



GMS Flash Alert

Immigration Edition

2020-028 | February 13, 2020

Singapore - Measures Implemented to Contain Spread of Coronavirus

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a public health emergency in late January 2020,¹ governments across the world have responded with immigration and health-related measures to help prevent the further spread of the novel coronavirus ("COVID-19"). Such measures include temperature screening at borders, entry or transit bans, and self-isolation or quarantine for travelers.

In Singapore, so far, the government is employing a combination of entry bans for visitors, denial of new work passes, and health directives (i.e., quarantine or compulsory leave of absence (LOA)) for employees coming from Mainland China.² On 7 February 2020, the government raised the Disease Outbreak Response System Condition (DORSCON) alert to Orange.

From 9 February 2020, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) further introduced a responsibility for employers to complete an approval step for the entry or return of employees from Mainland China. As a condition for the approval, employers must make sure that their employees complete a compulsory LOA upon arrival in Singapore.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The additional steps in light of the new measures, mean more administration and some inconvenience for some companies and their affected employees, though it is in the interest of protecting the health and safety of the population in Singapore.

Companies and affected employees must comply with the MOM approval process and the leave of absence (LOA). Affected employees and dependents must not travel to Singapore until the approval is obtained. Companies must request the approval, arrange suitable housing for the LOA, and comply with declaration and record-keeping obligations.

Noncompliance will result in revocation of work passes for employees and curtailment of the company's work pass privileges. The MOM will implement this strictly.

Entering or Returning Work Pass Holders – New Policies and Requirements

From 9 February 2020, work pass holders of all nationalities, their dependents, and those with in-principle approvals who were in Mainland China within the past 14 days need to obtain MOM approval before they can enter Singapore.³

The sponsoring employer must file the request online three days before the employee's intended date of arrival. In the request, employers must declare that they have secured suitable housing arrangements for the employees to serve a mandatory 14-day LOA. Employers will be required to send the MOM approval letter to the employees, and employees will be required to carry the letter to be admitted into Singapore.

Upon arrival, affected employees and dependents must proceed directly to the designated lodgings to serve the LOA. While on LOA, they must minimise time spent in public places and avoid contact with others. They must also complete a declaration form to be retained by the employer for submission to the MOM on request.

Individuals who arrive in Singapore without MOM approval will have their passes cancelled and the employing company's ability to sponsor work passes revoked or suspended. Observance of the LOA is compulsory, and employers and employees are jointly responsible for making sure the employee behaves responsibly during this period.

New Work Pass Applicants

From 31 January 2020, the MOM is rejecting all new work pass applications for foreign employees from Mainland China until further notice. Renewal applications for existing work pass holders are not affected.⁴

Visitors to/from China or in Singapore Having Transited through China

From 1 February 2020, temporary visitors with Chinese passports, as well as other nationalities who traveled to Mainland China within 14 days of arrival in Singapore, are not permitted to enter or transit through Singapore.⁵

Leave of Absence versus Quarantine

Leave of Absence

The following groups of people will be placed on LOA:

- Returning Singaporeans and permanent residents who traveled to Mainland China (outside of Hubei Province) within 14 days of arrival; and
- Returning work pass holders and their dependents, as well as those with in-principle approvals who traveled to Mainland China (outside of Hubei Province) within 14 days of arrival.

KPMG NOTE

The LOA is a precautionary measure. Individuals placed on LOA can still be allowed to leave their residences for daily necessities or urgent matters, but should keep contact with others to a minimum. Companies may explore allowing the employee to work from home, but if this is not feasible, consider providing additional paid leave to the employee.

Quarantine

The following groups of people will be placed on quarantine:

- Returning Singaporeans and permanent residents who traveled to Hubei Province, China within 14 days of arrival;
- Returning work pass holders and their dependents who traveled to Hubei Province, China within 14 days of arrival;
- Returning permanent residents and holders of work or dependent passes with Chinese passports issued in Hubei Province; and
- Recent travelers from Hubei who are already in Singapore – the health authorities will assess who among this group are at higher risk and place them on quarantine.

A quarantine order is a legal directive, noncompliance of which will constitute an offence carrying serious penalties. Individuals issued with a quarantine order must not leave their designated housing for any reason. They will be deemed to be on paid hospitalization leave.

KPMG NOTE

- The MOM encourages employers to defer, as much as possible, the return of workers from China until the COVID-19 situation de-escalates. The new approval process is expected to stagger and better manage these re-entries.
 - The MOM has sent a strong message that noncompliance with the LOA will not be taken lightly. It has cancelled work passes of employees and suspended work pass privileges of companies found to be noncompliant.⁶ Monitoring is conducted through on-site inspections, phone calls, and video calls.
 - Companies should also consider the wider implications for any foreign employees who may over-stay due to difficulties of returning home. There can be consequences around immigration, personal tax, and permanent establishment risk.
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FOOTNOTES

- 1 See the WHO [webpage](#) dedicated to coronavirus news and advisories.
- 2 For Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Advisories in relation to the coronavirus from the Singapore government, click [here](#).
- 3 See “New Requirements for Employers Who Have Work Pass Holders with Travel History to Mainland China Entering or Returning to Singapore” (7 February 2020) on the website for the Ministry of Manpower.
- 4 See “Update on Additional Measures by the Ministry of Manpower to Minimise the Risk of Community Spread of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus” (31 January 2020) on the website for the Ministry of Manpower.
- 5 See “Updates on Border Control Measures in Response to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus” (1 February 2020) on the website for the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority.
- 6 For a related news report, see “Manpower ministry revokes 4 work passes for Leave of Absence breaches, suspends employer privileges,” in *ChannelNewsAsia-International Edition* (online) dated 9 February 2020 click [here](#). *(Please note this is a third-party (non-governmental, non-KPMG) website. Provision of this link does not represent an endorsement of this site by KPMG.)*

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RELATED RESOURCE

New Thought Leadership from KPMG: “Coronavirus: Protect Your Staff and Your Business”

Due to the rapid development of the novel coronavirus situation, many companies have initiated business continuity planning to protect their staff and mitigate the impact on their business operations. In light of the concerns around international assignees – including business travelers – in affected areas, the KPMG People Services team in the People’s Republic of China has developed a [booklet](#) (“Coronavirus: Protect Your Staff and Your Business” (February 2020)) highlighting the key considerations for these issues from high level tax, legal, and immigration perspectives.

Contact us

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