



香港城市精神健康聯盟

**City Mental Health  
Alliance** HK

# EMPLOYER'S GUIDE TO SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF EMPLOYEES IN QUARANTINE

Employers and employees are navigating working in unprecedented times. Restrictive circumstances imposed by Covid-19 mean employees are having to juggle their work commitments in a variety of different circumstances. These could include working during lockdown or from different countries or undertaking quarantine in Hong Kong in a home, government location, hotel or other. This factsheet aims to provide tips to employers to better support the mental health and wellbeing of their employees during these uncertain circumstances and focuses specifically on quarantine.

## 1. SEEK FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYEES

There is no one-size-fits all solution as different individuals will be tackling different challenges during quarantine. Simply asking and listening to what your employee's specific needs and concerns are may be the best way to start.

## 2. BE FLEXIBLE

Be aware of time zones of where your employees are based and, where possible, arrange meetings during times that are within normal working hours for all participants. It's likely your employees will be using screens to interact with family and friends so where possible, try to limit long zoom calls to prevent screen fatigue. It also may be more challenging for employees to present or conduct external meetings so consider workload commitments and whether these may need to be adapted accordingly.

## 3. STAY CONNECTED

Encourage employees to stay connected and have regular one-on-one or team check-ins with them via digital platforms. Keep them

informed of any policy changes and how these may affect their specific circumstances.

## 4. BE SUPPORTIVE OF FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

Whilst in quarantine, employees may need to find solutions for childcare, home-schooling or alternative forms of support for family dependents. Employees may be sharing a hotel room with children who may demand their attention during a conference call. Be patient and understanding of unusual circumstances and provide support where possible.

## 5. BE AWARE OF FAMILY EMERGENCIES

Some employees may have travelled abroad for family emergencies and may be dealing with a wide range of emotions while in quarantine. Consider what support may be required, for example, offering reduced working hours or some time off.

## 6. PROVIDE IT/REMOTE WORKSTATION SUPPORT

Help your employees adjust to their new

work environment by providing IT support, necessary hardware and any relevant infrastructure such as an office chair or back support for them to work efficiently during their quarantine. Be aware of potential WIFI limitations at certain quarantine locations and consider providing them with solutions such as boosters.

## 7. MAINTAIN A CLEAR LINE OF COMMUNICATION

Ensure a clear and regular line of communication between your employee and different stakeholders within the organisation. Consider having one point of contact to minimise stress and conflicting messages.

## 8. PROMOTE YOUR SUPPORT CHANNELS

Being in quarantine can bring up a range of emotions and it can be a stressful time.

Ensure that your employees are aware of the support resources available, for example Employee Assistance Programmes, insurance coverage, in-house counsellor support and links to resources.

## 9. BE AWARE OF PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

Be conscious of employees with pre-existing mental health or other physical conditions. Consider how you might be able to support them and treat them with compassion and respect.

## 10. BRIGHTEN UP THEIR DAY

Employees will likely experience highs and lows in quarantine - consider sending them small gifts (such as snacks or fruit) to support them through the period and/or reach out to ask if they need anything.

## **Dr Sharmeen Shroff, Clinical Psychologist and Director at Central Minds, shares her thoughts on feelings linked to possible self-blame and guilt as a result of a positive Covid-19 test meaning they, or close contacts have been asked to go to a quarantine centre.**

*In my experience, people seem to be less fearful about catching the virus itself but rather of what others will think of them if they do test positive and their friends and colleagues have to be sent to quarantine.*

*When something happens that is out of our control, our minds start searching for reasons to explain it; the first one usually being: "I have done something wrong". The feeling of self blame is so strong because we start to question all our recent moves and criticise ourselves for not being extra vigilant. We ruminate on these thoughts and punish ourselves over and over for not taking all the necessary precautions.*

- *Sharing these feelings with a family member, friend, therapist or even writing them down can help.*
- *Remind yourself that you haven't done anything wrong. Speak to yourself like you would to a friend - with kindness and compassion.*
- *Feeling guilt and self blame is not going to change your external circumstances and is in fact harmful. Try and reframe the feeling and think, how can I turn this thought into something that will help me get through the next 2 weeks, and not make it harder?*

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Mind HK [Quarantine Tips](#)
- Wellcation Quarantine Wellness Kit by The University Of Hong Kong, available in [English](#) and [Chinese](#) versions
- CMHA UK [Guide](#) on How to Support Colleagues to Stay Mentally Healthy in Unusual Working Conditions
- CMHA HK [Coronavirus Resources](#)

## CASE STUDY: LINKLATERS

**Lucianne Powell, Senior HR Advisor at Linklaters**, travelled to the UK to visit family over the Christmas break and was met with unexpected changes to quarantine measures in Hong Kong prior to her return. She shares with us how her employer, Linklaters, supported her mental health and wellbeing during her trip and 21-day quarantine in Hong Kong.

### What support did you receive from Linklaters for travelling abroad in these uncertain circumstances?

Linklaters offered interest free loans for employees below manager level to assist them with quarantine costs and flights. This was much appreciated and took a lot of stress off the planning and travel process. My colleagues were also empathetic of the time difference and would move meetings around where possible to make sure I could attend them at a decent time.

### How did Linklaters support your 21 days of quarantine upon your return to Hong Kong?

I was asked if I needed an appropriate workstation in my hotel room and, within the same day, I was couriered a screen, keyboard, mouse and headset. I also received a fruit hamper from the Regional Managing Partner, who was also going through the quarantine process. I appreciated her regular check-ins and support during this period.

### For employers who have employees experiencing quarantine, what

### advice can you offer them in terms of supporting the mental health and wellbeing of this group?

- Check in regularly with your colleagues during this time, preferably on a one-to-one basis, as that is when people tend to open up.
- Where possible, try not to add additional stress on the employee. For example, asking someone to do a presentation to the whole office whilst in quarantine can induce a lot of additional anxiety, more than it would under normal circumstances. To the extent that it's possible, consider whether certain commitments can wait until the employee is out of quarantine.
- Being in quarantine can be a very lonely experience. Send them small gifts and snacks to brighten their day and show that you are thinking of them.

### What other advice would you give employers?

It is key for the employee to have one main point of contact, because there is so much information and communication that it could otherwise get quite overwhelming.



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## CONTACT

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The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong is a collaborative venture founded by city businesses. Championed by senior leaders, the Alliance is business led and expert guided and aims to create a culture of good mental health for workers in Hong Kong, share best practice and increase mental health understanding.