

## **Workplace Health Protocols Compliance in the Food and Beverage Manufacturing Sector during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Philippines**

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### **Abstract**

This research examines the implementation of COVID-19 workplace protocols in several Philippine food and beverage manufacturing (FBM) companies which are classified as essential economic sectors during the pandemic. It explores the areas of compliance and gaps in health and safety protocols introduced at that time and contribute to the literature on how workers and employers managed to operate the factories while reducing the risk of infection at work. The research data was collected through a small group survey of 12 union presidents in 11 food and beverage companies located in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao and a focus group discussion involving union officers of the companies. The results suggest a mixed picture of compliance. COVID-19 protocols in masking, quarantine completion, entry checks at the gate, mass gathering and meeting restrictions, ventilation, provision of soaps and sanitation supplies, and ventilation were well-observed

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(90-100%). However, there was moderate observance (70-89%) of protocols pertaining to movement in aisles and stairways, daily sanitation and disinfection of work areas including toilets, isolation areas, open windows in shuttle services, presence of a COVID-19 Committee, PCR testing, and protocols for transporting symptomatic workers. Some disallowed practices were practiced such as the sharing of tables during mealtimes and talking to others or on the phone while inside shuttle services. The lack of safety officers and occupational safety and health (OSH) committees in many companies are seen as crucial factors affecting overall compliance to the health protocols.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 health and safety protocols, compliance to health protocols, food and beverage, health and safety during pandemic

## **Introduction**

From 16 March until 31 May 2020, the Duterte government placed Metro Manila and other provinces under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ)<sup>3</sup> in its effort to contain the spread of the coronavirus. ECQ, the most stringent level of lockdown, suspended public transportation, government offices, and business operations. The government subsequently imposed less stringent levels of lockdown as rates of COVID-19 infections decreased, but even under lower quarantine levels, mobility restrictions remained in place and only essential services sectors were allowed to operate. “Essential goods and services” include “health and social services that secure the safety and well-being of persons, such as but not limited to, food, water, medicine, medical devices, public utilities, energy, and others as may be determined by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF), ECQ involves “the implementation of temporary measures imposing stringent limitations on movement and transportation of people, strict regulation of operating industries, provision of food and essential services, and heightened presence of uniformed personnel to enforce community quarantine protocols.” For the other protocols and coverage of ECQ and the other forms of community quarantine, see: IATF (2020). Omnibus Guidelines on the Implementation of Community Quarantine In the Philippines with Amendments as of June 03, 2020. Available at: <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2020/06jun/20200603-omnibus-guidelines-on-the-implementation-of-community-quarantine-in-the-philippines.pdf>.

Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF)”<sup>4</sup>. As part of the essential services sector, food and beverage manufacturing companies, particularly the large players, continued to operate even during the more stringent lockdowns or community quarantines.

Workers in essential sectors continued to report for work so they were more vulnerable to catch or transmit the virus to others (Gaitens et al., 2021). Research in other countries suggest that early transmissions of the virus occurred in essential sector workplaces and among taxi drivers, janitors, salespersons, and household workers (Lan et al., 2020; Rura, 2020). Food manufacturers in Canada and the United States reported outbreaks and high cases of infection quite early in the pandemic. In nine industry sectors in Canada almost half (45%) of workplace outbreaks from January to June 2020 occurred in the manufacturing sector while in the US the food processing and agriculture sectors also had a high number of cases (Waltenburg et al., 2021). In the Philippines, infections were reported in export processing zones (Cinco, 2020) where many manufacturing companies are located.

The need of many workers to resume work in a safe manner during the COVID-19 pandemic set the stage for new, albeit temporary rules on safety and health in order to protect workers from increased risk of infection. The Philippine government enjoined enterprises to adhere to additional protocols or be meted with penalties including possible revocation of their business permit (Caliwan, 2021). Despite this, subsequent inspections by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) suggests uneven conformance to the rules and at one time 23% of inspected firms were found to be non-compliant (Bagaoisan, 2022; Crisostomo, 2021; Patinio, 2021). Reports indicate that some shopping malls and business process outsourcing companies were found not enforcing the minimum health protocols, while others did not have safety officers or OSH programs (Patinio, 2021; Talabong, 2021).

The objective of this study is to describe the compliance of food and beverage companies to the health protocols during the COVID-19

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4 IATF (2020). Omnibus Guidelines on the Implementation of Community Quarantine In the Philippines with Amendments as of June 03, 2020. Available at: <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2020/06jun/20200603-omnibus-guidelines-on-the-implementation-of-community-quarantine-in-the-philippines.pdf>.

pandemic. Manufacturing companies tend to record some of the highest numbers of occupational diseases and workplace accidents among economic sectors (Lu, 2022). During the pandemic, what additional rules on safety and health did companies comply with easily and which ones did they find difficult to follow? The data is based on a small survey of union presidents in FBM firms in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. The union presidents' position in the workplace provides them with a unique vantage point from which to apprise and observe the situation on the factory floor thus they were selected as respondents for this study. The unions surveyed are affiliates of the labor center *Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa* (SENTRO).

### **Occupational health and safety standards during COVID-19**

Occupational health and safety standards refer to “a standard, which requires conditions, or the adoption or use of one or more practices, means, methods, operations, or processes, reasonably necessary or appropriate to provide safe or healthful employment and places of employment” (OSHA, 1970). OHS parameters ensure that the workplace is safe from risks and hazards that can cause injuries or diseases. In the Philippines the standards are enshrined in a comprehensive law on occupational safety and health (RA 11058 Occupational Safety and Health Standards Act of 2017), its implementing rules and regulations and in the department orders issued by DOLE. RA 11058 includes provisions on the rights and duties of workers and employers to a safe and healthy workplace, providing facilities and personal protective equipment for workers, establishment of safety and health committee, designation of a safety officer, and conduct of safety and health training. Due to the pandemic, the government had to issue health guidelines and workplace protocols to supplement the existing rules and standards for workplaces.

From January to August 2020, the DOLE, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Department of Health (DOH) released several advisories and (joint) memoranda on health protocols not only for required practices on hygiene, masking and physical distancing, but also on ventilation, decorum in eating areas, disinfection of common facilities, shuttle services, accommodation and health-related

assistance, designated isolation areas and company policies and practices for preventing and dealing with COVID-19.

On 31 January 2020, DOLE issued Labor Advisory No. 4<sup>5</sup> which directed enterprises and workers to take ‘precautionary measures’ such as raise awareness about COVID-19, keep the workplaces clean, ensure nutritious and well-cooked meals in canteens, promote good hygiene and practice ways to stay healthy. The wearing of face masks was only required for symptomatic or sick persons who should also be isolated in a room away from the rest of the workers.

On 15 March 2020, the DTI issued Memorandum Circular 20-04<sup>6</sup> which prescribed implementing guidelines for IATF Resolution 12 for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases on Social Distancing and Business Operations. The memo circular restricted the operation of malls, endorsed e-commerce and mandated physical distancing in businesses that remained open.

By the end of April, the wearing of face masks in public places was already mandatory<sup>7</sup> On April 30, DTI and DOLE jointly issued detailed rules “on workplace prevention and control of COVID-19”<sup>8</sup>. Entitled DTI and DOLE Interim Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of COVID-19, it enumerated protocols when entering company premises, during work, in the management of sick or symptomatic workers, managing workers suspected of having COVID-19, and physical distancing in offices.

More businesses were allowed to re-open starting May 1<sup>9</sup>. On May 11 the DOH issued Memorandum No. 2020-0220<sup>10</sup> entitled “The

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5 The advisory can be downloaded from: [https://www.dole.gov.ph/php\\_assets/uploads/2020/01/LABOR-ADVISORY-NO.-04-20-GUIDELINES-ON-2019-NOVELA-CORONAVIRUS-2019-nCOV-PREVENTION-AND-CONTROL-AT-THE-WORKPLACE.pdf](https://www.dole.gov.ph/php_assets/uploads/2020/01/LABOR-ADVISORY-NO.-04-20-GUIDELINES-ON-2019-NOVELA-CORONAVIRUS-2019-nCOV-PREVENTION-AND-CONTROL-AT-THE-WORKPLACE.pdf).

6 The memo circular can be downloaded from: [https://dtiwebfiles.s3-ap-southeast-1.amazonaws.com/e-library/Laws+and+Policies/Other+Relevant+Laws/Other+Related/Memorandum+Circular\\_1584318600.pdf](https://dtiwebfiles.s3-ap-southeast-1.amazonaws.com/e-library/Laws+and+Policies/Other+Relevant+Laws/Other+Related/Memorandum+Circular_1584318600.pdf).

7 Parrocha, A. (2020). Use of face masks now required in all areas under ECQ. 2 April 2020. Available at: <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1098595>.

8 The DTI-DOLE interim guidelines may be downloaded from: <https://www.dole.gov.ph/news/dti-and-dole-interim-guidelines-on-workplace-prevention-and-control-of-covid-19/>.

9 CNN Philippines (2020). List: Businesses allowed to reopen by May 1. 28 April 2020. <https://cnnphilippines.com>.

10 The DOH interim guidelines can be downloaded from: <https://doh.gov.ph/sites/default/files/health-update/dm2020-0220.pdf>.

Interim Guidelines on the Return-to-Work” which reiterated the health protocols, raised the need to monitor symptoms among returning workers, inform enterprises about the indicators that they could use to help them determine who can be allowed to return to work, the available COVID-tests, and how to use the test results to make return-to-work decisions for workers.

By the 1 August 2020, more businesses were allowed to (partially) re-open.<sup>11</sup> On August 15, DTI and DOLE issued Joint Memorandum Circular No. 20-04-A or the DTI and DOLE Supplemental Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of COVID-19<sup>12</sup>. This memorandum circular reiterated the interim guidelines the agencies had issued in April and introduced additional standards that included use of face shields, mandatory disinfection including frequent hand washing, mandatory awareness-raising, designating smoking areas, limitations on meetings and mass gatherings, and adoption of staggered meal schedules. Medium and large enterprises were explicitly enjoined to provide shuttle service for workers. Furthermore, the guidelines specified ventilation standards and protocols inside shuttle services and within work premises, standards for isolation areas and contact tracing procedures.

## Method

The core data of this study was derived from a small focused survey of union presidents in 11 factories/companies engaged in the manufacture of food and beverage. All the factories/companies in the survey have local unions that are affiliated with the trade union confederation SENTRO. The companies are located in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

The researchers designed the survey instrument based on a review of Philippine COVID-19 regulations and guidelines released between January 2020 to mid-August 2020. The instrument includes

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11 CNN Philippines (2020). Gyms, internet cafes allowed to partially reopen in GCQ areas by August. 29 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.cnn.ph/news/2020/7/29/Gym-internet-cafe-review-center-grooming-GCQ.html>.

12 The DTI-DOLE supplemental guidelines can be downloaded from: <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2020/07jul/20200815-JOINT-MEMORANDUM-CIRCULAR-NO-20-04-A-S-2020.pdf>.

questions on the respondent's profile, company profile, presence or absence of COVID-19 regulations and protocols implemented at the workplace, changes in the work organization to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and union initiatives that contribute to the prevention of the coronavirus. The researchers translated the protocols into more specific questions answerable by YES (the practice is observed) or NO (it is not observed). The questionnaire was pre-tested and revised before being fielded by shop stewards in each of the factories and SENTRO area organizers who also had an online orientation about the survey and the questionnaire on 12 September 2020.

The survey was conducted between September and December 2020. The data gathered were encoded and processed using the software SPSS. Descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies, multiple response tables, and means were used to analyze survey data.

Apart from the survey, a Zoom online focus group discussion (FGD) involving union presidents of the factories was held on 7 September 2020. The FGD focused on gathering and exchanging information and insights on the actual conditions at the workplace amidst the pandemic with focus on the state of implementation of government regulations on COVID-19 prevention in workplaces and other related measures adopted by companies.

### **Profile of respondents**

The study surveyed 12 union president respondents from 11 factories/companies. Five (5) union presidents are from four sites of the same parent company, while two other union presidents are from two sites of another parent company. It should be noted that there are two union president respondents (one representing the union of monthly-paid employees and the other, the daily-paid employees) from the factory (Company 3) in Canlubang City, Laguna.

Except for one female respondent, the union presidents in this study are all male (11 or 91.7%). About 7 out of 10 respondents (66.7%) are between 41-50 years, 16.7% are between 31-40, while another 16.7% are over 50 years.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by factory/company and survey group

Company	Location	Number of union president respondents
1	Ulas, Davao City, Davao del Sur	1
2	Davao Plant, Darong, Davao del Sur	1
3	Canlubang City, Laguna	2
4	Calasiao, Pangasinan	1
5	Davao del Sur	1
6	Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu	1
7	Davao del Sur	1
8	Tipolo, Mandaue, Cebu	1
9	Davao City, Davao del Sur	1
10	Bacolod City, Negros Occidental	1
11	Batangas	1
Total		12

### Profile of companies and unions

More than half (58.3%) of the 11 companies are beverage manufacturers, whereas one-fourth (25%) are into food manufacturing, while the rest (16.7%) produce both food and beverage. More than half of these companies (58.3%) are small, one-fourth (25%) are medium and one-third (33.3%) are large. All the 11 factories/companies have a collective bargaining agreement with the management except for one union.

Table 2. Number of union members (union presidents survey)

	Frequency	Percent
100 and below	6	50.0
101 – 200	4	33.3
201 – 300	2	16.7
Total	12	100.0
Average	137	
Actual number	1,565	



Among the 12 unions, the number of union members averaged 137 (Table 2). With a total of 1,565 union members among the 2,157 rank-and-file regular workers, *the union density rate across the 11 factories/companies is 72.6%, that is, nearly 3 in 4 rank-and-file workers are union members. This suggests a high level of unionization among the enterprises included in the survey.*

Half of the number of union presidents (6 or 50%) reported a union membership number of 100 and less. A third (4 or 33.3%) declared a membership of between 101 and 200, while less than a quarter percent (2 or 16.7%) said their union members number between 201 and 300. While the majority (10 or 83.3%) of the union presidents indicated the absence of non-regular workers in their union membership, *two claimed that there are non-regular workers who are members of their union. These non-regular workers are probationary workers and contractual workers who are directly hired by the enterprises, as indicated by two of the three unions that have non-regular workers as union members.*

### **Suspension of employment during lockdown**

The findings of the survey bear out the extent of work suspension at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns. Eight respondents or 66.7% said that as of November 2020 they have worked for more than four months since 16 March, a third (4 or 33.3%) indicated they were able to work between less than a month and three months.

### **Implementation of regulations and guidelines on COVID-19 at the workplace**

This section presents the findings of the survey on the implementation of government regulations on COVID-19 in enterprises.

#### ***1. Screening and face protection protocols***

Protocols on pre-entry screening and on face protection are very much complied with in the enterprises of the respondents (Table 3). *The union presidents indicated that there is full compliance with the protocol*

*on wearing of face masks and almost all observed daily temperature checks. The union presidents observed more mixed compliance with the following protocols: daily hand sanitizing at the gate, daily foot disinfection at the gate, and daily health form fill-up.*

Table 3: Screening and face protection protocols

Protocols	Union Presidents	
	Yes	No
Q15. Is there a daily check of temperature?	11	1
	91.7	8.3
Q16. Is there daily hand sanitizing at the gate?	10	2
	83.3	16.7
Q17. Is there daily foot disinfection at the gate?	9	3
	75.0	25.0
Q18. Is there daily health form fill-up at the gate?	10	2
	83.3	16.7
Q21. Do you have to wear face mask except when eating or drinking?	12	-
	100.0	-
Q22. Do you have to wear face shield unless the work demands for it to be removed?	11	1
	91.7	8.3

## **2. Physical distancing measures and policies**

Table 4 lists the measures related to physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 which are implemented at the enterprises of the respondents. Except on the reduction of workers per shift, the majority of union president respondents declared the presence and implementation of these measures.

Four (40%) of the union presidents noted that one-way movement in aisles, stairways, hallways is not practiced. Moreover, majority (8 or 72.7%) said that the number of workers in their shift was not reduced for proper distancing. A significant number of union presidents also declared the absence of a protocol keeping a distance of 1-2 meters between workers and restricting mass gatherings to 10% capacity, which 4 (33.3%) and 3 (25%) of union presidents pointed out respectively. *These findings suggest that there are gaps and deficiencies in the implementation of physical distancing measures, particularly on*

*the following: (1) fewer workers per shift to allow proper distancing; (2) one-way movement in aisles, stairways, hallways; (3) keeping a distance of 1-2 meters between workers; and (4) restricting mass gathering to 10% capacity.*

Table 4. Physical distancing measures

Protocols	Union Presidents	
	Yes	No
Q26. Is there a protocol to keep 1-2 meter distance?	8	4
	66.7	33.3
Q27. Is mass gathering restricted to 10% capacity?	9	3
	75.0	25.0
Q28. Are workstations arranged with proper distancing?	10	2
	83.3	16.7
Q29. Is there one-way movement in aisles, stairways, hallways?	6	5
	54.5	45.5
Q30. Are the number of workers in your shift fewer for proper distancing?	4	8
	33.3	66.7

### 3. Conduct of meetings

When it comes to the conduct of meetings during the pandemic, the majority of union president respondents indicated that small group meetings are allowed whereas big group meetings are not allowed (Table 5). Nonetheless, a significant number of union presidents (3 or 25%) declared that big group meetings are allowed to take place.

In terms of the duration of group meetings, the majority of union presidents (10 or 83.3%) claimed that only short group meetings that run for a maximum of 15 minutes are allowed to take place. However, long group meetings of more than 15 minutes are also allowed as averred by 5 (41.7%) union presidents, although the majority (7 or 58.3%) of the latter indicated that long group meetings are not allowed. The majority of union president respondents (10 or 83.3%) stated that their enterprises encourage videoconferencing. In terms of requesting and/or giving assistance, an online system is encouraged according to half (6) of the union presidents.

Table 5: Meeting arrangements

Arrangements	Union Presidents	
	Yes	No
Q31. Are small group meetings allowed?	10	2
	83.3	16.7
Q32. Are big group meetings allowed?	3	9
	25.0	75.0
Q33. Are only short group meetings allowed (maximum of 15 mins)?	10	2
	83.3	16.7
Q34. Are long group meetings (more than 15 mins) allowed?	5	7
	41.7	58.3
Q35. Is videoconferencing encouraged?	10	1
	83.3	8.3
Q36. Is online system of requesting assistance/giving assistance encouraged?	6	6
	50.0	50.0

*The foregoing findings suggest that among the enterprises surveyed, both small group meetings and, to a lesser extent, big group meetings are allowed. Moreover, long group meetings of more than 15 minutes are also allowed in half of the enterprises included in the survey. Nonetheless, it is important to note that videoconferencing is encouraged by a big majority of the enterprises. What needs to be developed further and perhaps prioritized is the migration to an online system of requesting and/or giving assistance.*

#### **4. Hygiene resources and practices**

*When it comes to the availability of hygiene resources and observance of hygiene-related practices, water and soap and sanitizer in wash areas and toilets, and alcohol or sanitizer stations in several areas of the company are very much available in the enterprises. Facilities that require improvement in terms of their availability include no-contact facilities and motion-sensor dispensers for single-use paper towels in toilets/restrooms.*

In terms of hygiene practices, half of the union president respondents declared that workers disinfect their own work area every day. The

majority (6 or 54.5%) averred that the housekeeping/utility staff do not disinfect work areas at the end of every workday. While half of the union presidents said that the housekeeping/utility staff regularly disinfect objects which are frequently handled, the other half said otherwise. A third of union presidents (4 or 36.4%) disagreed that the housekeeping/utility staff regularly clean toilets/restrooms.

Table 6: Hygiene resources and practices

Resources/Practices	Union Presidents		
	Yes	No	Don't know
Q39. Water is always available in wash areas and toilets.	11	1	-
	91.7	8.3	-
Q40. Soap or sanitizer is always available in wash areas and toilets.	10	2	-
	83.3	16.7	-
Q41. Alcohol or sanitizer stations in several areas within company premises.	11	1	-
	91.7	8.3	-
Q42. No-contact facilities are available.	5	6	1
	41.7	50.3	8.3
Q43. Workers disinfect their own work area every day.	6	5	1
	50.0	41.7	8.3
Q44. Housekeeping/utility staff disinfects work areas at the end of every workday.	5	6	-
	45.5	54.5	-
Q45. Housekeeping/utility staff regularly disinfects objects which are frequently handled.	5	5	1
	45.5	45.5	9.1
Q46. Housekeeping/utility staff regularly clean toilets/restrooms.	8	4	-
	66.7	33.3	-
Q47. The chairs and tables in the canteen are regularly cleaned and disinfected?.	6	2	2
	54.5	18.2	27.3

*The above findings suggest that many of the hygiene-related measures listed in Table 6 are not extensively practiced (i.e., disinfection by workers of work area every day, disinfection by housekeeping/utility staff of work areas at the end of every workday, regular disinfection by housekeeping/utility staff of objects which are frequently handled, regularly cleaning toilets/restrooms by housekeeping/utility staff) in some of the enterprises and thus require proper monitoring.*

### 5. Mandatory information dissemination on COVID-19 protocols

The union president respondents are more circumspect about their assessment of whether *measures and practices on information dissemination on COVID-19 protocols are observed*, particularly on the presence of visual reminders on hand washing, cough etiquette, spitting and non-sharing of personal items; verbal reminders from HR or supervisors to not share items like tools, telephones and work desks; and verbal reminders to rest, etc. The majority (8 or 66.7%) of union presidents also tended to disagree more with the statement that there are webinars and training opportunities to learn about COVID-19.

Table 7. Information dissemination on COVID-19 protocols

Measures/ways	Union Presidents		
	Yes	No	Don't know
Q50A. There are POSTERS on COVID-19 and its transmission and treatment.	9	3	-
	75.0	25.0	-
Q50B. Visual reminders on hand washing, cough etiquette, spitting and non-sharing of personal items.	7	5	-
	58.3	41.7	-
Q51. Verbal reminders from HR or supervisors to not share items like tools, telephones and work desks.	6	4	2
	50.0	33.3	16.7
Q52. Verbal reminders to rest, eat nutritious food, drink plenty of water, avoid sick individuals and avoid alcoholic drinks.	6	5	-
	54.5	45.5	-
Q53. Webinars and training opportunities to learn about COVID.	3	8	1
	25.0	66.7	9.1

### 6. Workplace ventilation

*In general, ventilation at the workplace appears to be well addressed in the majority of enterprises.* The majority of the respondents claimed their workplace was well ventilated (8 or 72.7%), with natural air (open windows, fans, no aircon, and with exhaust fan). There are also areas with air-conditioning (9 or 81.8%) although only 3 (33.3%) out

of 9 union president respondents said that the air-conditioning units use a HEPA filter.<sup>13</sup>

### **7. Mealtime and eating arrangements**

*The majority union president respondents acknowledged that there have been changes relating to mealtime and eating arrangements in compliance with the government-issued COVID-19 health and safety protocols and guidelines at the workplace. There are also specific arrangements which, for a significant number of respondents, are not practiced. They include staggering of mealtimes/lunch break schedules, discouraging workers from eating together with co-employees, encouraging workers to eat alone in their workstation, limiting the sharing of a table to two workers, and discouraging workers to talk to each other while eating. In short, these, and the practice of taking meals at approximately the same time, are the areas which require further attention.*

### **8. Health protocols for shuttle services**

Companies that are allowed to operate during periods of lockdowns are enjoined by the government to provide transportation services to their workers if they cannot provide within-premises or near-site accommodation for them.

*The majority of union president respondents declared that their company provides shuttle services for their workers. A union president nonetheless clarified that the shuttle service provided by their company picks up workers only at designated areas, so that going to work remains difficult for workers who still have to commute from home to the pick-up area.<sup>14</sup>*

*The majority (7 or 87.5%) of union president respondents (who provided an answer to the question) and half of the worker respondents also said that the 1 to 2-meter distance between workers inside the shuttle*

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13 HEPA or "high efficiency particulate air" is a type of air filter that can theoretically remove at least 99.97% of dust, pollen, mold, bacteria, and any airborne particles with a size of 0.3 microns ( $\mu\text{m}$ ). For more information about HEPA filter, visit: <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/what-hepa-filter-1>.

14 Focus Group Discussion, 7 September 2020.

*service is observed.* The majority (5 or 62.5%) of the union president respondents (who provided an answer to this question) disagreed with the statement that there are open-windows type ventilation inside the shuttle service. Likewise, the majority (6 or 75%) of 8 union president respondents said that workers are allowed to speak to each other while inside the shuttle service, a practice that is disallowed under Joint DTI and DOLE Memorandum Circular No. 20-04-A.

### **9. Accommodation and health-related assistance available to workers**

*Union respondents (who provided an answer to the accommodation questions) indicated that their companies do not provide accommodation either on-site or near their company premises for workers. However, there are a number of health-related assistance and support that workers can avail of according to the respondent, including telemedicine service through a health maintenance organization) and additional health insurance aside from the PhilHealth benefits. Counseling services for mental health concerns is one area found significantly lacking in the companies of the respondents.*

*For at risk and vulnerable workers, options to work from home appear quite limited according to half (6) of the union president respondents.*

### **10. Paid leaves for absences during the lockdown**

The absence of paid vacation leave or sick leave for absences during the lockdown were noted by more than half (7 or 58.3%) of the union president respondents suggesting *that the grant of paid vacation leave and sick leave for workers' absences during the lockdown is not a common practice among the companies of the respondents.* In addition, the union respondents also noted that in companies where vacation and sickness leaves are given, eligibility requisites must be complied such as workers should still have unused sick leave and vacation leave, and submission of a medical certificate.

### **11. Additional economic/de-minimis assistance**

The guidelines encourage companies to extend de-minimis benefits or assistance to workers. The majority (8 or 66.7%) of the union



president respondents noted that companies did not provide additional monetary assistance for days worked. *This finding is likewise confirmed by union leaders who participated in an FGD conducted by the researcher on 7 September 2020.* Asked what other assistance the company provided to its workers, one union president remarked: “Nothing more except free vitamins and shuttle service with additional routes.<sup>15</sup> In light of this, the respondents identified a number of economic, non-monetary and de-minimis assistance that they wished their employers would make available to them:

- Cash assistance
- Cash and grocery allowance
- Hazard pay
- Calamity/emergency loan
- Additional paid leave for COVID-19 cases
- Food, medicine and other essential needs
- Food assistance while on quarantine
- Complete health assistance in times of need
- Free shuttle service or travel allowance
- Additional personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Full payment of COVID-19 test

## **12. COVID-19 monitoring and mitigation measures**

Almost half of union respondents (45.5%) said that their company does not provide *an isolation area (different from the clinic) for workers with fever or symptoms and more than a third (36.4%) of union president respondents disagreed with the statement that there is safety officer/COVID-19 control officer who monitors the enforcement of health protocols in their company.* This is one protocol that therefore requires immediate attention.

The union president respondents were also asked about the conditions in designated isolation areas, if such exist within the company premises. Of the 7 union president respondents who declared the existence of an isolation area (different from the clinic) within the company premises for workers with fever or symptoms, 5 (71.4%) said that it is not well ventilated, half noted that the isolation facility is not disinfected frequently, and another half revealed that staff in

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

this facility are not provided with medical grade PPEs. Meanwhile, there is an equal number of respondents (2) that claimed both the existence and absence of a sufficient number of isolation areas in the company based on the prescribed ratio. These findings suggest that *the conditions of isolation areas in the companies where they exist leave much to be desired.*

Table 8. COVID-19 monitoring and mitigation measures

Measures	Union Presidents		
	Yes	No	Don't know
Q99 There is an isolation area (different from the clinic) for workers with fever or symptoms.	6	5	-
	54.5	45.5	-
Q100 Company has a safety officer/COVID-19 control officer who monitors the enforcement of health protocols.	7	4	-
	63.6	36.4	-

However, one good finding of the survey is the *availability of a temporary treatment facility for COVID-19 infected workers that can be accessed at or near the barangay where the company is located*, as pointed out by 6 of the union president respondents (Table 8).

### **13. Company policies and practices for preventing and dealing with COVID-19**

The survey results show that *there are policies and practices that are aimed at preventing and dealing with COVID-19 in over half of the companies that employ the union presidents. Six of the 11 union presidents declared that these policies were formulated in consultation with workers and the union.* However, a significant number (5 or 45.5%) said otherwise.

*While the survey found that majority of the union president respondents confirmed the existence of the policies and practices listed in Table 9, a significant number (5 or 45.5%) of respondents that pointed to the absence of the same should not be overlooked. In fact, it can be argued*

*that these policies and practices are not in place and/or observed in many of the companies covered in the survey.*

Table 9. Company policies and practices for preventing and dealing with COVID-19

Policies/practices	Yes	No
Q101 The company has policies for prevention and control of COVID-19 that were done in consultation with workers/union.	6	5
	54.5	45.5
Q102 The company has an infectious disease preparedness and response plan.	7	5
	58.3	41.7
Q103 The company has an OSH Committee/COVID-19 Infection Control Committee that oversees the implementation and monitoring of minimum health protocols.	7	5
	58.3	41.7
Q104 The company has a policy for temporary closure of the workplace, disinfection, and intensive contact tracing.	7	4
	63.6	36.4
Q105 The company has protocols for transporting symptomatic employees such as ambulance and conduct PCR testing.	6	6
	50.0	50.0
Q106 For companies in EPZAs located in Special Concern Areas, the company facilitates PCR testing for workers once every quarter.	1	7
	10.0	70.0

**14. Company policies and practices dealing with COVID-positive workers or suspected of having COVID-19**

*The majority of the union president respondents acknowledged a number of policies and practices followed by their respective companies in dealing with COVID-positive workers or those suspected of having the coronavirus. These practices include: not allowing symptomatic workers to return to work (10 or 80%), requiring a Certificate of Quarantine Completion from previously symptomatic workers returning to work (11 or 100%), and requiring a 14-day quarantine for asymptomatic workers before allowing them to resume work (9 or 75%). Nonetheless, over half (7 or 58.3%) of the union president respondents said that their company does not pay for tests using either rapid testing kits or RT-PCR for workers.*

Table 10. Company policies and practices dealing with COVID-positive workers or suspected of having COVID-19

Policies/practices	Yes	No
Q107 The company pays for rapid testing kits to test workers.	5	7
	41.7	58.3
Q108 The company pays for RT-PCR test to test workers.	5	7
	41.7	58.3
Q109 Symptomatic workers are allowed to return to work.	2	10
	20.0	80.0
Q110 The company requires Certificate of Quarantine Completion for previously symptomatic workers returning to work.	11	-
	100.0	-
Q111 The company requires 14-days of no symptoms quarantine before allowing worker to resume work.	9	3
	75.0	25.0
Q112 Workers who are requested to stay at home or serve quarantine are charged their absence using their VL/SL credits.	10	2
	83.3	16.7
Q113 If VL/SL has been used, absences due to COVID-19 infection are considered leave without pay.	10	1
	90.9	9.1
Q114 Workers who get COVID can access sickness benefit from Social Security System and employees' compensation benefits.	5	5
	41.7	41.7

*The absences incurred by workers who are requested to stay home or undergo quarantine are charged against their respective vacation leave or sick leave credits, according to the majority (10 or 83.3%) of the union president respondents (Table 10). On top of these leaves, the absences due to COVID-19 infection are considered leave without pay. Five of the union president respondents said that workers who get infected with COVID-19 can access sickness benefits from the Social Security System and from employees' compensation while another 5 stated otherwise.*

## Summary of survey results and discussion

The survey data suggest moderate and high level of compliance of health protocols in the food and beverage sector. The COVID-19 rubrics on screening and face protection were some of the most consistently

enforced while violations in protocols disallowing sharing of tables at mealtimes and talking inside shuttle services were noted.

There was 90-100% compliance in terms of: wearing of face mask except when eating or drinking (100%), requiring Certificate of Quarantine Completion (100%), wearing of face shield unless the work demands for it to be removed (91.7%), temperature check upon entry (91.7%), and provision of alcohol/hand sanitizers in several areas within company premises (91.7%). Meanwhile, the following protocols were observed by 70-89% of respondents as being implemented: daily hand-sanitizing at the gate upon entry (83.3%); daily foot disinfection (75%); daily health form fill-up (83%); mass gathering restricted to 10% capacity (75%); workstations arranged with proper distancing (83.3%); only small group meetings allowed (83.3%); videoconferencing encouraged (83.3%); soap or sanitizer is always available in wash areas and toilets (83.3%); production work area is well-ventilated (72.7%); bringing packed lunch is encouraged (75%); workers eating in the canteen must keep 1-2 meter distance from each other (81.8%); workers are discouraged to talk to each other while eating (72.7%).

The following practices had moderate compliance (<70%): one-way movement in aisles, stairways, hallways (33.3%); disinfection of own work area every day (50%); housekeeping/utility staff disinfects work areas at the end of every workday (45%); housekeeping/utility staff regularly disinfects objects which are frequently handled (45.5%); housekeeping staff regularly cleans toilets and restrooms (66.7%); chairs and tables in the canteen are regularly cleaned and disinfected (54.5%); shuttle service has proper open-windows type of ventilation (37.5%); presence of an isolation area (different from the clinic) for workers with fever or symptoms (54.5%), company has a safety/COVID-19 control officer who monitors the enforcement of health protocols (63.6%); the company has policies for prevention and control of COVID-19 that were done in consultation with workers/union (54.5%); the company has an infectious disease preparedness and response plan (58.3%); the company has an OSH Committee/COVID-19 Infection Control Committee that oversees the implementation and monitoring of minimum health protocols (58.3%); company has a policy for temporary closure of the workplace, disinfection, and intensive contact tracing (63.6%); and company

has protocols for transporting symptomatic employees such as an ambulance and conducting PCR testing (50%). For companies in EPZAs located in Special Concern Areas, the company facilitates PCR testing for workers once every quarter (10%).

The following protocols are not allowed under the guidelines but were observed by respondents: workers share tables during mealtimes (100%); workers in shuttle service speak to each other (75%); workers talk on the phone while in the shuttle service (87.5%).

These suggest a mixed compliance picture among the FBM companies studied. The basic protocols (wearing facemasks and face shields) and screening rules were complied with, but compliance with the majority of the protocols was uneven, with violations noted for some of rules. Inadequate systems for OSH enforcement and individual factors may provide some possible explanations.

The companies seem to have weak OSH systems for planning, implementation and monitoring of protocols. According to this study's survey only 63.6% of companies have a safety/COVID-19 officer. Just over half of the companies reported having the following: OSH Committee/COVID-19 Infection Control Committee (58.3%), policies for prevention and control of COVID-19 (54.5%); and infectious disease preparedness and response plan (58.3%). This was also similar to what DOLE found in its firm inspections (Crisostomo, 2021; Patinio, 2021). Many companies did not have a safety officer and an OSH committee, which were quite surprising because these are required under the OSH law, (RA 11058, 2018) under Sec. 13 and 14, so this suggests that these specific gaps in compliance were already present before the pandemic.

Individual ambivalence with some of the protocols is another factor that probably affected compliance. Workers were asked to adopt new behaviors such as mask wearing and social distancing that were unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or even surreal for some. In the FGD, the respondents said workers repeatedly complained about face shields and how uncomfortable and inconvenient to have to wear them at work. Yet, the rules themselves may have been vague, confusing or ill-explained and these may have affected the workers ability to abide by the guidelines.

## Conclusion

This study described the FBM companies' compliance with COVID-19 health protocols in order to contribute to the existing body of literature and documentation of how companies, through the lens of trade unions, adjusted work arrangements and working conditions in order to continue operating during the pandemic in the Philippines. Although the survey sample is small, the findings of this study support the DOLE's inspection findings at that time, and reveal the specific areas where compliance is strong and weak. This study suggests that there was uneven compliance by FBM enterprises to the COVID-19 health protocols and that crucially many companies lacked safety/COVID-19 officers and OSH committees which are important pillars supporting a company's ability to design and implement effective programs on OSH during the COVID-19 pandemic and afterwards. This study recommends to the DOLE to examine the challenges that impact on companies' compliance with Sections 13 and 14 of RA 11058 and to help companies address some of those hindrances in order to facilitate improved observance of occupational safety and health standards.

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## APPENDIX 1. COVID-19 guidelines at the workplace in the Philippines

COVID-19 Guidelines at the workplace, January-August 2020

		<b>Prescribing Implementing Guidelines for IATF Resolution 12 by the IATF for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases on Social Distancing and Business Operations</b>	<b>DTI and DOLE Interim Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of COVID-19</b>	<b>Interim Guidelines on the Return-to-Work</b>	<b>DTI and DOLE Supplemental Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of Covid-19</b>
<b>Guidelines on 2019 Novel Corona Virus (2019-nCoV) Prevention and Control at the Workplace</b>	Labor Advisory No. 4	Memorandum Circular No. 20-04		DOH Memorandum No. 2020-0220	Joint Memorandum Circular No. 20-04-A
	DOLE	DTI	DTI and DOLE	DOH	DTI and DOLE
<b>Date Issued</b>	1/31/2020	3/15/2020	4/30/2020	5/11/2020	8/15/2020
<b>COVID- situation around time of issuance</b>	First COVID case detected	Luzon lock-down takes effect	Essential sectors remain open; others closed	Malls partially re-open	More businesses partially re-open
<b>Applicability</b>	Workers and employers in private sector	All business establishments in the NCR	Workers and employers in the private sector	Employers in all workplaces	All private establishments
<b>Salient points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preventing transmission</li> <li>• Managing workers with fever or sick leave, hospitalization benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible work arrangements encouraged</li> <li>• Social distancing in non-retail businesses</li> <li>• Safety and health measures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace Safety and Health</li> <li>• Duties of employers and workers</li> <li>• Work from home option for most vulnerable workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engineering and administrative control measures</li> <li>• Other prevention and control measures</li> <li>• Screening of symptomatic and asymptomatic workers returning from travel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preventing transmission</li> <li>• Managing symptomatic and asymptomatic workers</li> <li>• OSH Committees</li> <li>• Disinfection and closure of buildings</li> <li>• Leaves and entitlements</li> </ul>

COVID-19 Guidelines at the workplace, January-August 2020 (continuation)

Workplace measures covered	Guidelines on 2019 Novel Corona Virus (2019-nCoV)	Prescribing Implementing Guidelines for IATF Resolution 12	DTI and DOLE Interim Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of COVID-19	Interim Guidelines on the Return-to-Work	DTI and DOLE Supplemental Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of Covid-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on COVID: transmission, outcome, treatment</li> <li>• Clean work areas</li> <li>• Water, soap, sanitizer in washrooms and toilets</li> <li>• Proper food preparation in canteen</li> <li>• Cough etiquette</li> <li>• Hand washing</li> <li>• Spitting</li> <li>• Monitoring workers with symptoms</li> <li>• Isolation and referral of symptomatic workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible work arrangements</li> <li>• Restricted mass gatherings</li> <li>• Limited mall operations</li> <li>• Closure of leisure, amusement and similar establishments</li> <li>• Social distancing</li> <li>• Good hygiene and infection control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free medicines and vitamins</li> <li>• Counselling for mental health</li> <li>• Face masks, filters</li> <li>• Health questionnaire</li> <li>• Temperature check</li> <li>• Isolation area</li> <li>• PPEs for clinic staff</li> <li>• Sanitizing frequently handled objects</li> <li>• Hygiene supplies in common areas</li> <li>• Alcohol, sanitizer, foot bath</li> <li>• Physical distancing</li> <li>• Eating in communal areas</li> <li>• Disinfection of work areas</li> <li>• Alternative work arrangements</li> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• PPEs for clinic staff</li> <li>• Decontamination of workplace</li> <li>• Advocacy and IEC materials</li> <li>• Safety officer</li> <li>• Health insurance</li> <li>• Shuttle services</li> <li>• Near-site accommodation</li> <li>• Hand washing</li> <li>• Mask wearing</li> <li>• Respiratory etiquette</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace disinfected, properly ventilated</li> <li>• Visual reminders</li> <li>• Alternative work arrangements</li> <li>• Daily temperature and symptoms monitoring</li> <li>• Referral network</li> <li>• Physical distancing</li> <li>• Wearing of masks</li> <li>• Hand hygiene</li> <li>• Cough etiquette</li> <li>• Face shield wearing</li> <li>• Screening for symptoms</li> <li>• COVID testing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face mask wearing and types</li> <li>• Face shield wearing and type</li> <li>• Physical distancing</li> <li>• Handwashing</li> <li>• Provision of sanitizing supplies</li> <li>• Placements of sanitizing supplies</li> <li>• Display of signages</li> <li>• Hygiene behaviours</li> <li>• Disinfection of surfaces</li> <li>• Sharing of items</li> <li>• Health standards in shuttle services</li> <li>• Ventilation standards inside workplace and shuttle services</li> <li>• Mandatory awareness raising</li> <li>• Designated smoking areas</li> <li>• Most-at-risk persons</li> <li>• Mass gatherings restriction</li> <li>• Eating and meal schedules</li> <li>• Health declaration form</li> <li>• Telemedicine or HMO access</li> <li>• Isolation area</li> <li>• OSH committee</li> </ul>	