

COVID-19: Government restrictions in Singapore

21 April 2020

* Updated following Prime Minister Lee's speech on 21 April 2020 at 5pm SGT.

Circuit breaker: Partial lockdown of Singapore

Implications for individuals

On 3 April 2020 as the COVID-19 situation worsened in Singapore, the government announced the closure of all workplace premises and retail outlets except for those deemed essential to support the daily living needs of the population during the "circuit breaker" period from 7 April 2020 and 4 May 2020. On 21 April 2020 the circuit breaker period was further extended until 1 June 2020. During this period the population is compelled to only leave their homes for vital tasks such as purchasing food or essential items, and for exercise. When undertaking such tasks, safe distancing measures must be observed at all times. Masks must be worn in public at all times, with an exception for when exercising. We are beginning to see enforcement action being taken against those who leave their homes without good reason. For example, on 10 April 2020 2,900 "stern warnings" and 40 fines were issued for breach of the elevated safe distancing measures. With people still failing to comply, warnings are no longer given and fines of SG\$300 are issued for first offence, increasing to SG\$10,000 for second offence.

Implications for employers

As mentioned above, only businesses providing essential services may operate from their premises during the "circuit breaker" period. The government website includes a comprehensive list of the services deemed essential at this time. This list can be accessed [here](#). Some examples of essential services include health and social services, food, and energy. Companies that operate services that are not deemed essential must suspend all activities at their workplace or place of operations. In order to be able to operate from their workplaces under the "general exemption," essential service providers must submit details of their plans to operate with enhanced safe distancing measures in place. Essential service providers must observe safe distancing measures, including but not limited to the following:

- a) All activities that can take place through telecommuting must be done from home.
- b) Employers must implement safe distancing measures to reduce physical interactions by:
 - (i) Reducing the need for and duration of physical interactions.

- (ii) Staggering working hours.
- (iii) Postponing all group events.
- (iv) Implementing shift work and/or split team arrangements.

Nonessential entities that are able to continue to operate their business (in limited or full capacity) with their employees working from home should continue to do so. Providers of nonessential services can therefore continue to operate to the extent that they are able to operate with their employees working from home, and a number of other options are available for providers of nonessential services, depending on their particular circumstances:

- a) **Supporting an essential service:** A company which is not listed as an essential service but which supports an activity listed as an essential service provider can submit an application for general exemption. The company must support the application with details such as the names of the essential company or companies being supported and the goods or services provided to these companies. The government will respond within 48 hours, during which period the company may continue to operate.
- b) **Belief that service is essential:** As mentioned above, only companies that carry out activities listed as essential may continue on-site activities. All other companies must suspend operations even if they believe their service to be essential. In such a scenario the company may submit an application for general exemption with supporting information and justification as to why the company's activities are essential. The government will consider all applications on a case-by-case basis. A company in this situation may only re-commence on-site activities upon approval of exemption.
- c) **Time-limited exemptions:** The owner of a nonessential business may attend their workplace in order to take care of crucial tasks that cannot be done remotely, or for the purpose of retrieving necessary materials or documents. Upon the successful application for a time-limited exemption, the workplace may be visited in order to carry out such integral tasks. Following a successful application, employees may also be enabled to work on site for a short period of time (i.e., less than a day). The time-limited exemption application form specifies that the owner of the business may attend the premises alone without submitting an application for a time-limited exemption. However, it may be advisable to make the application in order to enable a small group of employees to attend, or if there may be practical difficulties getting onto the premises without express authorisation (i.e., getting past security). Specific guidance on whether a task constitutes a "crucial task that cannot be done remotely" can be sought via the Enterprise Infoline on +65 6898 1800. Unfortunately, Ministry of Health (MOH) is under considerable strain due to the number of requests for time-limited exemptions and has imposed further restrictions that each entity can now only apply for four time-limited exemptions during the current circuit breaker period.

Travel bans

From 23 March 2020 23:59 all short-term visitors (from anywhere in the world) were prohibited from entering or transiting through Singapore. The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) is only allowing the entry/return of work pass holders, including their dependents, for those providing essential services, such as in healthcare and transport. As a result of the travel bans, the entry of foreigners into Singapore has all but ceased.

Initially those arriving from outside of Singapore were issued with a Stay Home Notice (SHN) pursuant to which they would have to quarantine at home for a period of 14 days. As measures

have tightened, returning citizens are now transported directly to designated facilities to serve their 14 day quarantine period. All arrivals into Singapore must take a mandatory COVID-19 swab test.

In view of the heightened risk of importation, the MOH on 18 March 2020 advised Singaporeans to defer all travel abroad. This expansion was to reduce the risk of Singaporeans being infected with the virus when abroad and spreading it to other Singaporeans when they return.

Any Singapore resident or long-term pass holder who leaves Singapore from 27 March 2020 in disregard of the prevailing travel advisories, will be charged at unsubsidised rates for their inpatient stay at public hospitals if they are admitted for suspected COVID-19 and have onset of symptoms within 14 days of returning to Singapore.

Singapore residents will also not be able to claim from MediShield Life or Integrated Shield Plans for these treatments at public and private hospitals if they are admitted for suspected COVID-19 within 14 days of returning to Singapore.

Any work pass holder or his/her dependant who leaves Singapore from 27 March 2020 will be deprioritized for entry approval and could see significant delays before they are allowed to return to Singapore if they persist in travelling abroad and return infected.

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