

inBrief



Recent measures implemented by the UAE authorities in response to COVID-19

By Charles Laubach and Kanan Kasuya | 18 March 2020

The UAE authorities have been dynamic in implementing measures to control the spread of COVID-19 within the UAE. Please find below a non-exhaustive list of noteworthy measures that have been implemented by various UAE authorities to date.

Preventive Guidelines

UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention (MOH): MOH has set up guidelines on preventive measures, as well as contact centres for medical support or inquiries on the coronavirus at the Department of Health, MOH and the Dubai Health Authority (DHA).

Remote Working System

The Dubai Executive Council: On 15 March 2020, the Executive Council issued a letter to Dubai authorities on the implementation of a remote working system with effect from 17 March until further notice. This letter sets out rules (among others) on how services are to be handled or prioritized, the required percentage of employees to work remotely, the requirement for all government employees to abide by the standards and controls approved by the Dubai Electronic Security Centre and that any suspension of services must be announced publicly with prior coordination with the Government of Dubai Media Office.

In compliance with the letter, certain authorities have implemented the remote working system with others to follow suit shortly. The noteworthy authorities that have implemented the remote working system are:

1. Dubai Courts:
 - As of 17 March 2020, the Case Management Department has closed all doors to the public. To prepare a case before the Dubai Courts, individuals must now contact the Case Management Department via a BOTIM app, phone call or email.

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- Pursuant to Resolution 30 of 2020 issued by the Dubai Courts dated 17 March 2020, all court hearings before the Court of Cassation, Court of Appeal and Court of First Instance will be postponed, and issuance of certificates and personal status documents will be suspended, from 22 March 2020 to 16 April 2020. The Dubai Courts will however continue to hear temporary and urgent matters, as well as criminal cases and appeals that relate to detainees. Courts will no longer accept claims and applications unless they are submitted electronically.

2. DIFC Courts:

- The DIFC Court and Registry Offices have also closed its doors to the public from 17 March 2020 until 26 April 2020 (or pending further notice), and will operate on a (generally) completely remote basis. Inquiries, urgent queries and applications must be made by email or telephone.
- Generally, hearings before the Court of First Instance and the Small Claims Tribunal will be done via teleconference (unless agreed otherwise).
- The pro bono clinic, DIFC Court's library and other rooms shall be temporarily closed.
- Probate appointments will be suspended until 26 April 2020 or pending further notice.

3. The Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship: Smart services are set up so that certain applications can be done online (*e.g.*, renewal of Emirates ID cards and existing UAE residence visas) to reduce the number of visitors.

Distance Learning

Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA): Pursuant to a Circular issued by the KHDA dated 8 March 2020, no students are permitted on the school premises from 8 March 2020 to 4 April 2020. Schools are required to implement distance learning from 22 March 2020.

Restrictions or Temporary Suspension on Businesses

Dubai Municipality (DM):

- The DM issued multiple circulars on 11 March 2020 requiring various businesses to increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection, to ensure the availability of hand sanitizers and hand soap and to document all cleaning and disinfection operations and to list the disinfectants used. Such businesses include (among others): schools, salons, residential buildings, hotels, malls, gyms. Since then, the DM has issued further circulars specifically addressing salons, restaurants and food delivery service providers with restrictions on operations, such as permanently closing the waiting areas of salons and restaurants, and requiring food delivery service providers to register their food delivery and transportation with DM's FOODWATCH platform.
- In conjunction with the Dubai Department of Economic Development (DDED), the DM imposed a shisha ban on cafes. As of 17 March 2020, DM has closed nine cafes for violating this ban.

DDED:

- Pursuant to a circular posted on a social media site of the Government of Dubai Media Office, the DDED temporarily suspended all cinemas, theme parks, game centres, massage parlours and spas until the end of March 2020.
- The DDED Consumer Protection Department has directed retailers to ensure that retailers sell detergent products and sanitizers at normal prices. To date, it has inspected 203 commercial outlets, issued 35 warnings and nine violation notices to shops that were found to have increased prices for these products.

Dubai Culture and Arts Authority: Operations at museums, historical sites and public libraries are temporarily suspended until the end of March.

Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing: Operations at entertainment venues, hospitality establishments, wedding halls, theme parks, sea cruises, desert camps, tours (safaris) and floating restaurants are temporarily suspended until the end of March.

Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development (ADDED): Pursuant to circulars issued by the ADDED, operations at entertainment game halls and cinemas are temporarily suspended. Similar to the DDED, shishas are also temporarily suspended from being served at restaurants and coffee shops. The Government of Abu Dhabi Media Office further provides that the main touristic attractions, theme parks and cultural destinations (such as the Louvre and the Presidential Palace) shall also be temporarily closed until the end of March.

Abu Dhabi Ports: As of 14 March 2020, cruise operations are suspended for all ships at Abu Dhabi Cruise Terminal in Zayed Port and Sir Bani Yas Cruise Beach until further notice.

Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism: Pursuant to a circular dated 13 March 2020, all events and operation of night clubs are temporarily suspended until the end of March.

Restriction on Travel / Transportation

UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFA)

There is currently:

- a travel ban on Iran, Thailand, Qatar and Karabakh Mountainous Region; and
- travel warnings with respect to China, Lebanon, Madagascar, Congo, Yemen and South Sudan.

Federal Transport Authority (FTA):

- Ferry services to and from Iran are suspended until further notice.
- Ship masters must: (i) send health declarations, along with an undertaking that no crew member is suffering from COVID-19, to UAE port authorities 72 hours prior to arriving in the UAE irrespective of the last port of call, and (ii) report any suspected cases on the vessel (whether during the vessel stay or anchorage at the berth) to the FTA and the relevant UAE health authority.

Dubai and Abu Dhabi International Airports

Effective as of 17 March 2020 (until further notice), the issuance of UAE entry visas is temporarily suspended. This suspension however does not apply to individuals with diplomatic passports or passports from visa-exempt countries that are entitled to visas on arrival. Flights to and from certain countries (*e.g.*, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey) have been temporarily suspended.

As per the Dubai International Airport's recent alert, all passengers will be required to go through a non-intrusive thermal screening process. Passengers from any of the following countries will undergo both thermal screening and a nasal swab carried out by the DHA's medical team based at the airport: Egypt, Italy (Rome only), China (Beijing only) and Thailand. As per a video tutorial prepared by the Government of Dubai Media Office, passengers with a high body temperature will be sent to hospitals (and a medical swab will be taken for a lab test). If a passenger tests positive for COVID-19, the passenger will be required to stay at the quarantine facility until the passenger tests negative for COVID-19. This quarantine period is likely to take a few weeks. The DHA will also arrange for individuals that have been in contact with the affected person to be screened (and if required, quarantined) as well.

As per the Abu Dhabi International Airport's recent alert, all passengers would be required to go through an advance polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing at the airport, then self-isolate for four days. Following the

four-day isolation period, the passengers will then be required to undertake another PCR test.

Economic Stimulus

The Dubai Crown Prince and Executive Council Chairman has launched an AED 1.5 billion stimulus package to support Dubai's business sector over the next three months. This stimulus is anticipated to result in the following (among others):

- freezing the market fees levied on facilities operating in Dubai;
- reduction of license renewal fees or by permitting onshore entities to renew their licenses without renewing their lease contracts;
- reduction of municipality fees imposed on sales at hotels;
- exemption of charges incurred from the cancellation or postponement of events; and
- reduction of the water and electricity bill by 10% for Dubai residents for the next three months.

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As stated above, new measures have been, and are expected to continue to be, introduced and implemented in very short notice. Afridi & Angell has been following and will continue to follow official sources for further updates and notices. ■

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