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Worldwide, the number of cases and death toll continue to climb as we grapple with an unprecedented pandemic in a quickly evolving situation.   As of today, we have been notified of three confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection within our legal community. The lawyers involved have been receiving treatment and are being well supported by their law firms. These cases serve as a sobering reality check and reminder that the health and well-being of our lawyers and staff are our utmost priority. The three law firms were responsible enough to alert us. We need to be particularly vigilant about the risks of contact transmission with returning Singaporeans.  Going forward, as a best practice for Law Society (“Law Soc”) to assess professional health and public health issues, even though we cannot issue a fiat on this, could I please request that if any member is diagnosed with COVID-19, served with a Quarantine Order (“QO”), etc., contact Law Soc Emergency Hotline **6538-2500**. Should the matter be particularly sensitive, please contact any member of the COVID-19 Task Force (comprising Law Soc’s Office Bearers, i.e. Vice Presidents Tito Isaac or Adrian Tan or Treasurer Daniel or myself) for advice. We assure you that the Law Soc COVID-19 Task Force and Law Soc Secretariat shall manage all information shared carefully and judiciously.  **Impact on Completion Deadlines** Travel bans, QOs, Stay-Home Notices, Leave of Absence, office closures for deep cleaning, etc., - these directives, orders and measures have been imposed not just on law firms but our clients and other stakeholders as well. We have to accept at this juncture of our history that this is not business as usual with some disruption. It is business as unusual with major disruption.  We have received queries from lawyers on what happens if they fail to meet conveyancing completion deadlines because of these mandated orders. Our Conveyancing Practice Committee is looking into the legal implications of this issue. Analogous situations could arise for corporate transactions. Disputes lawyers may need to request adjournments.  To the extent that there are no legal risk issues involved for the client or the lawyer, wherever feasible, let us extend grace and grant time indulgences due to disruptions occasioned by the COVID-19 situation. This if we know our counterparty is afflicted with illness or affected by its impact (e.g. serving QOs). A practical area for litigators is acceding to reasonable requests for adjournments from a counterparty lawyer or law firm that may be adversely impacted by COVID-19.   **Business Continuity Planning** It is a matter of urgency now for law firms to activate a business continuity plan in which technical and operational capabilities in firm-wide remote working and virtual meetings are stress tested. This will ensure that in the event that offices are closed for reasons such as deep cleaning, the firms will not be caught off-guard and the firm’s operations are disrupted and productivity levels go down. You need a Plan B even if that means forming a Team B.   Members are also urged to renew their PCs as soon as possible in case of unforeseen disruptions closer to the PC renewal deadline of 31 March.  **Law Soc Secretariat’s Precautionary Measures** Members may wish to know that internally, the Law Soc Council and Secretariat have adopted a series of precautionary measures including:   * Compulsory temperature checks on visitors and registration of contact information at the reception * Organisation-wide remote working and/or split team arrangements for employees * Twice-a-day temperature checks on employees coming in to the office * Travel declarations by employees * Holding virtual meetings for most of the Committee and Council meetings. In the Members’ Lounge, chairs where people should not sit have been demarcated to ensure sufficient social distancing * Converting training seminars into online webinars where it cannot be deferred * Postponing several key events, such as Mission to Vietnam, Corporate Law Day, State Court Luncheons   We have also encouraged all Committee Chairs to have online meetings, where feasible, to reduce contact transmission.   **Engagement with the Courts** Law Soc is actively engaging with the Courts on enhancing their precautionary measures. We understand that the Supreme Court is in the midst of expanding remote management of court hearings for more cases. These remote hearing modalities will obviate the need for physical attendance. The timeline for implementation is anticipated to be between 31 March and the second week of April. Stay tuned for more details.   On 16 March, the State Courts introduced a pilot on asynchronous CDRs involving emails to court in lieu of court attendances. State Court practitioners have warmed to this and coped well with such disruption. There will obviously be some teething issues and learning points but the kinks will be ironed out as it continues to pilot.   To minimise physical attendance, the Family Justice Courts have also piloted remote hearings for case conferences and pre-trial conferences where all parties are represented. Counsel with matters selected for the pilot have been informed by way of Registry Notices.  Even as the Courts continue to adapt and refine their precautionary measures, members are welcome to provide their feedback through Law Soc at [membership@lawsoc.org.sg](mailto:membership@lawsoc.org.sg). We will aggregate and anonymise the feedback.   **Members’ Assistance** Faced with a novel pandemic situation, the likes of which have rarely been seen in any previous generation of our history, the Law Society is committed to help law firms navigate the myriad of concerns and practical issues during this period. These concerns are broad ranging, from video conferencing tools, to court requirements and government economic assistance or legal obligations.   Law firms can also avail themselves of appropriate [government economic assistance measures](https://lawsociety.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0feffd14f75fa1a6911bd6f2e&id=92879b35de&e=6b47b171d7). Should you face any difficulties in any of these areas or have any feedback to share on how your firm has been adversely impacted, please email our Membership Department at [membership@lawsoc.org.sg](mailto:membership@lawsoc.org.sg) so that we can aggregate and anonymise overall feedback received to share with the government agencies. We will strive to attend to you and assist.  Should, however, any lawyer or staff member be unfortunately diagnosed with COVID-19, apart from the COVID-19 Taskforce please alert the Law Society immediately on our Emergency Hotline at **6538-2500**. Here are a few ways where we can be of practical assistance:   1. assistance with practice matters, such as finding a cover lawyer (if you have not yet availed of [Practice Pal](https://lawsociety.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0feffd14f75fa1a6911bd6f2e&id=0e5bab9b32&e=6b47b171d7)); 2. assistance with tracing of lawyers whom an infected lawyer has been in contact with; and 3. suggest cleaning service provider(s) that can perform deep cleaning of offices.   **Government Precautionary Measures and Advisories** Please take heed of the enhanced precautionary measures and advisories announced recently by the government. We have distilled the key measures for your easy reference [here](https://lawsociety.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0feffd14f75fa1a6911bd6f2e&id=40b67ec045&e=6b47b171d7) and will keep the list updated on our website.   Let us remain vigilant, resilient and alert to an evolving situation, the dangers of which are far from over. Let us also continue to stay strong and healthy and look out for one another in care and compassion.   Yours faithfully https://gallery.mailchimp.com/0feffd14f75fa1a6911bd6f2e/images/ac6a4b4a-801d-420c-b789-8f4e0209286c.png Gregory Vijayendran SC President The Law Society of Singapore   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Law Soc COVID-19 Task Force Members:** Gregory Vijayendran SC, President; Tito Shane Isaac, Vice President; Adrian Tan, Vice President; Daniel Koh, Treasurer | **To request for COVID-19 assistance**, email: [membership@lawsoc.org.sg](mailto:membership@lawsoc.org.sg). | | **To report COVID-19 infection**, call Law Soc Emergency Hotline 6538-2500. | **For compilation of updated travel advisories**, click [here](https://lawsociety.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0feffd14f75fa1a6911bd6f2e&id=07f08fe19d&e=6b47b171d7). | | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | | | | |