

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

DTI and DOLE Interim Guidelines on Prevention and Workplace Control of COVID-19

The outbreak of COVID-19 has undeniably changed the standard methods of working. The transition from Enhanced Community Quarantine to General Community Quarantine allowed work in some sectors but with strict compliance to standards set by the government.

The DOLE has always prioritized the safety and health of the country's workers as it calls for the employers and workers to prepare for a "new normal" in the next several months as physical distancing, wearing of face mask and hand washing and disinfecting are likely here to stay.

In line with this, the DOLE and DTI jointly issued the "Interim Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of COVID-19." The following are the collated inquiries and answers regarding the implementation of this guideline in the different establishments.

- **What was the rationale for issuing the DTI-DOLE Interim Guidelines?**

The Guidelines was issued to assist workplaces in the private sector in their preparations for the return-to-work of workers and resumption of on-site operations, after lifting the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ).

These preparations include the adaption for the "new normal" which includes physical distancing, mandatory wearing of face masks, disinfection procedures, cough etiquette and frequent hand washing. Collectively, if these are done properly, this will mitigate the spread of infection in the workplaces.

- **What are the components of the Joint Guidelines?**

In this Interim Guidelines, workers and employers will be required to follow total precautionary measures for the containment of COVID-19. The following are the different interventions which workplaces in the private sector may adopt for successful control and containment of the virus.

1. Increasing physical and mental resilience
2. Reducing transmission of COVID-19:
3. Minimizing contact rate
4. Reducing the risk of infection from COVID-19
5. Duties of employers and workers
6. COVID-19 Testing

- **Are the Guidelines applicable also to micro enterprises?**

As a general rule, YES. The Guidelines is inclusive, it is no different from the previous DOLE issuances on OSH. It was issued to provide the minimum acceptable degree of protection that must be afforded to every worker against the COVID-19 virus.

Micro-establishments are required to adopt the applicable provisions of the Guidelines in their workplaces and make the necessary equivalencies on provisions which they have some difficulties in complying with.

Section 10 of the Guidelines obliges the DTI and DOLE to render assistance and technical support to companies which have difficulties in complying with the Guidelines.

- **Is COVID-19 Testing mandatory?**

No. The DOLE takes cognizance of the enormous costs that the employer may shell out if this provision is forced on them. However, the DOLE and DTI highly encourage COVID-19 testing for employees of companies which can afford it. This may help them in identifying COVID-19 suspects for proper management.

The cost of the testing shall be shouldered by the employer.

- **What types of PPEs shall be provided by the employer to his/her workers?**

Employers shall provide the appropriate face masks for workers. Should cloth masks be used, the washable type shall be worn but additional filter material such as tissues inside the masks may be added.

Clinic staff assigned to assess the workers held in the isolation area shall be provided with appropriate medical grade PPEs by the establishment which shall include but not limited to, face masks, goggles/face shields and gloves.

For cleaners, rubber or latex gloves and goggles in addition to face masks shall also be provided by their employer at no cost to the workers.

- **Is the use of foot bath mandatory?**

The use of foot bath is not a mandatory requirement for workplaces in the Guidelines but an option for employers.

- **Is the one (1) meter requirement for physical distancing mandatory? How about those cramped establishments, what interventions are recommended for this set-up?**

The one (1) meter physical distancing is mandatory and in fact, the minimum as some standards even require a minimum of two meters between two adjacent workers.

For cramped establishments, to help maintain physical distancing; employers may have the option to implement skeletal workforce, work from home arrangements, shifting work schedule or any other similar work arrangements.

- **Some industries like construction and the audio-visual industry have some work processes which make the required physical distancing not possible to implement. What can be done in such cases?**

Industries such as those in construction and audio visual shall have separate guidelines specific for their industries. It shall adopt the pertinent provisions of the joint DTI and DOLE Guidelines and craft other provisions peculiar to the nature of their work processes and ensure that these are aligned with the minimum health standards set by the Department of Health.

- **What safety measures must be observed within the entrance/s of establishments?**

The following are the different interventions establishments are required to comply with:

1. No mask, No entry policy
2. Accomplishment of Health Symptoms Questionnaire for assessment
3. Temperature checked and recorded in the Health Symptoms Questionnaire (refer to Annex of the Guidelines)
4. Provision of a well-ventilated holding area
5. Designated health officer provided with appropriate PPEs
6. Disinfecting foot baths in all entrances are optional.

- **For establishments where the work from home arrangement is not feasible as those in the manufacturing or service sectors, how do we protect the vulnerable individuals? Will they be denied employment during this time?**

As a general rule, because of their vulnerability to the virus, senior citizens, pregnant women, workers with co-morbidities are discouraged to travel and work to protect themselves from being infected. Work from home

arrangement or any alternative work arrangement may be assigned to them as may be applicable.

Please take note that the Guidelines used the phrase “highly encouraged,” as the DOLE is aware of the peculiarities of the different industries and their demographics. Thus, the prohibition is NOT absolute.

For establishments with these types of workers; special work accommodation may be given to them such as priority for transport service, provision of sleeping quarters or other arrangements agreeable to both parties. They shall not be discriminated upon to work and make a living.

- **Is the provision of shuttle service and decent accommodation mandatory?**

The Guidelines used the phrase “whenever feasible”, meaning that those employers who can afford are required to provide these welfare facilities to their workers.

- **When did the Guidelines take effect?**

The Guidelines took effect upon its signing by the Secretaries of DTI and DOLE on April 30, 2020. The Guidelines shall remain in effect until it is amended or superseded by future issuances.