

Long COVID A Challenge For Malaysian Employers

International SOS Shares Timely Advice on How to Support Employees

KUALA LUMPUR, WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN, MALAYSIA, November 19, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [International SOS](#), one of the world's leading health and security companies, has identified that long COVID is fast becoming a challenge for businesses both in Malaysia and around the world. Globally, increased cases of long COVID are now being documented, as many people report symptoms related to COVID-19 months after infection. International SOS is being increasingly called on by organisations to help them effectively manage this emerging and concerning phenomenon.

“As more COVID-19 cases are reported, Malaysia will have to prepare for the expected increase of those suffering from long COVID and provide the necessary support. This is particularly important as we are in the process of moving into a possible “living with virus” phase. This means long COVID is something that Malaysian organisations have already faced, are facing or will face in the future,” shared Dr Chan Yanjun, Medical Director, Singapore & Malaysia, International SOS.

As of 30 October 2021, according to Malaysia's Health Director-General Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, a total of 5,193 patients have undergone treatment and monitoring rehabilitation programmes to address long COVID symptoms nationwide involving 31 public hospitals, 4 university hospitals, and 6 private health facilities. With the five most frequently reported symptoms being lethargy (71.8%), difficulty breathing while performing activities (61.9%), cough



(13.6%), pain (13.2%), and difficulty sleeping soundly (11%).

Dr Chan continued, “According to the [Ministry of Health Malaysia](#), from November 2020 to September this year, 2,712 long COVID patients were referred to the COVID-19 Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialised Services (CROSS) at Hospital Sungai Buloh within four to 12 weeks after infection. From this, 984 cases or 36.3% recovered completely from symptoms experienced, but 1,715 or 63.2% cases continued to have persistent symptoms. ”

“It was found that 97.5% of them were patients who experienced serious COVID-19 infections in Categories Four and Five. However, it is important to note that even people who do not have symptoms when infected could also develop long COVID. These conditions can have different types and combinations of health problems for different lengths of time. They can last for months and significantly impact both the physical and mental health of the patient as well as their ability to cope with their situations,” she added.



According to an ongoing study on the state of long COVID in Malaysia by Prof Dr Moy Foong Ming of Universiti Malaya’s Faculty of Medicine and her colleagues Prof Dr Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud and Prof Dr Noran Naqiah Hairi, long COVID can reduce work productivity. More than one third of respondents reported that their work is affected and had to take leave or reduce work hours due to prolonged symptoms. Post-COVID patients who suffer brain fog may have their jobs affected.

David Ng, Managing Director, Malaysia & Myanmar, International SOS, added “COVID-19 has amplified the importance of employee health, safety and wellbeing. Now, more than ever, organisations need personalised support based on their locations, environment and unique workforce needs. With this emerging concern that long COVID is, Malaysian businesses must be prepared to respond efficiently, both addressing long COVID employee’s concerns and needs as well as extending your support to domestic managers, travellers and employees. As an employer’s Duty of Care, providing easy access to quality care treatment, which includes support for mental wellbeing and having empathy for long COVID employees, is crucial.”

In line with this, International SOS shared some key preventive measures that senior management from Malaysian businesses can consider to help ensure a smooth return to work despite the long COVID threat:

- Align your HR policies – Long COVID can imply long absenteeism, resulting from the patient

difficulty to cope. Hence long absenteeism needs to be covered in your HR policies with clear directions for such situations. Although this will vary from country to country and is not a legal requirement yet to have it included as part of your official policies, this might evolve rapidly. Ensure to remain informed on the latest legal regulations and requirement on this matter to stay compliant. Policies will need regular review and adaptation to reflect the latest evolvments. In a longer-term future, as we will learn more on long COVID and its implications, this might be considered as a chronic condition for more serious cases and hence be formally included as such in the HR policies as any other disability or chronic disease.

- Educate and communicate about long COVID – Make sure your team members are aware of what the long COVID condition and associated symptoms could be. This will help them be diagnosed at an early stage. The education process could be implemented internally through email or other education material such as webinars. You should also encourage your workforce to notify their long COVID condition so you can have plan for it as part of your return-to-operation process.

- Monitor the workplace – Inform your employees on the required preventive measures to adopt in the work environment (social distances, masks, vaccines, etc.) and ensure those are followed by regularly checking. You might also want to consider implementing testing procedures at your premises as well as Occupational Health on-site solutions to address any concerns.

“There is a higher risk for people with long COVID to experience emotional health issues and there may be stigma attached to this. Organisations need to make sure their people’s emotional needs are addressed by dedicated HR or independent experts. As one of the world’s leading health and security companies, this is something we have been proactively helping our clients with and we are here to help businesses identify and adapt their current policies to fully cover the long COVID challenges. Our medical experts are on hand to offer data-driven solutions that address a broad scope of health challenges, opportunities and trends to help businesses maintain the health and wellness of their workforce and ensure the continuity of day-to-day operations,” David concluded.

For further information on how International SOS supports organisations and their people around the world, go to www.internationalsos.com.

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