

7 July 15

**TRIPARTITE ADVISORY ON WORKPLACE MEASURES
TO TACKLE MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME
CORONAVIRUS (MERS-CoV)**

Introduction

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM), together with the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) and National Trade Unions Congress (NTUC), is issuing this advisory to help employers prepare and implement precautionary measures at the workplace to tackle MERS-CoV and put in place the appropriate flexible work, leave and salary arrangements. MOH will issue an alert if the MERS-CoV situation escalates, at which time companies should be prepared to implement additional measures.

Precautionary Measures

2 Employers are strongly encouraged to implement the following measures at the workplace:

- Maintain environmental cleanliness to minimise transmission of MERS-CoV, including frequent disinfection of common areas.
- Advise employees to maintain high standards of personal hygiene such as washing hands frequently with soap and water especially after contact with respiratory secretions (e.g. after sneezing and coughing).
- Closely monitor the health of all staff, both new and existing, who have been to MERS-CoV affected countries¹ within the past 14 days, counting from the date that the staff had left the MERS-CoV affected country. They should wear a surgical mask and seek immediate medical attention promptly and mention their recent travel to the attending physician if they become unwell with fever and cough. For foreign workers staying in dormitories, employers should consider separating those who have been

¹ For the latest information please refer to www.moh.gov.sg.

to MERS-CoV affected countries within the past 14 days and have become unwell from others during this period.

- Regularly check the MOH website (www.moh.gov.sg) for the latest update on affected countries so that a considered decision can be made on whether to proceed with business travel plans. Employers should similarly advise their employees to check the latest advisories before making any non-work related travel plans. In the event that employees travel to countries affected with MERS-CoV, they should take precautionary measures, such as avoiding close contact with persons having acute respiratory infections and maintaining high standards of personal hygiene at all times. Employees should avoid visiting healthcare institutions in affected countries, unless it is necessary to do so.

Additional Measures

3 Employers should be prepared to implement the following measures at workplaces **if the MERS-CoV situation escalates:**

- Conduct temperature checks among employees routinely. Employees with a higher-than normal temperature should be advised to seek treatment immediately.
- Conduct temperature checks among visitors routinely. Information of all visitors should also be recorded, including the date and time of visit, personal particulars and contact number of visitors. This will facilitate contact tracing should the need arise.
- Reduce congregation of employees.

Flexible Work, Leave and Salary Arrangements

4 **If the MERS-CoV situation escalates**, MOH may carry out additional control measures such as issuing travel advisories against non-essential travel to affected countries or conducting contact tracing for cases in Singapore. At such a time, please note the points outlined below.

Absence from work under Home Quarantine Order

5 If Home Quarantine Orders (HQOs) are served on persons by the MOH, the period of absence from work necessitated by HQOs should be treated as paid hospitalisation leave, as part of the employee's hospitalisation leave eligibility under their employment contracts, collective agreements or under the Employment Act².

6 For employees who have used up their hospitalisation leave, employers are urged to exercise compassion and flexibility by granting additional paid hospitalisation leave, as the employees concerned may face financial hardship during this time.

Travel to affected country after MOH-issued travel advisory against non-essential travel

(i) Absence from work due to work-related reasons

7 For employees who are required by employers to stay at home for reasons that are attributable to work (i.e. the employer requests that the employee stay at home for a period to monitor health status and check for MERS-CoV symptoms after returning from a business trip), the employers should continue to pay them their salaries during their period of absence. To minimise work disruptions, employers could arrange for telecommuting and remote communications access systems (e.g. teleconferencing) to allow the affected employees to work from home.

(ii) Absence from work due to non work-related reasons

8 For employees who have returned from MERS-CoV affected countries for non-work related travel (e.g. for leisure or other personal reasons), the employer may, as a precautionary measure, request that the employee stay away from the workplace upon return. Other employees may be unable to report to work as they need to take care of their family members e.g. if their family member is sick or if there is a need for alternative childcare arrangements

² It is compulsory for individuals to comply with HQOs which are issued under the Infectious Diseases Act. The quarantine period is typically taken as 14 days from the date of last possible exposure to a confirmed case.

should schools or childcare facilities close as a result of the MERS-CoV situation. In such situations, the following measures may be considered:

- Where possible, employers and employees are encouraged to explore flexible work arrangements (FWAs) to meet organisational and employees' personal needs. Employers and employees should discuss the appropriate FWAs to be adopted; who are eligible for these FWAs; and any corresponding leave arrangements.
- Where such arrangements are not feasible, employees may then wish to consider utilising their leave entitlements such as annual, sick or childcare leave. If employees have exhausted their leave entitlements, employers are encouraged to be flexible in granting time off to their employees or allowing them to use advance leave or other leave arrangements as far as possible.
- By mutual agreement, employers and employees/unions could also agree on other arrangements for employees' leave of absence relating to MERS-CoV to share the costs incurred by the leave of absence.

Minimising Workplace Disruption due to MERS-CoV

9 Employers should closely monitor MERS-CoV-related developments, and follow travel and health advisories provided by the Government on the MOH website (www.moh.gov.sg). Such information should be communicated regularly to employees.

10 Employers should put in place Business Continuity Plans (BCPs)³ to help minimise work disruptions. Employers are encouraged to brief employees on the BCPs and the employees' roles and responsibilities. Employers could plan and conduct BCP exercises to maintain the readiness of the organisation and

³ BCP refers to planning and related activities that improve the resilience and readiness of an organisation in the face of crises. BCP aims to ensure that an organization's critical business functions and activities will continue to operate despite serious incidents or disasters that might otherwise have interrupted them, and help restore these functions and activities to an operational state within a reasonably short period. Refer to SPRING Singapore's "*Business Continuity Guide: Contingency Planning for Infectious Diseases Pandemics*", a guide to help businesses deal with infectious disease pandemics. View the guide [here](#).

employees. To help employers defray the cost of BCP adoption, financial assistance is available through SPRING Singapore's Capability Development Grant (CDG)⁴.

11 In situations where companies' operations are seriously disrupted by the large numbers of employees affected or if the companies face potential closure and need to manage costs, employers should discuss with their unions and employees on the appropriate flexible work, leave and salary arrangements to be put in place.

Conclusion - Staying United to Tackle MERS-CoV

12 The tripartite partners would like to encourage employers and employees to work closely to minimise the risk of local transmission of MERS-CoV, and minimise the impact to businesses and employees. Employers are strongly encouraged to take precautionary steps by putting in place precautionary measures and business continuity plans, and be considerate towards the needs of their employees. On their part, employees are urged to cooperate with their employers so as to minimise disruption to businesses. Both employers and employees are also strongly encouraged to exercise social responsibility by practising social distancing, maintaining high standards of hygiene and adhering to the advisories issued by Government on MERS-CoV.

13 For queries on the above advisory or advice on employment issues related to MERS-CoV, please contact the following:

- a. Ministry of Manpower
MOM Contact Centre, Tel: (65) 6438 5122
Email: www.mom.gov.sg/feedback
Website: www.mom.gov.sg/mers

- b. Singapore National Employers Federation

⁴ The CDG is a financial assistance programme aimed at helping Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) defray up to 70% of qualifying project costs, relating to consultancy, manpower, training, certification, upgrading productivity and developing business capabilities for process improvement, product development and market access. Click [here](#) for more details.

Duty Consultant, Tel: (65) 6290 7692

Email: mers@snef.org.sg

c. National Trades Union Congress

Industrial Relations Department, Tel: (65) 6213 8008

Email: ntucird@ntuc.org.sg