



WORKPLACE SAFETY NOTICE (WSN)

TOPIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR RETURNING TO WORKPLACE DURING COVID-19 TRANSITION PHASE			Reference Number 2021/WSN/09
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Purpose: This Workplace Safety Notice (WSN) provides information to all workplaces on issues for consideration for returning to the workplace setting in the COVID-19 transition phase and when COVID-19 is considered and declared by the Government of Brunei Darussalam to be endemic in Brunei Darussalam. This WSN also serves as reminder to all Principals, Occupiers, Employers, Employees and Self-Employed Persons to comply with the Workplace Safety and Health Order, 2009 and its regulations thereunder.

With Brunei Darussalam seeing a gradual decline in the number of infections daily, workplaces are gearing to return to normalcy and adapting to a different work life once the Government of Brunei Darussalam determines that COVID-19 cases are at a manageable level and the spread of the COVID-19 virus is considered endemic in the country, much like many other nations globally. In preparation of such matters, you are guided by the recommended practices stated below and required to review your business continuity plans as well as update your assessments on a routine basis.

Principals, Occupiers, Employers, Employees and Self-Employed Persons must remember that in order to avoid relapse into yet another wave of infections, there are several issues to be considered to maintain effective prevention and control of the virus at the workplace; these include procedural controls and re-aligning behaviours, as well as taking into account the mental health and well-being of the workforce and possible impacts to operations.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANISATIONAL MEASURES

- A committee and/or the management team should develop a work plan to effectively implement the process for workers return to the workplace in a safe and phased manner;
- Update the company's risk assessment as necessary to include the hazards, controls and action parties for the activities associated with the shift back to work-from-office;

- Update other necessary procedures such as the emergency response plans and business continuity plan as relevant, including contingency plans in the event there is another spike in cases;
- Undertake a step-by-step approach in a phased manner by which essential workers or teams of workers are identified and reinstated to the office or workplace (staggered timing and shifts can also be considered) from minimal optimum operations to normal level of operations, allowing those who are able to perform their task remotely the flexibility to do so;
- Where possible, avoid cross-deployment of workers i.e., no employee should work at more than one site; if unable to do so due to nature of the job, then additional measures should be in place to minimize cross-infection;
- All workers should be fully vaccinated as soon as possible. This must be a pre-requisite before allowing them to return to the workplace; and
- Identify a focal person to remain vigilant and monitor the prevention and maintenance of control measures for COVID-19 at the workplace including conducting regular inspection and checks to ensure compliance, assisting the employer to rectify the non-compliance as well keeping records of inspections, checks and corrective actions.

PREPARING THE WORKPLACE

- Prior to the return of workers, ensure all areas of the workplace are thoroughly cleaned including removal of dust and mould which may lead to respiratory issues. Disinfect the workplace especially shared spaces such as elevators, pantry, toilets and meeting rooms as well as arrange for regular disinfection of frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, handrails and light switches;
- Ensure the workplace is well-ventilated either by opening a window or regular maintenance of ventilation and central air-conditioning systems;
- Revise the layout of the workplace seating area to always allow for physical distancing between workers as well as visitors as recommended by Ministry of Health (MOH) directives;
- Engineering controls such as plexiglass partitions or plastic barriers can be installed especially for frontliners such as at the reception desk;
- Provision of hand sanitizers (>70% alcohol content) at various locations of the workplace and extra face masks if required by workers and visitors;
- Provision of hand soap at the washing area for employers as well as visitors especially in toilets and public spaces;
- Display signages at strategic locations to remind employees and visitors to adhere to COVID-19 prevention and control measures; and

- BruHealth QR codes must be clearly displayed, and temperature check stations established at the entrance of the workplace, only those with green or yellow codes are allowed to enter.

HEALTH & HYGIENE

- Conduct regular health surveillance of workers. Those who are unwell or showing symptoms of COVID-19 e.g., fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, should not be allowed to be at the workplace and encouraged to get medical attention immediately;
- Workers exposed to a COVID-19 positive case (suspected or otherwise) should notify the employer immediately and focal person to report to the Ministry of Health (MOH);
- Good hygiene practices and proper cough and sneeze etiquette should continue to be promoted e.g., regular handwashing;
- Employees and visitors are to ensure that they wear a face mask at all times except when eating and drinking in accordance with directives from MoH;
- Employees are advised to carry out regular cleaning and sanitizing of their personal workplaces;
- Avoid sharing of common stationary items e.g., staplers, pens between workers or shared resources such as newspapers or magazines; and
- Conduct regular use of Antigen Rapid Test (ART) for returning workers; during the Transition Phase in which the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) has specified for the test to be conducted on a bi-weekly basis but frequency should be higher for those at high risk, e.g., those living in shared workers accommodation or other institutional settings.

COMMUNICATION & TECHNOLOGY

- Where possible, adopt and continue the use of virtual conferencing to limit the number of workers and visitors at the workplace;
- Procedures and plans should be effectively communicated to workers and stakeholders prior to return to the workplace;
- Set up a centralized information system for all COVID-19 related matters including plans, activities and updates among others; for bigger organizations this may be on the company website or intranet while for smaller companies this may be just a notice board; and
- Keep updated on the latest news as well as MOH directives involving COVID-19 and other relevant stakeholders e.g., Department of Labour, Authority for Building Control and Industry (ABCi), PMO, etc. This information should be communicated to the workers effectively via email or Whatsapp.

WORKERS WELL-BEING & BEHAVIOUR

- Avoid concentration of persons in areas such as meeting rooms, pantry, company vehicles by limiting capacity, taking into account the requirement for physical distancing measures;
- Take measures to support the mental health and well-being of workers either by providing counselling services or maintaining an open dialogue between workers and the management;
- Promote a healthy work-life balance for both workers at the office and those teleworking through emphasizing the importance of sufficient rest, physical activity and disconnecting from technology;
- Review the expectations on workplace productivity taking into consideration the limitations due to COVID-19;
- Consider hybrid work-arrangement to strengthen business resilience against new variants and future outbreaks as well protection of high-risk individuals e.g., pregnant women, the elderly, those with underlying medical conditions and/ or those negatively affected mentally by the situation; and
- Ensure that efforts are made to prevent any stigma and any form of discrimination of workers who have previously been tested positive for COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the workplace can be a daunting prospect and may be a source of anxiety among workers. Employers can help ease that burden by undertaking necessary measures such as regular disinfection and sharing of procedures and plans to increase workers' confidence in the organisational management of the transition.

Ensuring the return of workers to the workplace in a phased approach is highly recommended in line with directives from Government Agencies. All workplaces are hereby reminded to ensure preparedness in planning required actions to be undertaken in the event cases of COVID-19 infection suddenly increase within the country or if there are detection of positive cases at the workplace.

Should there be any questions concerning this Workplace Safety Notice please contact SHENA at **+673 238 2000** or email **info@shena.gov.bn** SHENA would like to thank all stakeholders for their cooperation in ensuring Brunei Darussalam is a safe place to work and live.

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