriate training to comprehensively cover their absence.
8. Create a communications plan that includes providing employees and other stakeholders with regular situation updates as well as actions taken.
9. Implementing measures to ensure the safety of their employees. What will the firm do in the event that an employee or the sheriff is infected by the virus? What measures are in place in respect of quarantining staff who may have been exposed to the virus?

### ***Some of the recommended steps for sheriffs include:***

Creating awareness in the workplace, including stakeholders and the general public, about the **Coronavirus** and its risks, and communicating transparently and responsibly about the latest

news on the virus. For example, posters and other marketing tools promoting hand washing could be useful;

In order to determine which employees are infected or at risk of infection, implementing a procedure to encourage employees to disclose if they have any symptoms indicative of the virus;

Whether they have travelled to or intend travelling to affected areas; and/or been in close contact with anyone who they know has the virus or has travelled to any affected areas;

1. Circulate a list of relevant contact details should an employee get infected;
2. Advise all employees of the preventative measures that they can practise on a daily basis. For example, employees should: wash their hands frequently and properly with soap for at least 20 seconds after touching others or exposed surfaces; and avoid touching body orifices such as the mouth, eyes, and nose; and ensure that any wounds or bites that breach the skin barrier are covered to avoid ingress.
3. Ensuring that the workplace is clean and hygienic, eg, regular cleaning of shared areas, and placing of hand sanitizers in shared places where access to water and soap is unavailable.
4. Discouraging or restricting (personal and business) travel to any affected area until the virus has been contained, alternatively, advising employees and contractors to obtain credible national travel advice before travelling to affected areas; and – This in itself might have a huge impact of the income generated by the sheriff's office.
5. Sheriffs would be well advised to direct "at risk" employees to seek medical assistance immediately and get tested for infection. If they test positively, the relevant medical professional or official will be required to report the matter to the National Institute of Communicable Diseases ("NICD").
6. Advise employees who suspect that they may be infected with the virus, or who have travelled to affected areas, or who have been in close personal contact with others who have travelled to affected areas, to stay at home and isolate themselves until they have been tested, received medical attention, and recovered.
7. If there are reported cases of the Coronavirus in the workplace, immediately contact the Department of Health or a known medical official to inform them that their workplace has been compromised so that it can be reported to the NICD.

***Ultimately, to manage the Coronavirus epidemic effectively in the workplace and in general it is vital that sheriffs confront it head-on in a proactive, context-responsive and precautionary manner, while making an effort to contain the impact it potentially might have on their respective businesses commercially as much as they do the virus.***



**Mrs Charmaine Mabuza**

Chairperson of the South African Board for Sheriffs

## CORONAVIRUS – SYMPTOMS

Watch for symptoms

Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases.

The following symptoms may appear **2-14 days after exposure.**\*

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath



- There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).
- **The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus.**
- The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.
  - Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
  - Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.



## Steps to protect yourself

### 1. Clean your hands often



- **Wash your hands often** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, **use a hand sanitizer** that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth** with unwashed hands

### 2. Avoid close contact with people who are sick



Put **distance between yourself and other people** if COVID-19 is spreading in your community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

### 3. Coughs and sneezes



- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.
- **Throw used tissues** in the trash.
- Immediately **wash your hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

## TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT OTHERS



**Stay home if you are sick**, except to get medical care



- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.
- **Throw used tissues** in the trash.
- Immediately **wash your hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



**Wear a facemask if you are sick**

- **If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. If you are not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then you should do your best to cover your coughs and sneezes, and people who are caring for you should wear a facemask if they enter your room



**Clean and disinfect**

- **Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily.** This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.
- If surfaces are dirty, clean them: Use detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.