

COVID-19

HEALTH BULLETIN

May 4, 2020

Introduction

ActiveLink helps businesses optimize and implement a sustainable benefits program that empowers employees to do more, give more, and live more.

As the pandemic tempers throughout the world, we initiated a health bulletin to share insights and government updates about COVID-19. Our goal is to make sure you get the information you need to anticipate irregularities brought by the coronavirus outbreak.

We will closely monitor the coronavirus crisis to bring you the latest combined information from different medical research institutions, government agencies, and insurance companies. We're here to make your benefits better. Connect with us at inquiries@benefitsmadebetter.com to see how we can help you.

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COVID-19 Update

AS OF MAY 4, 2020

No. of cases worldwide: 3,356,205¹

No. of deaths: 238,730 (7%)¹

Confirmed cases in the Philippines: 9,458²

State update on coronavirus outbreak

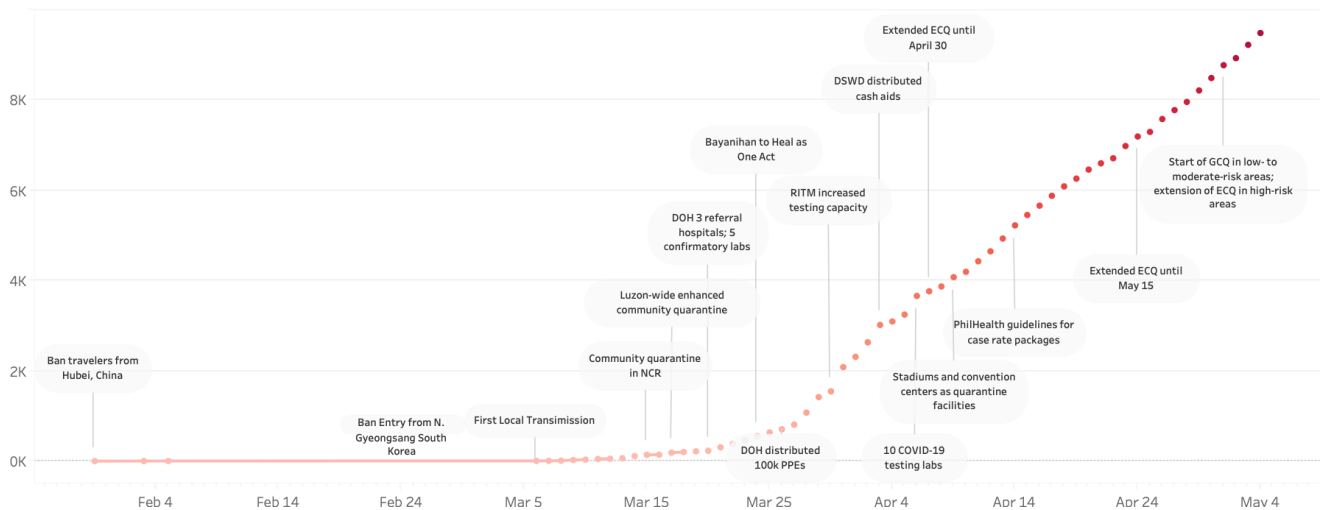


Figure 1. ActiveLink's Business Intelligence tool on Philippine government's response to COVID-19

Companies around the world are preparing for the "new normal" where social distancing, mandatory wearing of face masks, and customary temperature checks in buildings will become the new norm.

As the number of coronavirus cases continue to rise, the Philippines extends its lockdown restrictions until May 15, 2020. Provinces and cities with high reported numbers of coronavirus cases will be under the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ).

The following areas shall be under ECQ:

- National Capital Region
- Region III (Central Luzon), except Aurora province
- Region IV-A (CALABARZON)
- The province of Benguet
- The province of Pangasinan
- The province of Iloilo
- The province of Cebu
- Bacolod City
- Davao City

From May 1 to May 15, 2020, areas not mentioned, or those with low to moderate numbers of COVID-19 cases, will be placed under general community quarantine (GCQ). Under GCQ, some sectors will be allowed to resume business operations in phases, provided that they comply with the minimum health standards and physical distancing measures.

In connection with the Department of Health’s (DOH) minimum health standards,³ the Departments of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) have set up guidelines to assist companies in developing strict health protocols in the workplace. The issued guidelines are for private establishments that are allowed to operate during the ECQ and GCQ period.⁴

(DOLE and DTI guidelines can be read on page 11, under “Government guidelines and instructions.”)

The guideline mentions that employers may conduct COVID-19 tests for their employees, provided that employers will shoulder the procurement of test kits and the testing complies with the COVID-19 testing guidelines set by the DOH.

However, this could bring further backlogs if daily testing capacity is not improved and the laboratories are operating on reduced numbers of staff due to the virus infection. The DOH confirmed that they no longer met the 8,000 daily testing target since April 30.⁵

There are 20 licensed laboratories for COVID-19 testing. The newly certified laboratories are the Philippine Red Cross – Logistics and Multi-Purpose Center and the Marikina City Health Office.

LICENSED LABORATORIES	MAXIMUM DAILY TEST CAPACITY
Research Institute for Tropical Medicine	1,500
Philippine Red Cross	1,500
Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center	500
Makati Medical Center	350
Baguio General Hospital and Medical Center	300
Lung Center of the Philippines	300
St. Luke’s Medical Center–BGC	250
San Lazaro Hospital	200
UP National Institutes of Health	200
Western Visayas Medical Center	200
Chinese General Hospital	180
Detoxicare Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory	180

St. Luke's Medical Center–Quezon City	180
Southern Philippines Medical Center	150
The Medical City	80
Bicol Regional Diagnostic and Reference Laboratory	50
V. Luna Hospital	50

Source: Department of Health Online COVID-19 Tracker (accessed May 2, 2020).

* List does not include the 3 recently licensed laboratories.

The country has recorded a total of 9,485 cases of COVID-19. Of these cases, 1,315 have recovered and 623 have died. The DOH also reported that 1,772 (19%) of the cases are healthcare workers.

Meanwhile, the following facilities are utilized as temporary treatment and isolation facilities:⁶

FACILITY	BED CAPACITY
NCC NGAC	668
NCC Athlete Village	520
World Trade Center*	502
Philippine Arena*	300
Philippine International Convention Center*	294
Asean Convention Center	150
Rizal Memorial Coliseum*	132
Ninoy Aquino Stadium*	120
Philippine Sports (ULTRA) Stadium	112
Filinvest	108
Quezon Institute	100
Las Pinas Rehab Center	50
Alta de Tagaytay	30
Total	3,086

* Facilities under Mega Local Isolation and General Treatment Areas for COVID-19 (LIGTAS), managed by the national government.

Medical Updates

Although we have been hearing claims that a COVID-19 vaccine might exist in 2–3 months, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, clarified that it's one thing for a vaccine to exist and quite another thing for it to be available for routine use in humans.

"It will take 3 or 4 months to see if it's safe. Then you go to the real proof of the pudding ... that would take yet again another 6–8 months in an environment with infection, because you want to show it works. Add all of that up and you're dealing with a year to a year-and-a-half at the earliest," Fauci explained.⁷

In the meantime, the spotlight is on the drug remdesivir as something that might be useful for combating the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19. The drug was originally developed to treat Ebola but it didn't work well enough there. Now we are trying it out on COVID-19 and hoping it will be more useful this time.

So far, clinical trials done on over a thousand people suggest that the people who received the drug recovered faster than those who didn't. However, the studies did not show if remdesivir treatment prevents deaths better than a placebo.⁸

Remdesivir is not actually an FDA-approved drug. Its safety profile, efficacy, and optimal dose have not been established.

Instead, the US FDA has granted remdesivir Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) so that it can be used with – and only with – COVID-19 patients with severe disease, who understand that remdesivir is an unapproved drug, agreed to receive it, had eGFR and hepatic laboratory testing, and has no known hypersensitivity to remdesivir.

The availability of the drug outside of the United States is still uncertain.

Remdesivir can only be given as an intravenous infusion, not through oral ingestion or muscular injection. The mixture must only be prepared by a trained healthcare professional using aseptic tools and procedures, because the product contains no agents to prevent bacteria from reproducing in case bacterial contamination occurs. It is best used immediately after preparation because the product contains no preservatives either.⁹

What you should do and why

We have at least a year to wait for the vaccine. Unlike the experimental drugs being tested for the treatment of people with severe disease, there is no skipping clinical trials for the vaccine because it will be administered to healthy people.

In other words, we have at least a year to live with the “new normal.” It’s time to stop believing that everything will go back to the way it was in a few months’ time.

The government has released guidance on how we can begin resuming a new-normal life. This information needs to be disseminated transparently and empathetically to all stakeholders in the company, including the employees. Hypercommunication is key in these times. Make sure you have feedback lines wide open.

Be aware that nobody comes out of this crisis unchanged: The economy has taken a huge hit. Your competitors have evolved. Customers have new expectations. ¹⁰

Priorities are changing: if you earned loyalty once because your brand was considered premium, you may now find that people are giving their loyalty to brands that are considered conscientious: What are your safety and sanitation practices? Are you giving back to the community? What are your employees saying about how you treated them during the crisis?

So yes, even if the government ends the lockdowns, things can never completely go back to the way they were, and businesses who try to fully revert to their old ways will find themselves sounding off-tune among their customers and employees.

This change is not temporary. The sooner we accept that, the sooner we can regain our footing and begin moving forward again.

PhilHealth, HMO and group life insurance coverage

The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) will shoulder the cost of treatment for patients with COVID-19 based on a case-rate package.

The state-run insurance agency has also clarified that patients may use their health insurance coverage and mandatory discounts, such as senior citizen and PWD discounts, to help substantially cover the cost of treatment.

As of April 28 the following HMO and medical insurance providers confirmed that they will continue to cover availments related to COVID-19, based on the allowable limit of the member's policy:

- Intellicare
- Maxicare
- Avega

These group life insurance providers will also cover loss of life due to COVID-19, as of April 17:

- Manulife Philippines
- Etiqa
- Generali

Please take note that the above provisions are based on the notification sent by HMO, medical insurance and group life insurance providers, which are subject to change without prior notice.

Meanwhile, HMO providers are operating with a skeletal workforce; hence, members may experience delay in contacting their HMO providers' call center hotlines.

1. Maxicare

Customer Care Hotlines: (02) 8582-1900, (02) 7798-7777

Provincial Toll-Free Hotline: 1-800-10-582-1900 (PLDT), 1-800-8-582-1900 (Globe)

Online Member Gateway for LOA issuances: membergateway.maxicare.com.ph

All Maxicare Helpdesks are temporarily closed, while some primary care centers are open from Monday to Sunday, 7 AM to 7 PM.

2. Intellicare

24/7 Call Center Hotline: (02) 7902-3400, (02) 8789-4000

3. PhilCare

COVID Care Helpline: (02) 8462-1810

Customer Service: (02) 8462-1800

4. Etiqa (formerly AsianLife)

Primary care centers are closed until further notice. For urgent medical availments, members may call the following:

Medical Information Center Hotline: (02) 8895-3308

Provincial Toll-Free Hotline: 1-800-10-8895-3308 (PLDT)

Mobile No.: 0917-5208919, 0908-8834901

Email: mic@etiqa.com.ph (for Certification of Coverage)

5. Cocolife

24/7 Helpline:

Landline: (02) 8812-9090, (02) 8396-9000

Mobile No:

SMS: 0917-622-COCO

Call:

Globe: 0917-5360962

Smart: 0908-8947763

Sun: 0922-8928828

Hospital Network

As of April 17, 2020, these hospitals are **at full capacity** and can no longer admit patients who are positive with COVID-19:

1. St. Luke’s Medical Center – BGC and Quezon City (*outpatient COVID-19 testing can be accommodated*)
2. The Medical City
3. Makati Medical Center
4. Asian Hospital Medical Center
5. Chinese General Hospital and Medical Center
6. Victor R. Potenciano Medical Center
7. De Los Santos Medical Center
8. Capitol Medical Center
9. United Doctors Medical Center
10. De La Salle University Medical Center
11. Our Lady of the Pillar Medical Center
12. Medical Center Imus
13. Bautista Hospital
14. De La Salle University - Rodolfo Poblete Memorial Hospital
15. N.L. Villa Memorial Medical Center

Meanwhile, here are some hospitals currently accommodating and handling COVID-19 cases:¹¹

NCR

PRIVATE HOSPITAL	ADDRESS	CONTACT NO.
Fatima University Medical Center	20 MacArthur Highway, Valenzuela City	(02) 8291-6538
Cardinal Santos Medical Center	10 Wilson, Greenhills West, San Juan City	(02) 8727-0001
University of the East Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Medical Center	64 Aurora Blvd., Quezon City	(02) 8715-0861
Diliman Doctors Hospital	251 Commonwealth Ave., Matandang Balara, Quezon City	(02) 8883-6900
Manila Doctors Hospital	667 United Nations Ave, Ermita, Manila	(02) 8558-0888
University of Santo Tomas Hospital	España Blvd., Sampaloc, Manila	(02) 8731-3001
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital	46 P. Sanchez Street, Sta. Mesa, Manila	(02) 8716-8001 to 20
Adventist Medical Center – Manila	1975 Donada cor. San Juan St., Pasay City	(02) 8525-9191

San Juan de Dios Education Foundation, Inc. Hospital	Service Rd, 2772 Roxas Blvd., Pasay City	(02) 8831-9731 to 36, 02) 8831 5641
Veterans Memorial Medical Center	North Ave., Diliman, Quezon City	(02) 8927-6426
Metropolitan Medical Center	1357 G. Masangkay St. Sta. Cruz, Manila	(02) 8863-2500, (02) 8254-1111
Medical Center Manila (ManilaMed)	850 United Nations Avenue, Ermita, Manila	(02) 8523-8131
St. Clare's Medical Center	1838 Dian St. cor. Boyle St., Makati	(02) 8831-6511
Fe Del Mundo Medical Center	11 Banawe St., Brgy. Doña Josefa, Quezon City	(02) 8712-0845 to 50, (02) 8712-2552 to 53, (02) 8732-7103
FEU – Dr. Nicanor Reyes Medical Foundation	Regalado Ave. cor. Dahlia St., West Fairview, Quezon City	(02) 8983-8338
New Era General Hospital	Commonwealth Ave, New Era, Quezon City	(02) 8932-7387
Alabang Medical Clinic	297 Montillano St., Alabang, Muntinlupa City	(02) 8842-0680 0917-7123400 0933-851 4427
Las Piñas Doctors Hospital	8009 CAA Rd., Pulanglupa II, Las Piñas	(02) 8825-5236, (02) 8825-5293

Outside NCR

PRIVATE HOSPITAL	ADDRESS	CONTACT NO.
Qualimed - Sta. Rosa Hospital	W, E Nature Ave., Santa Rosa City, Laguna	(049) 303-0000
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Medical Center	Km.78 McArthur Highway Brgy. Saguin, San Fernando, Pampanga	(045) 435-2420
Bataan St. Joseph Hospital and Medical Center	151 Don Manuel Banzon Avenue, City of Balanga, Bataan	(047) 237-0226
Urdaneta Sacred Heart Hospital	15 MacArthur Highway, Urdaneta, Pangasinan	(075) 656-2296
Ace Dumaguete Doctors, Inc.	Claytown Road, Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental	(035) 523-5957
Daniel O. Mercado Medical Center	1 Pres. Laurel Highway, Tanauan City, Batangas	(043) 778-1810, (043) 405-1000
Dr. Pablo O Torre Memorial Hospital	BS Aquino Dr, Bacolod, Negros Occidental,	(034) 433-7331
Clinica Antipolo Hospital and Wellness Center	L. Suumulong Memorial Circle., Antipolo City	(02) 8695-9486
Divine Grace Medical Center	Antero Soriano Highway, General Trias, Cavite	(046) 482-6888

Nueva Ecija Doctors Hospital	AH 26, Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija	(044) 960-5500
Perpetual Help Medical Center-Binan	National Highway, Sto. Nino, Binan City, Laguna	(049) 531-4475
San Pedro Calungsod Medical Center	Kalayaan Rd. Kawit, Cavite	(046) 484-3112
The Medical City South Luzon	L. United Blvd., Santa Rosa City, Laguna	(049) 544-0120
The Medical City Iloilo	Locsin St. Molo, Iloilo City	(033) 500-1000
Angono Medics Hospital	Rainbow Village 1, Quezon Ave., Brgy. San Isidro, Angono, Rizal	(032) 451-1996
Batangas Health Care Hospital Jesus of Nazareth	Gov. Antonio Rd., Batangas City	(043) 723-4144
Binakayan Hospital and Medical Center	179 Covelandia Rd. Balsahan-Bisita, Kawit, Cavite	(046) 516-0500
Binangonan Lakeview Hospital	193 Manila East Rd., Binangonan, Rizal	(02) 8570-0791
Cavite Medical Center	Manila-Cavite Rd., Dalahican, Cavite City	(046) 431-9988

Please contact your HMO provider or log in to your Benefits Made Better (www.benefitsmadebetter.com) account to know if these facilities are accredited by your HMO provider.

Government Guidelines and Instructions

DOLE and DTI guidelines in the workplace

The DOLE and the DTI have issued workplace guidelines for private companies that are allowed to operate during the ECQ and GCQ.⁴

The guidelines below encompass the DOH's minimum safety and health standard requirements in the workplace:

Coverage

The guideline applies to all offices, employers, and workers in the private sector.

Workplace safety and health

1. Increase physical and mental resilience

- Remind workers to stay healthy by eating nutritious food, drinking plenty of fluids, avoiding alcoholic beverages, getting at least 8 hours of sleep, and exercising regularly.
- Direct companies to provide free medicines and vitamins to employees.
- Provide referrals to employees who need counseling and are exhibiting mental health concerns.

2. Reduce transmission of COVID-19

Before entering buildings or workspaces, all employers and employees must:

- Wear face masks at all times, and remove masks only when eating or drinking. Employers will provide face masks to its employees. In case cloth masks will be used, an additional filter material, such as tissue paper, may be placed inside the mask.
- Accomplish the daily health symptoms questionnaire, and then submit it to the designated safety officer prior to entry.
- Have their temperature checked, and record it in the health symptoms questionnaire. Those with temperatures higher than 37.5°C, even after 5 minutes of rest, need further questioning and shall be isolated. Isolation areas must be well-ventilated and frequently disinfected. Clinic staff assigned to monitor isolated persons must be provided with personal protective (PPE).
- Spray alcohol or sanitizer on both hands. If practicable, the building or office may also provide disinfectant foot baths at the entrance.
- Disinfect equipment or vehicle entering hubs or operational areas.
- Instill physical distancing in long queues outside the office or within premises, with roving officers to ensure implementation.

Inside the workplace, everyone must observe the following measures:

- All work areas and frequently touched objects such as doorknobs and handles, must be cleaned and disinfected regularly, at least every 2 hours.
- All washrooms and toilets must have sufficient clean water and soap. Employees are encouraged to frequently wash their hands and avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Sanitizers must be available in corridors, conference areas, elevators, stairways, and other areas where workers usually pass.
- Employees must always practice physical distancing, with a minimum of 1-meter radius space (side, back, and front) between workers.
- Eating in commercial areas is discouraged. It is best to eat in individual work areas, and all wastes shall be disposed properly. If eating in individual work areas is not possible, the employer must ensure that physical distancing in dining areas is maintained. Employees are also discouraged to engage in conversations during meals or while their masks are removed. Tables and chairs must be disinfected after every use of the area.
- Canteens and kitchens should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

3. Minimize contact rate

- Implement alternative work arrangements, such as working-hour shifts, work from home, where feasible and on rotation basis.
- Discouraging of prolonged face-to-face interaction between employees and clients. Meetings that need physical presence shall be kept to a minimum number of participants and only within short duration. Masks must be worn at all times and not to be removed in the duration of the meeting. For lengthy discussions, videoconferencing shall be utilized.
- Office tables must be arranged in compliance with the proper physical distancing. Barriers may be provided between tables.
- The number of people inside enclosed spaces such as rooms or stores shall be limited. Physical distancing and limiting the number of people using the elevator must be observed.
- Use of stairs should be encouraged, subject to physical distancing measures. If the building has 2 stairways, one stairway may be used exclusively for people who are going up and the other stairway for those going down.
- Online systems and videoconferencing are highly encouraged when engaging with clients who will need assistance.
- Roving officers must ensure physical distancing and observance of the minimum health protocols

4. Reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection

If an employee is suspected to have COVID-19:

- The employee must immediately proceed to the designated isolation area and must never remove his or her face mask.
- Clinic staff must wear appropriate PPE and, if needed, arrange for the transport of the employee to the nearest hospital. Companies must have protocols for the transport of suspected COVID-19 cases and for COVID-19 tests. Hospitals must report the suspected case to the DOH.
- Decontamination of the workplace:
 - Workplaces must be decontaminated with appropriate disinfectant (e.g., chlorine bleaching solution and 1:100 phenol-based disinfectant).
 - After decontamination, work may resume after 24 hours.
 - Employees who were present in the work area with the employee who is suspected to have COVID-19 shall undergo 14-day home quarantine and must be given instructions from the clinic staff on the monitoring of symptoms.
 - If the employee suspected to have COVID-19 has tested negative, coworkers may be allowed to report back to work.

If an employee is sick or has fever but is not suspected to have COVID-19 – for instance, the more likely diagnosis is urinary tract infection, wound infection, or other diseases not related to the respiratory tract – the employer must advise the employee to take prudent measures to limit the spread of diseases:

- Stay at home and keep away from the office or crowds
- Take adequate rest and drink plenty of fluids
- Practice personal hygiene
- Seek appropriate medical care if there is persistent fever, or breathing becomes difficult, or when employee begins to feel weak

Duties of employers and employees

1. Employers shall:

- Provide necessary company policies for the prevention and control of COVID-19 in consultation with workers. Advocacies and programs should be taken from the DOH, World Health Organization, and other reliable sources of information on COVID-19;
- Provide resources and materials to keep employees healthy and safe in the workplace (e.g., masks, soap, sanitizer, disinfectant, PPE, COVID-19 testing kits, etc.);
- Designate a safety officer to monitor COVID-19 prevention and control measures such as physical distancing, wearing of masks, regular disinfection, compliance with thermal scanning, and accomplishing the health-symptoms questionnaire;
- Enhance health insurance provisions for workers;

- Provide shuttle services and/or decent accommodation or near-site location, to lessen travel and movement of people;
- Enjoin hiring from the local community; and
- Put up a COVID-19 hotline and call center numbers where employees can report symptoms, and also have a daily monitoring scheme for suspected COVID-19 cases.

2. Employees shall:

- Comply with all the workplace measures for the prevention and control of COVID-19, such as frequent handwashing, wearing of masks, and observing of physical distancing;
- Observe proper respiratory etiquette;
- Properly dispose of used tissues; and
- Disinfect hands immediately after coughing or sneezing, through proper washing with soap and water or by using alcohol-based sanitizers.

Workplace with imminent danger situations

For workplaces where employees are at risk of infection, like healthcare and other frontline services, the employer must comply with the DOH Department Memorandum No. 2020-0178: Interim Guidelines on Health Care Provider Networks during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

COVID-19 testing

Employers may conduct testing on employees, provided that the procurement of the tests will be shouldered by the employer. The testing and interpretation of results must be in accordance with the DOH Department Memorandum on “Revised Interim Guidelines on Expanded Testing for COVID-19”¹² and DOH Administrative Order on the “Guidelines in Securing a License to Operate a COVID-19 Testing Laboratory in the Philippines”.¹³

The company policy agreed by the employer and employees must be in conformity with the DOH protocols on COVID-19 testing.

Employees who tested negative of the virus shall continue to work and should receive appropriate advice and instructions in case they develop any health complaints or symptoms. The company’s occupational safety and health personnel shall continue to monitor all employees.

Most at-risk workers and vulnerable groups

The following are considered to be under the vulnerable group:

- Employees above 60 years old
- Employees with comorbidities or pre-existing illness (i.e., hypertension, diabetes, cancer or immunocompromised health status, etc.)
- Employees with high-risk pregnancy

Employers are highly encouraged to allow these employees to work from home. Work arrangements should detail the deliverables from these employees, and there shall be no diminution in salary or benefits.

Assistance from DTI and DOLE

The DTI and DOLE shall extend assistance and technical support to all workplaces, employers, and employees in complying with the department guidelines.

Reporting of illnesses, diseases, or injuries

The employers shall provide their DOLE Regional Office with a monthly report of illness, disease, and injuries using the DOLE Work Accident/Illness Report Form (WAIR). A copy should also be furnished to the DOH.

References:

- 1 World Health Organization. www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019
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- 3 Department of Health. (2020, April 27). Guidelines on the Risk-Based Public Health Standards for COVID-19 Mitigation. www.doh.gov.ph/sites/default/files/health-update/ao2020-0015.pdf
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