

# Impact of Covid-19 on call centres

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With Covid-19 impacting daily life across the globe, contact centres have been facing a huge surge in incoming calls as people continue to seek accurate information and reassurance about the impact of the pandemic on their business or personal circumstances.



Even during the strictest Level 5 and 4 restrictions of South Africa's national lockdown, contact centres that provided essential services – such as in the health, safety, social support, government and financial services sectors – were allowed to continue operating. The country's business process outsourcing (BPO) market has also continued to thrive, despite an understandable dip in work from international markets outsourcing their global business services to South Africa.

## Three Cs of call centres

But, even as demand for call centre support has reached unprecedented levels, Covid-19 has presented the sector with particular challenges. Traditional contact centres can often meet all the criteria for the 'three Cs' of Covid-19. They are generally closed spaces, crowded places and employees are in close contact with others. This makes it especially challenging to implement a social distancing regime. Employees might also share equipment and workspaces, increasing the risks of coronavirus infection.

The people-intensive nature of call centres also means that a suspected or confirmed case of Covid-19 can cause severe resourcing challenges. Agent illness and self-isolation requirements can easily produce a ripple effect that might lead to poor client servicing, call backlogs or even total closure of the call centre. For many centres operating in this highly pressured environment, often with transitory workers and high staff turnaround, having a readily available pool of correctly qualified and available candidates can be the difference between major impact and total business shutdown.

Fortunately, South African contact centres have responded well to the challenges of Covid-19. As a whole, the industry has collaborated extensively to develop workplace health and safety protocols to stop the spread of the virus in the workplace while ensuring the well-being of workers. All relevant regulations and directives contained in the regulations and the directives issued in terms of the Disaster Management Act apply to call centres.

Many have reconfigured workspaces, implemented remote working practices and introduced staff rotation schedules or flexible shifts that enable them to have anything between 30% and 100% of staff working from home.

However, while being based remotely works for some employees, it does not work for others. This means that a blended approach is likely to become the norm and call centres need to be prepared for the future with new operating models.

One way to reduce the impact of Covid-19 on the call centre is to have a stream of already pre-verified individuals to call on when extra staffing is needed. This would require that all candidate screening is conducted in advance and call centre organisations can have the peace of mind and confidence that they're recruiting the best-fit employees despite a largely remote working environment.

**Want to learn how to Covid-proof your call centre? Visit <https://bit.ly/3ciB1Dt> to download a free guide now.**


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