

COVID-19 MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR WORKPLACES

COVID-19 has affected the working population in Malaysia not only due to infections at the workplace affecting manpower, however due to the rise in cases, the nation has had to implement specific Movement Control Orders. Subsequently some industries have been allowed to function under the provisions of the National Recovery Plan (NRP) taking into consideration vaccination rates, hospital intensive care bed utilization and rate of new cases. It is imperative for industries to take the relevant measures to emphasize and enforce continuous compliance to the prescribed Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to ensure a safe working environment while safeguarding business operations.

There has been an emergence of new SARS-CoV-2 variants due to viral mutations where they can be categorized into variants of concern (VOC) or variants of interest (VOI) based on variant characteristics and public health risks by the World Health Organization (WHO). Currently the Delta variant (VOC) is predominant in Malaysia which has contributed to the exponential rise in the number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

Up till 12 September 2021, there were 2839 workplace COVID-19 clusters reported to the Ministry of Health (MOH) involving 282, 729 cases. The impact of outbreaks has led to the lack of employees to carry out operations due to them being admitted or quarantined. This guideline aims to provide the necessary preventive and control measures that should be undertaken at the workplace and may be used as a basis for workplace strategies in order to ensure continuity of operations.

Responsibility at the workplace:

The management is responsible to ensure that all preventive measures as deemed necessary under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 (Act 342) and its regulations are adhered to. Managing COVID-19 at the workplace may be part of Occupational Health management under the purview of the Safety and Health Committee of the organization.

This guideline consists of two sections;

1. Prevention and control measures to be taken at the workplace
2. Actions to be taken when there is a positive case and/or close contact to a positive case at the workplace

1. PREVENTION AND CONTROL MEASURES TO BE TAKEN AT THE WORKPLACE

It is important for workplaces to implement measures to prevent and manage COVID-19 at their organization. Workplaces have a responsibility towards the safety and health of their employees under the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994(Act 514) as well as under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988(Act 342). Management should take the necessary steps to manage COVID-19 at the workplace by following the steps below.

A. BE UPDATED ON THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT POLICIES RELATED TO COVID-19

Management must constantly update themselves with regards to the latest information regarding COVID-19 and also the current prevention and management policies related to COVID-19 from the authorities. This is important in making decisions with regards to managing COVID-19 at the workplace. Action to be taken under the Act 342 must be implemented with urgency to avoid the spread of COVID-19 at the workplace as well as to prevent from facing liabilities associated with non-compliance to workplace SOP's.

General Information regarding COVID-19

Symptoms:

Symptoms include fever, cough, general weakness/ fatigue, headache, myalgia, sore throat, loss of taste, loss of smell, shortness of breath, runny nose, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea.

Transmission:

Current evidence states that the SARS-CoV-2 virus is transmitted through close contact (distance less than 1 meter) between two individuals when small and large droplets containing the virus are inhaled or come directly into contact with the eyes, nose, or mouth of the person who is the close contact.

There is a possibility of the virus spreading in poorly ventilated or crowded indoor settings as the smaller aerosol droplets may remain suspended in the air or travel further than 1 meter.

The virus can also spread after infected people sneeze, cough on, or touch surfaces of objects such as tables, door knobs and handrails. Other people may become infected by touching these contaminated surfaces or objects then touching their eyes, noses and mouths without having cleaned their hands first.

Incubation Period

Incubation period is currently estimated to range between 1-14 days

Vulnerable Employees:

- Older persons aged 60 and above. **However, anyone may get COVID-19 at any age.**
- Those with pre-existing medical conditions e.g. high blood pressure, heart and lung disease, diabetes or conditions that affect their immune system

B. TAKE APPROPRIATE STEPS TO ENSURE MAXIMUM PROTECTION OF STAFF TO ENABLE CONTINUATION OF BUSINESS.

I. Action by Employers

- Encourage and facilitate employees to get COVID-19 vaccination under the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme or Program Imunisasi Industri COVID-19 Kerjasama Awam-Swasta (PIKAS).
- Communicate regularly to employees about COVID-19;
 - i. Advise employees on preventive methods:
 - physical distancing (keep 1 metre away from others)
 - practicing personal hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
(Refer Appendix 1)
 - practicing hand hygiene (Refer Appendix 2)
 - using a mask in areas where required and where distancing cannot be maintained (Refer Appendix 3)
 - ii. Remind employees regularly about preventive methods e.g. via e-mail, social media, tele-promotion, gamification and various methods of communication.
 - iii. Provide regular updates on COVID-19 to employees

- iv. Provide appropriate health education and promotion materials regarding COVID-19 to all employees (in the employees' native languages if needed)
- Identify vulnerable employees and ensure extra precaution is taken eg. well controlled chronic diseases, adequate control measures at the workplace
- Instruct supervisors to monitor
 - i. for symptoms among employees at workplace
 - ii. employee compliance to preventive measures
- Encourage employees to monitor for symptoms
- Register premise with MySejahtera and generate and print QR code to be displayed at the premise for registration of employees and visitors upon entry (refer Annex 42 MySejahtera, COVID-19 Management Guidelines in Malaysia No.5 / 2020).
- When an employee develops symptoms at the workplace;
 - i. Supervisor to isolate staff member from work area
 - ii. Ensure employee wears a face mask and seeks medical attention at the nearest health facility immediately
 - iii. Ensure that accompanying person also wears a face mask
- Conduct mental health assessments among employees and carry out appropriate measures to reduce stress among employees.
- Monitor sick leave and absenteeism among employees. Keep a record of staff sick leave including reasons for leave, duration of leave and current status.

II. **Action by Employees**

- Keep updated on COVID-19
- To get vaccinated as soon as possible including pregnant individuals and those with co-morbidities.
- Scan MySejahtera QR code upon entering work premise
- Always maintain good personal hygiene;
 - i. Frequent hand washing with soap and water or hand sanitizer

- ii. Practice cough and sneezing etiquette
- To practice physical distancing at work, during breaks and meals
- If employee develops symptoms;
 - i. at the workplace:
 - To alert supervisor immediately
 - Wear a face mask
 - Avoid contact with fellow employees
 - Seek medical treatment immediately
 - ii. at home:
 - Wear a face mask and seek medical attention at the nearest health facility immediately.
 - Avoid contact with family members
 - Accompanying person should also wear a face mask.
- To alert supervisor if identified as a suspected/probable case, person under surveillance (including close contacts and travelers from overseas) or confirmed case.
- Employees are also advised to practice all preventive measures out of work
- To maintain health status at an optimal level especially for those with chronic diseases.

III. **Action at the Workplace**

- Screening of all employees entering the workplace
 - i Temperature: those with temperature $>37.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ should be asked to seek assessment at a medical facility
 - ii Symptom screening: those with cough, sore throat, complete and sudden loss of taste, complete and sudden loss of smell or difficulty breathing should be asked to seek assessment at a medical facility
 - iii History of close contact to a positive or suspected COVID-19 case (taken when necessary)
- Enforce hand sanitization at entrance

- Ensure regular cleaning and disinfection of the workplace including equipment and focusing on high touch areas (Refer Appendix 4)
- Practice a policy of no physical contact e.g. handshaking and fist bump
- Provide easy access to hand washing for employees. If not possible, provide hand sanitizers for frequent hand cleaning
- Proper maintenance of toilet facilities with adequate supply of liquid soap and water as well as disposable towels.
- Provision of lidded rubbish bins with regular refuse disposal
- Enforce strict adherence to SOPs at common areas e.g. rest area, pantry, canteen, prayer room etc.
- Limit occupancy at common areas according to size of the room and taking into consideration physical distancing
- Consider alternate communication methods e.g. virtual meetings in place of face to face meetings, group chats etc.
- Consider deferring large meetings or events
- Consider having meetings outside in open air if possible
- In case of indoor meetings or events, ensure all precautions are taken:
 - i. Informing participants not to attend if they are unwell and to join the meeting using a virtual platform
 - ii. Ensuring all relevant information is given to the participants such as the practice of hand hygiene and the use of face masks
 - iii. Providing hand sanitizers where necessary or ensuring availability of soap and water
 - iv. Consider opening windows for better ventilation (Refer to Guidance Note on Ventilation and Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) for Non-Residential Setting During COVID-19 Pandemic by Department of Occupational Safety and Health)
 - v. Ensuring limited participants and distancing is maintained at all times
 - vi. Monitor participants daily and provide support for isolating those with symptoms and transporting them to a health facility.
 - vii. Keep in touch with participant on their health status after seeing the doctor.
 - viii. Keep contact details of all participants and organizers in case there is a need to contact them. Records should be kept for at least one month for the date of completion of the event.
- Enforcing all SOPs at workplace

- When situation calls for working from home
 - i. Ensure employees are well versed and equipped to handle virtual sessions
 - ii. Employees are given work targets accordingly and working hours are followed
- In the setting of **public transport** e.g. taxis, e-hailing services, trains and buses, drivers should ensure the following measures;
 - i. Frequent use of hand sanitizer and practice respiratory etiquette at all times.
 - ii. Wear a mask while carrying out the duty
 - iii. Seek medical attention if symptoms develop
 - iv. Ensure passengers wear masks while in the vehicle.
 - v. Regularly disinfect the interior of the vehicle after alighting passengers or after each trip including door handles (both outside and inside) as well as airing out the vehicle before transporting another passenger by opening the vehicles doors and/ or windows for a few minutes before transporting a new passenger.
 - vi. In order to further improve the ventilation, the driver may set the air conditioning to non-recirculation mode (fresh air mode).
 - vii. In bigger vehicles that have air conditioning vents in the back cabin, the driver may close all the vents that are located in the back cabin of the vehicle
 - viii. The best way to improve ventilation in the vehicles is to open all windows to allow better air circulation however this may not be practical in warmer temperatures.
 - ix. Limiting the number of passengers in the vehicle.
 - x. Passengers should also refrain from eating and drinking in the vehicles during the journey.

IV. **Travel Considerations for the workplace**

- Before traveling:
 - i. Follow the latest advisory on traveling from National Security Council (MKN) and MOH
 - ii. Assess the benefits, risks and needs of travel
 - iii. If travelling overseas, obtain all relevant information of travel to that particular country

- While traveling:
 - i. Always bring along face masks and hand sanitizer for use when required
 - ii. Avoid crowded places and closed contact with people especially those showing symptoms
 - iii. Seek prompt medical treatment if develop symptoms
- On returning back:
 - i. Observe home surveillance or quarantine procedures as per MOH directives
 - ii. Immediately seek medical attention if you develop symptoms after completing the quarantine period

2. ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN WHEN THERE ARE POSITIVE CASES AND/OR CLOSE CONTACTS TO A POSITIVE CASE AT THE WORKPLACE

(A) Positive case among the employee/employer

I. General

- If there is any positive case detected by testing, the case should be notified by a treating doctor to the nearest District Health Office (DHO) using the notification system in place.
- For positive cases detected by self-testing kits, results should be entered into MySejahtera application by the positive case.
- Where required, employers should provide DHO with the list of all positive cases.

II. Actions by Management

- Employer should ensure all positive employees self-isolate him/herself at home. Employee should be isolated in a separate room, avoid contact with other members of the residence and wear a face mask if need to come out of the room. The employee should update their status and conduct daily health assessment using the MySejahtera application.
- Employer should ensure positive employees adhere to the Home Surveillance Order (HSO).

- Management should assist in identifying close contacts of the positive case by taking a detailed history of persons in close contact to him/ her.
- The management should give full cooperation to the DHO in their investigations at the workplace.
- Positive cases with no or mild symptoms as well as negative cases may be given HSO depending on the risk assessment by DHO as well as the suitability of their home for quarantine.
- Positive cases should be monitored daily for symptoms and when applicable the management should provide them with a pulse oximeter to assess oxygen saturation level in the blood.
- If symptoms of the positive case worsen, the employer must ensure that access to healthcare services are available immediately.
- Employer should provide support for the provision of necessary essentials for employees under HSO.
- Those who are not considered as close contacts may return to work with strict adherence to SOP.
- Disinfection should be carried out immediately as per Annex 36; Garis Panduan Pembersihan dan Disinfeksi di Tempat Awam from COVID-19 Management Guidelines in Malaysia No.5.
- For workplaces where the DHO has issued a notice of closure, the period of closure will be determined by the DHO based on the reason for closure e.g. disinfection, contact tracing and risk assessment findings.
- For workplaces closed for the purpose of disinfection, the workplace only has to be closed for the duration of disinfection and subsequently the workplace may function as normal but with available employees who are not close contacts. Employers may inform the DHO for assessment and re-opening of the premise once the disinfection process is completed.
- In the event, majority of the employees are close contacts, the workplace may be closed for the duration determined by DHO in order to carry out investigation and risk assessment.
- Close contacts who have completed HSO should get their official release order before returning to work.
- Positive cases who have been discharged from hospital, PKRC or home isolation may return to work with strict adherence to SOP.

- There should be strict adherence to SOPs on transportation of person under surveillance, probable or confirmed cases among employees.
- It is not advisable for positive cases within 3 months of recovery to undergo testing as they may still show a positive result although they are no longer infective. However, if symptomatic they should be tested and assessed accordingly.

III. **Actions by Employees**

- Self-isolate at home/ accommodation and obey the HSO served
- Isolate in a separate room, avoid contact with other members of the residence and if needed to come out from room to wear a face mask
- To alert supervisor of positive status
- Update their status and conduct daily symptom monitoring using the Home Assessment Tool (HAT) function in MySejahtera
- If symptoms worsen, to seek medical attention immediately or call 999

(B) **Close contacts among the employee/employer**

I. **General**

- Employer/ employees identified as close contacts should self-isolate at their homes immediately and update their status on MySejahtera.
- They should be isolated in a separate room, wear a face mask, maintain 1-meter physical distancing and frequently practice hand hygiene as well as maintain good personal hygiene.

II. **Actions by Management**

- Employer should assist in identification of close contacts at workplace and ensure all close contacts adhere to home surveillance order served.
- In a dormitory setting, the employer should ensure all close contacts are isolated in a separate room, avoid contact with other members of the residence and if needed to come out from their room to wear a face mask.
- In a dormitory set up, one dormitory can be used to house close contacts if there are a large number of them. These individuals should not have any contact with any other employee in the building.

- Close contacts should be asked to update their status and conduct daily symptom monitoring using the Home Assessment Tool (HAT) function in MySejahtera
- Employer is to assist in monitoring the health of the employees under home surveillance.
- Employer should provide support for the provision of necessary essentials for employees under home surveillance.
- Employer is responsible for testing of close contacts at workplace according to DHO recommendation.

III. **Actions by Employees**

- Self-isolate at home/ accommodation and obey the HSO served
- Isolate in a separate room, avoid contact with other members of the residence and if needed to come out from room to wear a face mask
- To alert supervisor of close contact status
- Follow DHO recommendations with regards to testing
- Update their status and conduct daily symptom monitoring using the Home Assessment Tool (HAT) function in MySejahtera
- If symptoms worsen, to seek medical attention immediately or call 999

IV. **Special Circumstances**

- For industries with a large number of employees who are close contacts, the asymptomatic close contacts may be allowed to work strictly using a bubble concept, the details of which will be determined by the relevant DHO.
- Testing requirements of close contacts will be determined by the DHO. However, all close contacts must be quarantined according to current quarantine policy of MOH.
- For close contacts quarantined together where one or more become positive, the remaining close contacts quarantine period will be extended depending upon risk assessment by DHO.

This guideline may be used as a basis for managing employees during this period of time. Employers and employees are advised to keep up to date with the latest developments and advice issued by the Ministry of health.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

- Good personal hygiene should be observed at all times. Regular hand hygiene by washing with soap and water or use hand sanitizer
- Maintain at least 1 meter (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth

COUGH AND SNEEZING ETIQUETTE

- Cover mouth and nose with bend of elbow or tissue if coughing or sneezing.
- Throw tissue in the trash after using it
- Wash hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer
- If no tissue available, use upper sleeve or elbow instead of hands while sneezing and coughing.

GUIDELINES FOR HAND HYGIENE

- Wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer after any contact with respiratory secretions
- Remove jewelry before any hand wash procedure
- Lather with soap; cover all surfaces of the hands and fingers using friction.
- Rinse under running water
- Dry hands thoroughly with a disposable towel
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be used to decontaminate hands that are not visibly soiled
 - Apply alcohol-based hand sanitizer to palm of one hand and rub hands together, covering all surfaces of hands and finger, until hands are dry.

The face mask should be used by those working in areas where COVID-19 is widespread and physical distancing cannot be practiced such as social workers, cashiers, waiters etc. and in public areas such as public transport, grocery stores, places of worship and crowded environment. For those experiencing any symptoms, you are advised to stay at home and if needed to go out, make sure to wear a face mask. The surgical 3 ply mask is for those experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and those caring for someone identified as a close contact, person under surveillance or confirmed case of COVID-19. It is also recommended for vulnerable populations such as people aged ≥ 60 years old and people with underlying health conditions. Meanwhile, fabric face masks are recommended for those without COVID-19 symptoms.

STEPS ON WEARING FACE MASK

Clean your hands before putting on masks and after taking it off. Inspect the masks and do not use it if damaged, wet or contaminated.

STEPS ON WEARING SURGICAL MASKS (3 PLY)

1. The surgical mask should fit snugly over the face
2. The coloured side of the surgical mask should face outside
3. Tie all the strings that keep the surgical mask in place
4. The surgical mask should fully cover the nose, mouth as well as the chin.
5. The metallic wire part of the mask should be fixed securely over the bridge of the nose to prevent leakage
6. The surgical mask should not be used more than a day but if it is wet, damaged or soiled by secretions or body fluid at any time, change the mask immediately.
7. Discard all used surgical masks into a plastic bag which should then be tied properly before disposing it into a rubbish bin.

STEPS ON WEARING FABRIC FACE MASK

1. The fabric mask should ideally be made of 3 layers of fabric.
 - Outer layer: water resistant fabric
 - Middle layer: filter
 - Inner layer: water absorbent
2. Hold the fabric mask by the straps, put over the nose and mouth and secure under the chin.
3. Make sure there is no gap in between the fabric mask and face.
4. The fabric mask should fully cover the nose, mouth as well as the chin.
5. After use, take the masks off by leaning forward slightly and remove the loops from behind the ears by holding the straps only.
6. When the mask needs to be removed e.g. while having meals, it can be kept in a paper bag or resealable plastic bag.
7. It is recommended to wash the fabric mask with soap and water after each day of use.

For further information regarding use of face mask, refer to Annex 8a: Guidance On The Use Of Mask With Regards To COVID-19 Pandemic available at https://covid-19.moh.gov.my/garis-panduan/garis-panduan-kkm/Annex_8a_RECOMENDATIONS_ON_FACE_MASK.pdf

DISINFECTION PROCEDURES

- High touch surfaces such as taps, switch, door knobs, counter tops, stairway rails, floors and walls should be identified for regular daily cleaning and disinfection.
- Commonly used disinfectants are potentially toxic.
- Preparation and application of disinfectants must follow manufacturer's instructions to protect the safety and health of disinfection workers.
- Workers carrying out disinfection procedures must be provided with regular training on safe chemical handling and appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Area spraying of entire rooms, outdoor areas or persons is potentially toxic and should not be conducted.

Surfaces

- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol should be effective.
 - i. Diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. The recommended concentration of sodium hypochlorite is 5% for household bleach solutions. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.
- Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:
 - i. Use ratio bleach solution: water of 1:49 for indoors
 - ii. Use ratio bleach solution: water of 1:9 for outdoors
 - iii. For soft (porous) surfaces such as carpeted floor, rugs, and drapes, remove visible contamination if present and clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces.
 - iv. If the items can be laundered, launder items in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and then dry items completely.

Refer Annex 36 Tatacara Pembersihan Dan Disinfeksi Di Tempat Awam (Garis Panduan Pengurusan COVID-19 di Malaysia No.5/2020) at www.moh.gov.my

REFERENCES:

1. Improve How Your Mask Protects You. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC), updated 6 April 2021. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/effective-masks.html>.
2. World Health Organisation (WHO). Preventing and mitigating COVID-19 at work (Policy Brief). 19 May 2021. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-workplace-actions-policy-brief-2021-1>.
3. World Health Organisation (WHO). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. Available at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.
4. World Health Organisation (WHO). Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19. 3 Mac 2020. Available at: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6.
5. World Health Organisation (WHO). COVID-19 FAQs Available at: <https://www.epi-win.com/>.
6. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). How to Protect Yourself & Others. 13 August 2021. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>.
7. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Cleaning and disinfection of environmental surfaces in the context of COVID-19. 15 May 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/cleaning-and-disinfection-of-environmental-surfaces-inthe-context-of-covid-19>.
8. Dalton, Craig and Corbett, Stephen and Katelaris, Anthea, Pre-Emptive Low Cost Social Distancing and Enhanced Hygiene Implemented before Local COVID-19 Transmission Could Decrease the Number and Severity of Cases. (March 5, 2020). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3549276>
9. Ministry of Health Malaysia. COVID-19 Management Guidelines in Malaysia No.5 / 2020 (5th Edition).

Prepared by:

Occupational & Environmental Health Sector,
Disease Control Division,
Ministry of Health Malaysia
Updated: 12 September 2021