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Updated requirements for safe management measures at
the workplace



Authors
Wong Pei-Ling, Marvin Chua and Pearlene Han

UPDATED REQUIREMENTS FOR SAFE MANAGEMENT MEASURES AT THE WORKPLACE

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Authors: [Wong Pei-Ling](#), [Marvin Chua](#) and [Pearlene Han](#).

A. Introduction

On 23 September 2020, the Ministry of Manpower (“MOM”) updated its advisory on “Requirements for Safe Management Measures at the workplace” (the “Safe Management Measures”), which was first jointly introduced by MOM, National Trades Union Congress and the Singapore National Employers Federation on 9 May 2020. The Safe Management Measures were further updated on 22 October 2020.

Effective from 28 September 2020, the updated Safe Management Measures are intended for general workplace settings and were introduced to minimise the risk of widespread re-emergence of COVID-19 in the community. Specific workplaces such as construction worksites and shipyards may have to fulfil additional requirements and are advised to refer to sector-specific requirements.

Further information on the Safe Management Measures is available in the “FAQs on Safe Management Measures at the workplace after Circuit Breaker period” (the “FAQs”).

Agencies including MOM, Building and Construction Authority and Enterprise Singapore will continue to enforce and take action against errant employers, including issuing stop-work orders and financial penalties.

An overview of the Safe Management Measures is set out below.

B. Take care of workers

Actively enable employees to work from home

Prior to the 23 September 2020 update, working from home was the default mode of

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working (this applied to companies resuming operations in Phases One and Two) and employees were only to go into the office where there is no alternative. While work from home remains the default mode of working, from 28 September 2020, employees who are able to work from home may return to the workplace to better support work and business operations, subject to compliance with the following:

- For employees whose jobs can be performed from home, employers must ensure that they continue to do so for at least half their working time to limit their exposure at the workplace. This will be measured across a reasonable period of time not exceeding 4 weeks.
To illustrate, a full-time worker with a six-day work week will now be allowed to be in the office for up to three days in a week. The employee's return to the workplace can either be initiated by the employee and agreed upon with the employer, or directed by the employer.
- In addition, employers must ensure that no more than half of their employees who are able to work from home are at the workplace at any point in time. This is intended to help limit the number of workers that may be exposed at the workplace at any point in time, and reduce crowding in common areas.
To illustrate, an employer may split its employees who are able to work from home into two equal teams. Each team will alternate between work from home and the workplace on a weekly basis.
- Work from home measures should also be implemented in a sustainable manner that enables employees to maintain work-life harmony while continuing to meet business needs.

To illustrate, putting (i) and (ii) together, if there are 20 workers and only 10 are able to work from home. Out of the 10 who are able to work from home, only up to 5 can be in the office at any one time. In addition, the 10 workers who are able to work from home must continue to do so for half their working time. If an employee takes leave, this can be counted towards the time that they are working from home. On the other hand, work or training done outside of the workplace is considered time spent at the workplace and will be counted towards the working time the employee is allowed to spend at the workplace.

For employees who are still unable to work from home, employers should review work processes, provide the necessary IT equipment, and adopt solutions that enable remote working and online collaboration. The onus is on employers to show that they have made a reasonable effort to facilitate work from home. Employers must also demonstrate business or operational reasons as to why these workers are unable to work from home despite the employers having reviewed and redesigned their work processes. The Advisory encourages

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employers to also leverage technology to ensure business continuity and safe management. A list of resources (such as technology solutions and grants available to assist companies) is provided in Annex A of the Safe Management Measures (<https://www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/covid-19/annex-a-resources-to-assist-companies.pdf>).

As much as possible, companies should continue to conduct virtual meetings, and physical meetings should be minimised (e.g. by using tele-conferencing facilities).

Companies should pay special attention to vulnerable employees (e.g. persons who are aged 60 and above, and patients who are immunocompromised or have concurrent medical conditions such as, *inter alia*, obesity, hypertension and diabetes) by enabling them to work-from-home or temporarily redeploying them to another role within the company.

Employees at the workplace

For employees at the workplace, employers should take note of and ensure the following new or updated precautions in the Updated Safe Management Measures are in place:

Work-related events

Previously, employers were required to cancel or defer all events or activities that involve close and prolonged contact amongst participants, including conferences, seminars and exhibitions. From 28 September 2020, all work-related events (e.g. conferences, seminars, corporate retreats, staff training sessions and general meetings) that proceed must adhere to prevailing workplace Safe Management Measures and are subjected to the following requirements:

- the number of persons per event must be capped at 50 persons;
- attendees must maintain at least 1 metre of safe distancing between individual attendees, as per the requirement at the workplace;
- food and drinks should preferably not be served at workplace events. If deemed necessary for practical reasons to serve meals, individuals must be seated and served individually, and minimise contact with one another while eating. Meal durations should be kept short to minimise the period that individuals are unmasked, and the meal should not be a main feature of the event.

From 22 October 2020, work-related events at third-party venues will also be allowed to resume subject to any additional premise owners' safe management policies.

Minimise socialising

Previously, employers were required to ensure that employees do not socialise or congregate in groups at the workplace, including during meals or breaks. Employees were

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required to have meals or breaks on their own. All social gatherings at the workplace had to be cancelled or deferred and employers were not to organize social gatherings outside the workplace and had to remind their employees not to socialise outside of the workplace, both during or outside working hours. This included going out together for lunch, dinner, breaks or drinks.

In the updated Safe Management Measures, employers are still not allowed to organise or encourage social gatherings (e.g. parties, celebrations, team bonding activities and gala dinners) within or outside the workplace. However, the FAQs clarify that employees in the same shift or worksite may now socialise in groups within and outside of the workplace, subject to the prevailing guidelines on social gatherings and permissible group size limits and safe distancing of at least 1 metre should be maintained between groups at all times. In addition, the updated Safe Management Measures state that employers must ensure that employees adhere to the permissible group size based on prevailing guidelines on social gatherings at common spaces at the workplace, including during meals or breaks.

Employers should also take note that the following precautions from the previous version of the Safe Management Measures continue to apply in the Updated Safe Management Measures and should ensure that they are in place:

Stagger start times and allow flexible workplace hours

The purpose of this precaution is to spread out employees across time and place, and reduce possible congregation of employees at all common spaces at or near the workplace. It is also intended to reduce congestion of people in public places, including public transport.

Start times should be staggered for all employees such that at least half of all employees at the workplace start work in the workplace at or after 10am, as far as possible. This would enable more employees to avoid peak-hour travel, especially if employees require the use of public transport. Timings of lunch and other breaks should also be staggered accordingly.

For employees who can work from home but who return to the workplace, employers should also allow for flexible workplace hours. This is to allow for flexibility in reducing the duration spent in the workplace, while also allowing employees to work from home during the day.

To illustrate, employers have a variety of options to implement staggered start times and flexible workplace hours:

- allow a proportion of their employees to work in the workplace from 10am-4pm, while working from home the rest of the time,
- allow their employees to work from home in the morning, and only return to the workplace in the afternoon or

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- return to the workplace only for meetings and work from home the rest of the day.

If it is not feasible to implement staggered start times, flexible workplace hours, and staggered break hours due to operational reasons (e.g. manufacturing production line activities), employers must implement other systemic arrangements to reduce congregation of employees at common spaces such as arranging for different groups of employees to arrive or depart through different entrances and exits.

Implement shift or split team arrangements

For suitable workplace settings, employers must split employees at workplace premises into teams, with each team restricted to one worksite wherever possible and no employee should work in more than one team or worksite.

There should be no cross-deployment or interaction between employees in different shifts, teams or worksites, even outside of work, although this will not apply to industries or companies that need to do so due to the nature of their work. Employers must ensure clear separation of employees on different shifts or split teams, such as implementing human traffic management measures and stepping up on cleaning of common areas during shift or split team changeovers.

If cross-deployment cannot be avoided (e.g. due to the nature of the job), additional safeguards must be taken to minimise the risk of cross infection. Such safeguards will include having systems in place to ensure that there is no direct contact with the cross-deployed personnel.

Wear masks at the workplace

Employers must ensure that all onsite personnel, including employees, visitors, suppliers and contractors, wear masks and other necessary personal protective equipment at all times at the workplace, except when participating in activities that require their masks to be removed. Masks will have to be worn immediately after the activity is completed. The FAQs also clarify that when individuals are alone in their own office with the door closed, they may remove their masks. However, if the room door is opened or if there is any contact with people, a mask must be used.

Employers should ensure that they have sufficient masks for all employees, including any need to replace masks more frequently due to workplace conditions (e.g. humid workplaces, call centres where the nature of the work may necessitate frequent mask changing). Where possible, employers should consider improving the working environment for employees to enable them to sustain the wearing of masks.

Observe good personal hygiene

Employers should encourage their employees to observe good personal hygiene (e.g.

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washing their hands regularly and refraining from touching their face).

C. Take care of the workplace

The updated Safe Management Measures in relation to taking care of the workplace have largely remained unchanged from the previous version of the Safe Management Measures.

Access at the workplace

Access at the workplace should continue to be controlled and limited to only essential employees and authorised visitors. Employers must use the SafeEntry visitor management system to record the entry of all personnel (including employees and visitors) entering the workplace. All employees and visitors should check-in and check-out of workplaces using SafeEntry to help the Ministry of Health (“MOH”) in establishing potential transmission chains.

Personnel who are unwell (including having a fever upon temperature screening) must be refused entry to the workplace. Visitors who are unwell should be asked to reschedule their appointments to another day when they are well, or be served via alternate means, such as tele-conferencing.

Employers must ensure that employees and visitors make the following declaration via SafeEntry or other means (e.g. electronic or hard copy records), before being allowed to enter premises:

- that they are currently not under a Quarantine Order or Stay-Home Notice;
- that they have not had close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case in the past 14 days; and
- that they do not have any fever or flu-like symptoms.

Employers who buy services should also require their suppliers or contractors to implement similar safe distancing measures, so that operations and business interactions with these suppliers or contractors are kept safe. Where physical interactions are still necessary, such as for the delivery of goods, employers must adopt precautionary measures such as scheduling delivery times by different suppliers in a staggered manner and keeping the durations of such transactions as short as possible.

Adhere to prevailing travel advisory

Employers should ensure that their employees adhere to MOH’s prevailing travel advisory.

Precautions to ensure clear physical spacing

Where physical interaction cannot be avoided at the workplace, precautions should be taken to ensure clear physical spacing of at least 1 metre through physical means, such as placing barriers between workstations and relocating workstations, and demarcation of safe

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physical distances using visual indicators, where possible, in the following situations:

- between all persons at meeting rooms, work areas, and workstations; and
- at all times during work-related events held at the workplace.

Keeping the workplace clean

Where possible, employers should reduce the occurrences of, or need for common physical touchpoints in the workplace such as by deploying contactless access controls. Where physical contact is needed, additional safeguards, such as disinfecting touchpoints frequently, must be taken to minimise the risk of cross infection.

Employers should step up the cleaning of workplace premises. In particular, common spaces and areas with high human contact should be regularly cleaned. Employers must also clean and disinfect tables between each meeting or seating at common spaces such as pantries and canteens. Machinery and equipment shared between different employees across different shifts or alternate teams must be cleaned and disinfected before changing hands. The sanitation and hygiene advisories disseminated by the National Environmental Agency must be adhered to.

In addition, employers must provide cleaning and disinfecting agents at all toilets and hand-wash stations, human traffic stoppage points and at common spaces.

D. Take care of workers who become unwell at the workplace

The updated Safe Management Measures in relation to taking care of workers who become unwell at the workplace have largely remained unchanged from the previous version of the Safe Management Measures. These Safe Management Measures include:

- ensuring regular checks for temperature and respiratory symptoms for all onsite employees and visitors. Employers must be able to demonstrate that these checks are in place during inspections;
- encouraging all employees to download and activate the TraceTogether app;
- actively monitoring unwell employees and guarding against incipient outbreaks. This include (i) collecting records of the employees' medical certificates and the diagnosis provided if there are any COVID-19-related symptoms and the results of the employees' medical test if they were tested for COVID-19, (ii) advising employees who are unwell to stay at home and consult a doctor, and (iii) requiring employees on sick leave to closely monitor their health before returning to the workplace, and requiring their close contacts at the workplace to monitor their health more regularly;
- where possible, ensuring that each employee visits only one clinic for check-ups if

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unwell. Otherwise, the employee should inform the clinic of all recent doctor visits over the past 14 days for any COVID-19-related symptoms; and

- putting plans in place to manage unwell and confirmed cases. This includes an evacuation plan for employees who are unwell or suspected of having COVID-19 (the “Suspected Case”) and a follow-up plan for employees who are confirmed to have COVID-19 (the “Confirmed Case”). The evacuation plan should include the appointment of an emergency response team, established procedures for activation of the emergency response team, evacuation routes, identification of designated clinic and transport arrangements for the Suspected Case. The follow up plan should include follow up actions to contain the spread of the virus such as cordoning off and disinfecting of affected area and managing of employees that are in close contact with the Confirmed Case.

E. Implement a system of Safe Management Measures

The updated Safe Management Measures in relation to taking care of workers who become unwell at the workplace have largely remained unchanged from the previous version of the Safe Management Measures. These Safe Management Measures include:

- implementing a detailed monitoring plan to ensure compliance with Safe Management Measures and timely resolution of outstanding issues; and
- appointing Safe Management Officer(s) (“SMO”) to assist in the implementation, coordination and monitoring of the system of Safe Management Measures at the workplace. Employers must provide the appointed SMOs with adequate instruction, information and supervision for them to fulfil their required duties, which include (i) coordinating the implementation of the Safe Management Measures by identifying relevant risks, recommending and assisting in implementing measures to mitigate the risks and communicating the measures to all personnel working in the workplace, (ii) conducting inspection and checks to ensure compliance with the Safe Management Measures and reporting and documenting any non-compliance found during such inspections and checks, (iii) immediately remedying any non-compliance found, and (iv) keeping records of inspections, checks and correction actions which shall be made available upon request by a Government Inspector.

Employers must ensure that the measures above are in place, communicated and explained to employees prior to resuming work onsite. Signs should also be put up to remind employees and visitors to observe all measures in place.

F. Further updates to be expected

As Singapore could potentially be moving into Phase Three of its gradual re-opening by the

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end of December 2020, it is likely that the Safe Management Measures will continue to be implemented and further updates to the same may be expected depending on the technological updates and operational practices.

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