

Employment & Benefits

## Resuming Workplace Operations: Safe Management Measures

### Introduction

Following the Multi-Ministry Taskforce's announcement that the circuit breaker measures would be progressively-eased over the coming weeks, the Tripartite Partners (Ministry of Manpower ("**MOM**"), National Trade Union Congress and Singapore National Employers Federation) have issued Safe Management Measures on 9 May 2020 ("**Measures**") for employers to establish a system to ensure a safe work environment and minimise the risks of further outbreaks. The overarching goal of the Measures is to reduce physical interactions in the workplace in order to minimise spread of COVID-19.

The Measures issued by the Tripartite Partners must be implemented by employers which are allowed to resume operations, including employers allowed to operate during this period and those permitted to do so after 12 May 2020. For employers resuming operations after the end of the circuit breaker period, the Measures must be in place before they can resume operations at the workplace. An outline of the Measures is set out below in this update.

### General Workplace Safe Management Measures

#### System of Safe Management Measures

To ensure that the Measures are implemented in a sustainable manner for as long as necessary, employers are required to implement a detailed monitoring plan to ensure compliance with the Measures and that issues of non-compliance and risks are resolved timeously. The monitoring plan should include the steps taken to ensure the requirements are communicated to the employees and adhered to. Risk management strategies and steps taken to remedy non-compliance should be documented.

A Safe Management Officer ("**SMO**") should be appointed to assist in the implementation, coordination and monitoring of this system. The duties of the SMO include:

- Coordinating implementation of the Measures, including identifying risk management and communication to all employees;
- Conducting inspections and checks to ensure compliance;
- Remedying non-compliance of the measures; and
- Maintaining records of the abovementioned inspections and checks conducted and corrective actions. Government inspectors may request for such records periodically and the SMO must make them available upon request.

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### Minimising Physical Interactions and Safe Distancing

Employers must ensure that employees work by telecommuting from home where possible. To support work by telecommuting, employers must provide the necessary IT equipment to employees to do so as well as adopting solutions that enable remote working and collaboration. Meetings between employees and with third parties should be held virtually and physical meetings should be minimised. Activities with close and prolonged contact must be cancelled or deferred, including conferences, seminars and exhibitions.

For employees in roles that cannot be performed by telecommuting from home, employers must take the following precautions:

- **Staggering working and break hours:** Work hours, lunch break and other breaks must be staggered over at least three one-hourly blocks, with no more than half the employees in one group. For instance, employees can be allowed to report to work in three groups with staggered timings to ensure that there is no overlap in reporting times and lunch breaks to reduce congregation. If possible, reporting and end times should not coincide with peak-hour travelling times. Below is a sample of the staggered hours.

*Table 1: Sample staggered working and break hours*

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<b>Reporting Time</b>	7.30am – 8.30am	8.30am – 9.30am	9.30am – 10.30am
<b>Lunch Break</b>	11.30am – 12.30pm	12.30pm – 1.30pm	1.30pm – 2.30pm
<b>End Time</b>	4.30pm – 5.30pm	5.30pm – 6.30pm	6.30pm – 7.30pm

- **Reduce congregation at workplace:** If staggered working and break hours are not feasible due to operational reasons, a system should be implemented to reduce congregation such as allocating different groups of employees to different entrances.
- **Implement shift or split team arrangements:** Employees should be split into different teams with each team working in a different worksite where possible. There should be no cross-deployment or interaction between members of different teams to reduce the likelihood of cross-infection. Disinfection of common areas should be stepped up.
- **Minimising common physical touchpoints:** Common physical touchpoints should be reduced through implementation of alternatives such as contactless controls. If not possible, frequent disinfection should be implemented.
- **Ensure physical distancing:** Clear physical spacing of at least one metre must be maintained at all times. Employers must demarcate safe physical distances at the workplace with visual indicators or through physical means at workstations, meeting rooms, common spaces such

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as entrances, exits, pantries, canteens, break rooms, or any place where employees and visitors may congregate.

- **Avoid physical meetings:** Unless absolutely critical, physical meetings should be avoided. Even so, the number of attendees and duration must be limited to the extent required.
- **Minimise physical interactions with and between suppliers and contractors:** Safe distancing measures also apply to suppliers and contractors. Where physical interactions are required, delivery of goods and services by third parties should be staggered.
- **Control access to workplace:** Only essential workers and authorised visitors should be permitted to enter the workplace. The SafeEntry system should be used to record all entries to the workplace.

## Use of Personal Protective Equipment and Observance of Personal Hygiene

Employers must ensure all onsite personnel wear a mask and other necessary personal protective equipment at all times, except during activities where a mask cannot be worn such as where its removal is necessary for the use of work equipment or when riding a motorcycle in the course of employment. Employers are obliged to ensure they have sufficient masks for all employees, including sufficient replacement masks as required by the work conditions (e.g. humid and warm work environment). If possible, employers should look into improving work conditions to enable employees to wear mask at the workplace. Employers should also encourage all employees to observe good personal hygiene.

## Cleanliness of Workplace

Employers should take steps to ensure cleanliness of the workplace to reduce the chances of cross-infection through common areas and shared equipment and facilities. Such measures include:

- Regular cleaning of common spaces such as lobbies, visitor rooms, break rooms, pantries, meeting rooms.
- Shared equipment and machineries must be cleaned between usage by different employees.
- Cleaning and disinfecting agents should be made available at all human stoppage points such as washrooms, lobbies, entrances, security booths.

## Protocols to Manage Potential Cases

Employers are required to implement the following protocols to manage potential cases amongst its employees as well as all visitors to its premises:

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- Require employees and visitors to conduct temperature screening and check for respiratory syndromes and submit records on the same twice daily.
- Require employees and visitors to make a declaration, before they enter the premise, on whether they have
  - travelled overseas in the past 14 days;
  - received a quarantine order, isolation order, Stay-Home Notice or been issued a medical certificate for respiratory syndromes; and
  - come into contact with any confirmed cases.
- Maintain all records and declarations by employees and visitors for 28 days for contact tracing and inspection purposes.
- Ensure employees adhere to the Ministry of Health's travel advisories issued from time to time.
- Ensure employees do not clinic hop and only visit one clinic for medical check-ups. Employees who are unwell must provide all medical certificates and diagnoses provided.
- Employees who are unwell should be asked to report to their employers, leave the workplace and consult a medical practitioner. Employers should monitor and record such cases.
- If any employees are unconscious or incapacitated, employers should call for an emergency ambulance at 995.

Where there are confirmed cases, employers must adopt the following measures:

- Immediately vacate and cordon-off the immediate section of the workplace where that employee worked at.
- Carry out a thorough cleaning and disinfecting of the on-site areas and assets that were exposed.
- If there has been sustained and close contact with the confirmed cases, the above measures may be expanded to include the whole floor or relevant part(s) of the building.

### Special Attention to Vulnerable Employees

For vulnerable employees such as older employees, pregnant employees or employees with underlying medical conditions, special attention should be provided to reduce the likelihood of infection. Where possible, they may be temporarily redeployed to allow them to work from home.

### Our Comments

It remains a changing world, with employment practices being one of the key areas which need to meet the evolving compliance requirements. As we are allowed to gradually return to work, employers must familiarise themselves with and implement the Measures before resuming work operations. Employers who will only be resuming operations after the end of the circuit breaker period should start preparation now. Such measures must also be clearly communicated to employees.

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Non-compliance will see painful consequences.

The MOM has cautioned that it will take calibrated enforcement actions against errant employers which do not comply with these Measures, including directing such employers to cease operations. A failure to comply may also attract a fine of up to S\$10,000, imprisonment of up to 6 months or both for the first offence and double of the same for repeated offences under the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act. As such, employers are strongly advised to ensure that they follow the Measures to avoid such liabilities and ensure minimal disruptions to their operations.

In addition, please note that the MOM has also issued sector-specific guidelines for the manufacturing sector, customer-facing businesses, and employers who provide transportation for employees. Relevant employers should ensure that they follow these guidelines.

If you need to speak on any of these issues in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact our employment team.

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