

ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

Preparedness for SMEs - Responding to COVID-19

CONTENTS

Is COVID-19 really gone?

The current reality

Key advisories for SMEs

Summarising the key message

What should be in your BCP

What should it really contain?

Legal considerations

Working arrangements

Next steps

Putting your preparedness plan into action



Is COVID-19 really gone?

It is fairly easy to forget that not too long ago, the whole world was still battling with COVID-19. As a recap, Singapore started to develop strategies and measures to transition to endemic COVID-19 since May 2021. In a Ministry of Health (MOH) press conference on 15 October 2022, the Minister for Health, Ong Ye Kung, shared that Singapore would have to adopt an “endemicity” approach where we accept that COVID-19 still exists, while taking necessary steps to live with it. These include vaccination, testing, treatment as well as practising social responsibility.

Fast forward to 15 Dec 2023, the MOH has provided in its weekly update that the number of COVID-19 cases in Singapore have risen to about 56,043 cases (compared to just 32,035 in the previous week). As a key response measure, the MOH has even activated its second COVID-19 Treatment Facility (CTF) to cater to increased capacity at Singapore EXPO. These would be for patients who do not require intensive hospital care.

The MOH has also called for the general public to exercise personal and social responsibility, including wearing face masks in crowded places and selected settings.

Organisational Resilience

Key advisories for SMEs

In response to the recent updates, a few trade associations and chambers of commerce have provided brief advisories on how SMEs should be prepared. Some of the key points include:

1. **Reinforce personal hygiene and protective measures:** This includes mask-wearing if unwell.
2. **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Consider implementing flexible work arrangements such as remote work or staggered shifts where feasible. Encourage employees who are unwell or display symptoms to stay home and seek medical attention promptly.
3. **Stay Informed and Educate Employees:** Keep your employees informed about the latest updates and developments concerning COVID-19. Educate them on preventive measures and encourage them to remain vigilant both at work and in their personal lives.
4. **Prepare Contingency Plans:** Review and update your business continuity plans to ensure readiness in the event of any disruptions caused by the pandemic. Identify critical functions, alternative supply chains, and remote working capabilities.



But what key considerations should SMEs take note of with regards to “preparing contingency plans”? What are the legal considerations to look out for?

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“What is generally believed to be required in your BCP, may not always be applicable.

Be sure to engage a certified business continuity consultant to avoid unnecessary effort”

What should be in your BCP

A business continuity plan (BCP) should cater to more than just a COVID-19 scenario. It is a “living document” that should be scalable and adaptable to your business operations. The following summarises what is generally required in a BCP document. However, do note that the specific contents (and details) will depend primarily on the organisation’s scope of services coverage and the requirements set out by the respective regulators within your area of operations.

From a brief overview, your BCP should encompass the following:

1. Introduction: Identify your areas of operations and the business scope the plan is intended to protect and recover during a disruption.
2. Policy and Objectives: Describe the policy and objectives that guide the development and implementation of your BCP.
3. Risk Assessment: Identify potential risks and threats to the organisation, evaluate their likelihood and potential impact, and prioritise them based on severity.
4. Business Impact Analysis (BIA): Identify your critical business functions and processes, allocate the resources needed to maintain them during a disruption, and prioritise them based on their importance to the organisation.

Organisational Resilience

What should be in your BCP



5. Recovery Strategies: Outline the strategies and actions needed to recover critical business functions and processes, including IT systems, infrastructure, and data.
6. Emergency Response Procedures: Document the procedures for responding to an emergency or crisis situation, including communication protocols, evacuation procedures, and emergency contact information.
7. Crisis Communications Plan: Outline the processes and protocols for communicating with employees, stakeholders, customers, and the media during and after a disruptive event.
8. Training and exercising: Develop simple tests and exercises to ensure your team know what to do when the BCP is activated. Provide clear assessment and awareness objectives.
9. Appendices: Includes supporting documentation, such as contact lists, emergency response checklists, and other relevant information.

Legal Considerations (by [DL Law Corporation](#))

On working arrangements, Employers should consider the following:

1. Employers will need to refresh and update their documents and have a system.
2. Identify the changes in your Employment Agreement and Employment Handbooks and make the changes immediately to be in line with current practices.
3. Make the Employment Handbook dynamic by constantly reviewing and updating the policies.
4. Check and update your existing employment agreement so that you are ahead of the curve; and,
5. Communicate all changes with your existing employees so that you have consensus and understanding in your organisation.



Have you kept up with the changes?

Next steps

Living in an “endemicity” mode is what businesses in Singapore can expect will continue. COVID-19 will continue to evolve in the community as borders and trade remain open. As such, SMEs should not just rely on occasional advisories or “news of the day” events to guide their daily operations. SMEs should incorporate business resiliency (specifically business continuity planning) considerations as part of their strategic planning process. SMEs should also give due consideration in the legal aspects that may impact their business operations during a disruption or a crisis.

For further discussion on ensuring your BCP is in good order or any legal consideration discussions, we’d be delighted to assist. Do reach out to us at the following:

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