



MINISTRY OF
MANPOWER

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National Trades Union Congress

SNEF

 SINGAPORE
BUSINESS
FEDERATION
Apex Business Chamber

THIRD TRIPARTITE ADVISORY ON WORKPLACE MEASURES TO TACKLE INFLUENZA A (H1N1-2009)

BACKGROUND

Following the recent announcement by the Ministry of Health (MOH) on the transition from containment to mitigation approach, the tripartite partners, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) / Singapore Business Federation (SBF) and the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), in consultation with the MOH, have updated the *Tripartite Advisory on Workplace Measures to Tackle Influenza A (H1N1-2009)*, for implementation by employers and employees. This third Advisory supersedes the preceding advisories released on 30 April 2009 and 26 June 2009.

MINIMISING WORKPLACE DISRUPTIONS

2 Employers should closely monitor Influenza A (H1N1-2009)-related developments, and follow health advisories provided by the Government. These may be accessed at www.moh.gov.sg or www.flu.gov.sg. The information should be communicated regularly to employees.

3 Employers should start planning early to ensure that disruptions are minimised and that their businesses remain viable during this period. They should prepare to implement their business continuity plans, which should include dealing with the possible scenario where there is significant absence from work. They could also consult the Singapore Business Federation (contact details below) when

developing and implementing such plans. Employers are encouraged to brief employees on the business continuity plans.

INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES

4 Employers are strongly encouraged to exercise social responsibility, and implement infection control measures at the workplace, including:

- a. Considering the needs of employees who might be at higher risk of severe illness and complications due to Influenza A (H1N1-2009),¹ and take appropriate steps to enable them to work, while minimising their risk of infection at the workplace.
- b. Maintaining environmental cleanliness to minimise transmission of the Influenza A (H1N1-2009) virus, including frequent disinfection of common areas.
- c. Advising employees to maintain high standards of personal hygiene, such as washing hands frequently with soap and water, and covering their noses and mouths with a piece of tissue paper when they cough or sneeze. Those who have flu-like symptoms should be asked to seek medical help at a nearby Pandemic Preparedness Clinic, and to observe the period of leave as indicated in the Medical Certificates issued by the doctors, in accordance with the latest MOH advisories.
- d. Considering taking precautionary measures such as staggering working hours where practicable so that employees might avoid peak hour

¹ As at 10 Jul 2009, the groups at higher risk according to MOH are: (i) persons aged 65 and older, (ii) children under 5 years of age, (iii) those with chronic metabolic disease (including diabetes mellitus), chronic lung disease (including asthma) or chronic heart disease, (iv) those with medical conditions such as cancer on active treatment, organ transplant, dialysis or immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medication or by HIV), (v) children and teenagers less than 18 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy, and (vi) pregnant women.

crowds in the public transportation system, advising employees to avoid crowded areas and contact with anyone who appears unwell.

- e. Urging employees on medical leave not to return to the workplace. This socially responsible measure would allow employees to recover fully, reduce the risk of infecting other colleagues, and minimise business disruptions at the workplace. Likewise, employees on medical leave should be socially responsible and rest at home. For employees who have used up their medical leave, employers are urged to exercise compassion and flexibility by granting extended paid medical leave.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Absence from work under Home Quarantine Order

5 In the mitigation phase, contact tracing and Home Quarantine Orders (HQOs) would generally not be necessary, unless there are public health reasons to do so on a case-by-case basis. However, if 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 Act.

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.

Social Distancing – Special Leave of Absence

7 The employer may, as a precautionary measure, require an employee to consult a doctor. The employer may also request that the employee stay away from

the workplace (e.g. to practise social distancing). In such a situation, the employer may implement alternative work arrangements such as tele-commuting to minimise work disruptions. The employer could also grant them special paid leave of absence. Based on the circumstances of the individual company and workers, the employer could treat the leave of absence as medical leave, allow time-off or other arrangements by mutual agreement with the affected employees. Employers are urged to be flexible and compassionate when implementing such arrangements. Employees should also be flexible in accepting the measures requested by employers to ensure business continuity.

8 For employees who need to stay away from the workplace, such as taking leave to take care of unwell family members, employers are also strongly encouraged to adopt a flexible and enlightened approach in implementing flexible work arrangements as well as allowing employees to take their leave (e.g. annual leave, childcare leave and unpaid infant care leave). For employees who have used up their leave entitlements, employers could consider granting them no-pay leave during the period of absence.

9 In situations where large numbers of workers are affected, and consequently companies' operations are seriously disrupted or companies face potential closure, employers could implement cost-management measures (e.g. to redeploy workers or temporarily layoff workers who are requested to stay away from the workplace). The implementation of such measures, including how leave of absence should be treated, should be carried out in consultation with employees / unions (if the company is unionised).

CONCLUSION - STAYING UNITED IN TACKLING THE FLU PANDEMIC

10 The tripartite partners would like to encourage employers and employees to work together to mitigate the spread of the Influenza A (H1N1-2009) and minimise the impact to businesses and employees. Employers should take precautionary

steps by putting in place infection control measures and business continuity plans, and be considerate towards the needs of their employees. On their part, employees should also cooperate with the company so as to minimise disruption to businesses. Both employers and employees should also exercise social responsibility by practicing social distancing, maintaining high standards of hygiene and adhering to the advisories issued by Government on the Influenza A (H1N1-2009).

11 For queries on the above advisory or advice on employment issues related to the Influenza A (H1N1-2009), please contact the following:

a. Ministry of Manpower

MOM Contact Centre, Tel: (65) 6438 5122
Email: mom_lrd@mom.gov.sg
Website: www.mom.gov.sg/flu

b. Singapore National Employers Federation

Duty Consultant, Tel: (65) 6327 9297 (Weekdays, 9 am to 5.30 pm)
Email: flu@snef.org.sg

c. Singapore Business Federation

Member Relations and Services Group, Tel: (65) 6827 6844
Email: enquiry@sbf.org.sg

Capacity Building Group (For enquiries on Business Continuity Management)

Tel: (65) 6827 6867
Email: bcm@sbf.org.sg
Website: www.sbf.org.sg

d. National Trades Union Congress

Industrial Relations Department, Tel: (65) 6213 8233
Email: ntucird@ntuc.org.sg